

# A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Cloth Names among the Ga and Dangme People of Ghana

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## Abstract

Varied ways are used for communication which may either be verbal or non-verbal. Non-verbal occurs in different forms and one is kinesics which includes gestures, facial expression, touching, eye contact and mode of dressing. The paper focuses on the aspect of dressing by examining traditional cloth worn among the Ga and Dangme people. It investigates the cloth types and their name source. It further examines the choice of cloth worn among Dangme and Ga in relation to function or ceremony. Additionally, it did a brief morphosyntactic analysis of the cloth names. The paper employed the visual semiotic theoretical framework by de Saussure. The data were gathered from sellers of cloth in the Accra Business Centre and some markets in the Dangme speaking areas through photography, semi-structured interviews, observation and notetaking. The data was then subjected to a sociolinguistic analysis. It was revealed in the paper that the sources of the name were from events, occasions, requested names and names derived from the motifs. The paper revealed morphosyntactically that the names of cloth are derived from phrases, sentences, personal names, wise sayings, proverbs and others. The names are mostly misspelled because they are not written by experts of the language. Furthermore, the colour of the cloth also determines the event to which one can wear it. Insinuations, the act of thanksgiving and congratulatory messages are some of the information relayed to the public upon usage. Lastly, the paper shows that in contemporary times, most relatively young people do not have much ideas about names of cloths and how they impact their usage.

**Keywords:** Signifier, Signified, Cloth Ga, Dangme, Motif, Proverbs

## 1. Introduction

Communication among humans can be verbal or non-verbal. Non-verbal includes facial expression, gestures, tone of voice, proximity, eye behaviour that have impact in daily communication. There may be other forms of communication which may include inscriptions, hair styles and dressing. Four forms of non-verbal communication identified by Lunenburg (2010) are kinesics, proxemics, paralanguage and chronemics. Kinesics is the study of body movement which include gesture, facial expression, eye behavior, touching, mode of dressing as well as limbs and body movement, (Bowden, 2011; Walters, 2011).

Proxemics, as noted by Lunenburg (20-10) is the use of space and conversational distance during communication. The variations such as quality of voice, tempo, pitch, volume, nonfluencies and the like are what is referred to as paralanguage as noted by Young (2008). The use of time and other relationship between time and status is what is referred to as Chronemics. Some scholars have investigated non-verbal communication such as Hall (et al. 2019), Hess (2016), Uyanne and Oti (2012), Lapakko (2007), Gustafson (2002). The paper focuses on one of the forms in Kinesics, that is dressing. One of the latent functions of dressing is communication. 'First impression' is a lasting impression' is a popular saying therefore, most people feel their outward appearance should be highly impressive. People try as much as possible to impress others around them through dressing. Dressing comes in various forms; wearing of suit, a pair of jeans and top, skirt and blouse, a dress and many others. Nkrumah et al (2002) postulated that clothing gives information about a person rank, occupation, education among others. The paper addresses the linguistic aspect of cloth names among the Ga and Dangme. It is believed that the names given to cloths are deeply rooted in linguistics and therefore the linguistic analysis unravelled the reasons for their choice and usage. Various messages can be given in various forms and one way is through the clothing worn. It is a cultural practice among the Ga and Dangme people to put on cloths often and these prints come with various names such as the names that most often communicate to onlookers.

Wearing of clothing can be traced as far as the early days of man. Adam and Eve according to the Bible account, were naked until they ate the fruit from the forbidden tree. They quickly covered themselves with fig leaves when God came to speak to them in the Garden of Eden. Since then, man has always figured out a way to cover his body. This covering was made from leaves as in the early times, animal skin, wool and cotton and others and serves as a protective garment against weather conditions. In modern times prints, has become one of the key clothing. Wearing of prints in Ghana is still fashionable as in the past, especially when the educated also holds its use in high esteem.

Wearing of cloth in Ghanaian and in the African society is a long tradition. Women usually sew prints in full length skirt and a top known as 'slit' (the long skirt) and 'kaba' (the top). It is known as a 'slit' because a slit (a vertical opening) is made at the back of the skirt to enable the wearer walk with ease. The *kaba* is normally designed to suit the taste of the wearer but it follows the fashion in vogue. This usually matches with a headgear of the same cloth which is optional to the wearer. Females use cloth for sewing dresses.

Males usually use cloth in making shirts, a pair of trousers and top, a pair of shorts and top or wrapped around the body in the traditional way. With the influx of the cloth prints from companies like Ghana Textile Prints (GTP), Akosombo Textile Limited (ATL), Printex, Vlisco and the foreign but popular Hitarget, wearing of cloth has become very fashionable leading to increase in its use among both men and women. In recent times, cloth is also used to design accessories like bags, necklaces, bangles, earrings, footwear, hair accessories, purses, necktie, brooch and so on. One political reason that has helped increase its use is the declaration of the 'Friday wear.' Clothes made from prints are now used as Friday wear nationwide in Ghana. Institutions such as the Ghana Health service, State Insurance Cooperation, Ghana Commercial Bank, Ecobank Ghana among others wear their cloth specifically designed for them on Fridays to work, while other workers wear it throughout the week. Some of these institutions have even gone further to print their institution's name or logo in the cloth for easy identification. This in effect has promoted Ghanaian culture and made in Ghana goods.

In the Ghanaian culture, choice of cloth is made mostly based on the names of cloth which is mainly categorized into two, those with names and those without names known as 'life (fashionable) cloth.' Aside these, colour, design and style required all play a role in choice. Considering the fact that many languages seek to express the social and linguistic values of cloths among their people, this study add to those by investigating the sociolinguistic values of cloths among the Ga and Dangme people. The study therefore aims at investigating the social aspect of cloth through the sources of the cloth names, the basis for selection and then a linguistic analysis by making a morphosyntactic enquiry into the names.

Even though, some studies on non-verbal communication have been done in the two languages, there is still the need to explore other areas to enrich the existing literature. The current study enriches the socio-cultural aspects of non-verbal communication among the Dangme and Ga people of Ghana, a foundation that will pave way for similar research. Culture is deeply rooted in language and aspects of it are expressive in their choice of clothing. Hence the study brings to the fore the sources of the names which were largely informed by the motifs in the cloth. Furthermore, the linguistic structures; phrases, sentences, personal names, wise sayings, proverbs and others which relay messages like insinuations, appreciation, and commendation messages strongly relates affirm the inextricable relationship between language and sociology.

## 2. Literature Review

Todorovic, et al. (2014) examined the internal world of individuals using the synthetic view. They discovered that what was worn symbolizes one's culture and also noted that it indicates a sign of affiliation. On the other hand, Resat (2019) investigated the importance of knowing the essentials of body language. She further revealed the key elements found in non-verbal communication such as handshake, physical contact, sitting position among others. Ananda, et al. (2021) examined the teaching by a foreign English teacher to second language learners. They were concerned about how the learners interpret the non-verbal forms of communication by the foreign English teacher. Philips (1993) examined non-verbal communication in the workplace. She looked at how non-verbal cues assist in interpreting and conveying unspoken messages among the workers for peaceful co-existence. In the health sector, Wanko Keutchango, et al, (2020) examined the non-verbal communication between nurses and older adults. The twenty-two studies indicated that the nurses often use haptics, kinesics, proxemics and vocalics more than

chronemics and artefacts. They discovered that the nurses did not make use of silence as a non-verbal communication strategy. Additionally, they found out that the adult responses were both positive and negative ..... Gonzalez (2020) looked at the immediacy behavior to intimate relationship. The findings suggested that couples in short term relationships are more likely to practice non-verbal immediacy behaviours to actively maintain their relationship as compared to couples in long term relationship. Employing the content analysis strategy, Zeki (2009) investigated the interpretation of eye contact, mimics and gesture of 67 university students. The findings revealed that the eye contact, mimics and gestures were interpreted as source of motivation, concentration, enthusiasm and a tool for maintaining attention. This contrast the findings from secondary school studies where the eye contacts, mimics and gesture are used for controlling and keeping silence among the students. The non-verbal communication rather created a relaxed teaching and learning atmosphere among the university students which made them more confident and more participatory in the lessons. Zeki (2009) concluded with the recommendation that teachers are to take note of the importance of non-verbal communication in the classroom and employ it favour of the students.

Ahakbari and Abdollahi (2013), Pante (2006), Rainey (2006), Thornbory and White (2006) postulate that clothing communicates daily to people. Cummings (2011) also states in his study that first impression is important and that can be seen evidently by what you wear. Tsuruki et al. (2012) asserts that what is worn may help you communicate better as he examined these among international students who were Japanese studying in the USA. Employing the communicative adaptability theory, Tsuruki et al (2012) examined the correlation between the theory and clothing behavior among 111 international Japanese students studying in the United States. They posit that in an intercultural setting clothing behaviour helps in improving cultural adaptation. Furthermore, communication via dressing was examined by Abdollahi (2013) among Arabs and she noted that what one puts on determines how one is received in public. She experimented with the same group of women who wore high class garments (style A) for shopping and on another occasion the same women wore (style B) which was low class garments to the same shops. There was a difference in which they were received in the shops due to their garments, when they were in Style A which was high class garment, they were given more recognition than when they went in Style B. Holman (1980) also noted that dressing communicate a lot to people as her findings were based on an experiment she conducted among university students in Texas, Austin. There she asked students to tell what pictures of people in various dressing style communicate to them. She concluded that some think certain dress types indicate the wearer was fashionable or sexy.

In the same vein, Lower (2018) examined the effect of initial judgements about women in different dress styles at work. With the use of the expectancy violation theory the results indicated that models in feminine attire are perceived to be lower in expertise and dominance whereas those in more masculine attire are seen to be lower in ratings of kindness and friendliness. In the same vein, Larsson (2014) used the Grounded theory to investigated two people from two different cultural background, China and Sweden. Larson concluded that clothing in both high and low context cultures have the ability to interpret clothing as nonverbal signals which have meanings attached to them. Similarly, this study employs the sign, signifier and signified framework developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce to analyse the sociolinguistics of cloth names among the Ga and Dangme people of Ghana.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Signs and symbols reflect the beliefs, values and practices of the traditions of a group of people. The study of these artefacts and their use and interpretation is semiotics (Arthur 2017; Sharp 2011). Arthur (2017:9) defines semiotics as the science of signs and symbols and how we use them in our lives to infer and communicate meanings.

The sign, signifier and signified framework was developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure (1959) opines that in the study of signs, the *signifier* is the content while the *signified* is the expression. In his original work – *A Course in General Linguistics* (1916) and later (1959), Saussure asserts that the *signifier* is the form of the material or content being presented to the audience while the *signified* is the mental concept or the interpretations or meanings to which it refers. He argues that *signifier* and *signified* are inseparable to the concept of sign studies. The framework advances that the meaning of a sign “depends on its relation to other words within the system”. It must be noted that with time, and cultural context variations, the signified (or signification) as interpreted from the signifier may change. Therefore, what the egg, for instance, signifies in culture A will be different from that of culture B. Same way an eagle signifies a threat to the lives of people in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it signifies power and authority to the people of Ghana cultural context.

Arthur (2017) argues that meanings and identities of a sign do not exist as mental phenomenon ‘inside’ people. They always arise and develop by the mediation of material tokens or signs of some kind: words, images, sounds or other perceptible external marks organized into various forms of artefacts, texts, works, genres and discourse. The symbol is any work of art (artefact) device or physical representation of an abstract idea or conception, philosophy or an institutionalized historical fact of an individual or group of people. It takes discernment and disentanglement to deduce the message and meaning behind a symbol, especially, when it has been carefully crafted by work of art. The interpretation of the sign or symbol depends on the socio-cultural context of the users. As a tool for communicating the conventions of a group of people, cultures around the globe use symbols to inform the viewing audience of what they would otherwise have used vocal mode of expression to disseminate. Some of these symbols are carved and fixed onto the top of the linguist staff, on the stools of chiefs and queens, on palanquins of chiefs and queens, and affixed on top of royal umbrellas of chiefs. In the frontage of many family houses and royal residences as found among many Ghanaian cultures, symbols are drawn by artists on to the walls and on top of gates to inform both inhabitants and guests of the socio-cultural identity to which the dwellers of that home belong. For centuries, mode of dressing

continues to serve as a distinct way of portraying one's culture. The clothes worn by people have symbols as motifs with which those who wear them communicate their emotions. By inference, the motifs in the clothes of most Ghanaians have messages that need to be interpreted. The motif is the signifier and the message it conveys is the signified.

#### 4. Methodology

In the nine-month period elicitation, data was collected from Agormanya in the Krobo dialect area and Kasseh in Ada for cloth names in Dangme. The two Dangme communities have regional markets patronized by the nearby cities, towns and villages in the Eastern, Volta and Greater Accra Regions. The Ada and Krobo dialects represent the extreme ends of the Dangme dialect continuum, hence, the data is a fair representation of the people of the Dangme land. All the markets were chosen for the numerous agents for the cloth or print industry. Data for the Ga cloth names came from Makola, in the Accra Central Business Centre, Kaneshie, Teshie and Osu. In all, a total of 150 research participants were consulted. These constituted 50 cloth sellers with a minimum of twenty years of experience in the trade, 50 cloth buyers and 50 cloth users who made up of the elderly as well as the youth. Participatory observation technique was employed at the cloth shops where buyers interact with sellers in the buying process. Photographs and videos of the interaction taken, transcribed, coded and final selections made. Cloth sellers in particular and a few purposively sampled elderly folks in the Ga and Dangme communities were engaged in semi-structured interviews. Notepads and writing instruments helped in taking notes alongside the recording. Finally, Focused Group Discussions (FGD) were employed to find out how the names of the cloths influence their selection and use of the cloths within their communities.

#### 5. Data Analysis

In this section, we discuss the cloth names and their sources and then follow with the discussion on factors that determine the choice, and conclude with the linguistic analysis of the names at the word, phrase and sentence levels.

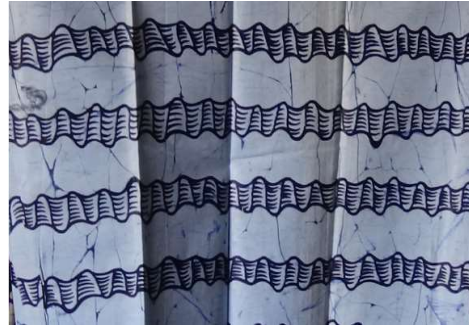
##### 5.1. Cloths with same names in Ga and Dangme

The discussion below presents the sources of the names as were found in the Ga and Dangme. To make the data simple to understand, similar names in both languages are put together.



**Figure. 1. D: *Bɛ bo* 'the broom cloth'  
G: *Abɛ Makola* 'Makola is being swept'**

Abɛ Makola literary means Makola is being swept is the cloth seen in 5. Both languages refer to the cloth with the same name meaning broom. In this cloth 'abɛ Makola' there is the symbol of brooms printed in the cloth. This had two narrations. It was narrated that during the reign of King Tackie Tawiah, a day was set aside for sanitation, all the women swept the Ga town neatly, it was during one of these sweeping events that one lady dressed in this cloth kept sweeping that she became oblivious of her cloth was falling off her, she was notified and she answered, "are we not sweeping Makola?" Her statement was used to name the cloth. Another version was that, there was once a bountiful harvest of mangoes during its off-season period. The coming of mangoes naturally came with butterflies. The delivery of a certain 'life cloth' coincided with the mangoes and butterflies. Butterflies invaded the markets so much that, the women swept away butterflies from time to time. The unusual delay made the women to name the cloth after the event, that *abɛ/abei Makola* is being swept" *Abɛi* means 'butterfly' while *abɛ* means 'they are sweeping' So, in effect, the name is either 'they are sweeping Makola' or 'butterfly invaded Makola'. Among the Dangme, the broom is a tool for cleansing the environment. The symbol signifies cleanliness. It suggests clean person or the person immediate environment is clean. In this cloth in 5, the signifier is the broom design in the cloth and the signified is the sweeping and cleanliness.



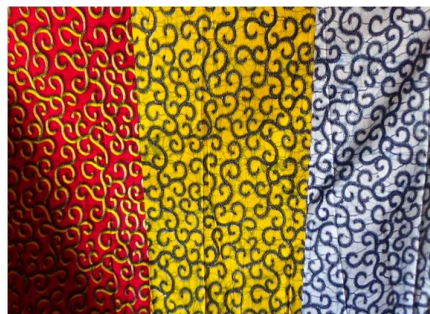
**Figure 2. D: *afungu kpɔ* ‘knots in sugarcane’  
G: *shɛ* ‘sugarcane’**

Both Ga and Dangme refer to the cloth seen in figure 2 as sugarcane. It was asserted that there was a gentleman in Accra who was courting a lady from Swedru, a town in the central region. The gentleman in order to marry her sweetheart made a sugarcane farm and harvested them and used the proceeds to buy different types of cloths to meet the marriage demands. It was said that the cloth appeared first in the Swedru market during the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival by the Ga people and many bought it for the occasion as well as the sugarcane farmer for his lover. This means that the sweetness of love was compared with that of a sugarcane. Many lovers consequently purchased the cloth for their partners. The moral behind it was that when you love someone, express it. The signifier sugarcane is the motif in the cloth, and the sweetness is the signified as interpreted in the culture.



**Figure 3. D: *kuadaa ba* ‘the leaves of pepper’  
G: *Shitɔ* ‘pepper’**

The name comes from the motif which is the signifier, the design looks like the leaves of pepper. It is used for general purposes including outdoorings and naming ceremonies, marriage, festivals and grand occasions. There are small and big patterns. Ga call it *shitɔ* ‘pepper’ and Dangme refers to it as *kuadaa ba* ‘pepper leaves’. The cloth is seen in figure 4.



**Figure 4. D: *agɔmetaku* ‘ginger’  
G: *kakatsofa* ‘ginger’**

Ga and Dangme people both refer to the cloth in figure 4 as ginger. Ginger in Dangme is *agɔmetaku* and in Ga it is *kakatsofa*. The name is derived from the pattern, signifier, the roots of the ginger plant, which spreads underground. There are big and small patterns and are used for general purposes depending on its colour. However, in recent times from our interview we noted that this cloth original name has changed. It is now referred to as macaroni, also due to the design in it. It comes in different colours and it is also sewn with the different colours put together as a design. The design signifies the ginger plant in the cultural setting.





**Figure 5. D: *kpaku ke e nyanɔ* ‘the gourd and its cover’  
G: *akpaki ke enaanɔ* ‘the gourd and its cover’**

The cloth in figure 5 is referred to as the gourd and its cover by both the Dangme *kpaku ke e nyanɔ* and Ga *akpaki ke enaanɔ*. The motif which is the signifier in the fabric suggests the name. Most respondents argue that the motif symbolizes a hypocritical behaviour of people in our communities where they cover their wrongdoings and expose those of others within the communities. Some users of the cloth use it to cast insinuations at others while others use it for its beauty.



**Figure 6. D: *gige/akate bo*  
G: *ɲkatie* ‘the groundnut cloth’**

The motif in the fabric in figure 6 suggests the name groundnut. Both Ga and Dangme refer to it as such. The morale behind the naming is that, marriage is a sacred life-long relationship which must be entered into with all wisdom and readiness to accept the shortcomings of one’s partner. Therefore, it is not like groundnut which one cracks and eats only when they find it palatable and discards it when bad. Compared with marriage, a spouse may not be able to opt out of the marriage so easily once the union falls below one’s expectation leading to dissatisfaction.



**Figure 7. D: *kɔdu sau* ‘bunch of banana’  
G: *akwadu shao* ‘bunch of banana’**

In figure 7, the cloth is called *akwadu shao* by the Ga while the Dangme call it *kɔdu sau*, which means bunch of banana. The name is derived from the motif, which stands for a sense of belonging. There are the big and small patterns/designs and are used for general purposes.



**Figure 8. D: 'mangotso ba'**  
**G: mango baa 'leaves of the mango tree'**

Dangme and Ga refer to the cloth in figure as mangotso ba and maŋo baa respectively. These words mean mango leaves. The naming is based on the motif which is the signifier. The leaves of a mango tree are the design in the cloth. This is normally blue and white, hardly do you come across colours of this cloth. This cloth normally signifies victory as it is mostly worn by women who have delivered especially due its blue and white colour. The other colour which is most often brown are hardly found in the market, but that is worn for other occasions.

#### 5.2. Cloths with Different Names in Ga and Dangme

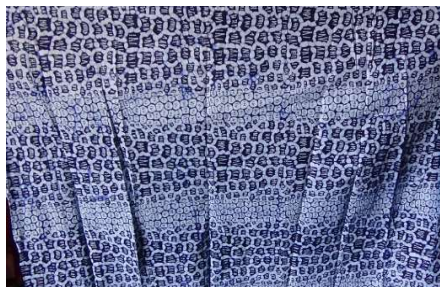
Some of the cloths bear names which are different in the two languages. The following are examples of such cloth.



**Figure 9. D: tsile susue (Aadaa) tsle soso mi (Klo)**  
**Ga: tsile daa 'the mouth of the tsile fish'/the gills of the fish. kplotoo kadaa 'the jaws of the pig'**

The name is derived from the motif which resembles the gills of the big fish for the Dangme and has one of its motifs look like the jaw of an animal which the Ga use to name the cloth in figure 9. The name in both Dangme and Ga follows after one of the motifs in the cloth. The Dangme call it *tsile susue* (Aadaa) *tsle soso mi* (Klo) and the Ga call it *tsile daa* or *kplotoo kadaa*. All these designs are found in the cloth and the choice is made by the Ga or Dangme. It is used for general purposes.

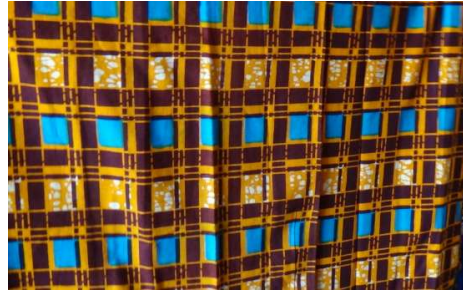
#### 5.3. Cloths with Conflicting Names in Ga and Dangme



**Figure 10. D: ohiafo kpe we te, se le hu e yeɔ ngo 'the poor never chew stones but s/he also eats of salt'**  
**Ga: ɲmilitsa 'gravels'**

The Dangme named the cloth seen in figure 10 using a proverb '*ohiafo kpe we te, se le hu e yeɔ ngo*' literally meaning the poor never eat chew stone but also eat salt. A common expression that suggests that God is the provider for the poor, needy and vulnerable in our societies. It is used to console someone who finds themselves in such deplorable state. The signifier in the cloth does not give a clue about the name given by the poor never going hungry but eats salt at least.

On the other hand, Ga refers to the cloth as *ɲmilitsa* ‘gravels.’ From further interview conducted we were informed that this comes from an Akan proverb which says, *efie mmoseabo, eno na etwa wo*. ‘It is the gravels in your house that cuts you harder’. The Ga cut it short and simply called it gravels. The motif which is the signifier in the cloth suggests the name. The name given to the clothes signifies what is seen in the community as gravels.



**Figure 11. D: *Pɔ tɔ ye he kɛ gba munyu* ‘I am fed up with marital issues’  
G: *wokɔ aware a, bisa***

Unlike the popular Akan proverb for this cloth saying “*se wokɔ aware a, bisa*” literally meaning when you are going to marry ask’ that find out about marriage before you enter into it. The Ga people have borrowed the Akan name, while the Dangme people call it ‘I’m fed up with marital issues’. These embodies all the challenging issues that are brought to the elders regularly on their children in marriage. It is also used by someone in marriage, especially, the woman, who is supposedly fed up with attempts by the husband in engaging in concubines and second and third wife issue. This is said in Dangme as *Pɔ tɔ ye he kɛ gba munyu*. ‘I am fed up with marital issues’ in both Ga and Dangme, it was seen that the cloth name has no connection with the signifier.



**Figure 12. D: *Hunoyo munyu nge kaa na fi* ‘rivalry is like the cow dung (it is dry and harmless at the surface but soft and nasty inside)’  
G: *gramafon apaawa***

The Dangme refer to the cloth in figure 12 as *Hunoyo munyu nge kaa na fi* ‘rivalry is like the cow dung (it is dry and harmless at the surface but soft and nasty inside)’. This is a proverb about marriage especially where rivals are involved as in a polygamous certain. As the proverb goes, rivals may have issues with one another but do not show it openly. In other words, rivals pretend that all is well but deep down within them the competition for the same man leads to all kinds of unhealthy secret behaviour as the inside of the cow dung. This supposes that alleged reports by rivals smells as they normally do not have anything worth-praising for their rival. They are always derogatory.

On the other hand, Ga people call this same cloth is *gramafon apaawa* ‘gramophone plate’ because the motif round and flat just the gramophone plate used to record and play music in the past.



**Figure 13. D: *se bo* ‘stool cloth’  
G: *mantse sei* ‘royal seat, throne’**



The cloth in figure 13 is referred to *se bo* ‘stool cloth’ by Dangme and *mantse sei* ‘royal seat, throne’ by Ga. Further interview revealed that it has the Akan name which says take a seat when you want to gossip about me. This cloth has two implications to the design. Firstly, it is used for royals and by royals. And secondly, the motif, a stool which means that when you want to gossip about someone, ‘always’ take a seat and so that you think properly about what you want to say. The name of the cloth shows the relationship between the signifier and the signified.



**Figure 14. D: *ye kasa wu* ‘my rib/my better half’  
Ga: no name found**

The Dangme people call this cloth *ye kasa wu* and Ga has no name for it. The motif appears to suggest the name in Dangme because the stripes are likened to the ribs of man. The respondents claim that it is the rib nature, which suggests the name. It is used as a gift; the married women present it to their husbands and vice versa. Suitors can also use it as gifts to their would-be partners.



**Figure 15. D: *Obukaamada* ‘You think I will go waste’  
G: *Bonso* (same as Akan) is a personal name in Akan.**

The cloth in figure 15 is referred to as *Obukaamada*. ‘You think I will go waste’ by Dangme and *Bonso* ‘Personal name’ by Ga. The Dangme name comes from an insinuation cast by a rival to another woman who thinks that after the husband (or would be husband) had left her, she did not go waste, instead she found another man of equal or better reputation who married her later on. Women, who for various reasons think or believe have rivals, commonly wear it to cast insinuation. Ga used the personal name simply to name the cloth without any insinuation.



**Figure 16. *sanga do* ‘the valley of the puff adder’**

Usually, the puff adder stays at a lower ground level and would have to climb up the ground to look for its prey. The motif resembles the path the adder charts. It is used for general purposes.



**Figure 17. D: hiɔ bo ‘the sword cloth’  
G: akofena (same as Akan) ‘the sword’**

The motif suggests the name. It is used by royals and for royal activities like swearing in of a king among the Dangme people. But among the Ga people, the Akan name is adopted and the cloth can be worn by anyone. There is a relationship between the signifier and the signified in this instance where the design represents the sword used by kings.

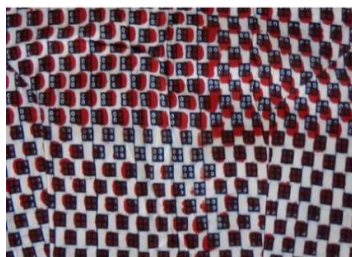


**Figure 18. Kɔli (Adiagba) ‘an expensive/precious bead’**

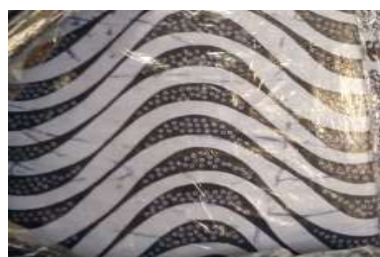
The motif in the fabric suggests the name. The beads named are very expensive beads among the people of Dangme land. It is appropriate to give it as a gift between spouses.

#### 5.4. Cloths with English Names

The names of the following cloths are in English and used among both the Ga and Dangme people. The names of the cloths are written beneath them. The cloth name ‘ludu dice’ signifies the dice used to play the ludu game among the Ga and Dangme societies. The name of cloth, ‘Senchi bridge’ used by both ethnic groups signifies the design of a bridge while ‘ABC’ (the first letters of the alphabet) as seen below symbolises learning in formal education. ‘Senchi’ is the name of the town where the bridge is located. It is clear that there is a correlation between the signifier and the signified since the motif resembles a bridge.



**Figure 19. Ludu (aba) dice**



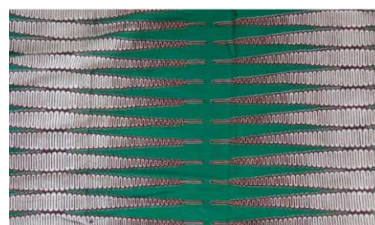
**Figure 20. Senchi /Atimpoku bridge**



**Figure 21. ABC**



**Figure 22. Koforidua flowers**



**Figure 23. Nkrumah Pencil**



**Figure 24. Lipstick**



**Figure 25. City Hotel**

From the above examples of cloth, the item ‘lipstick’ is depicted by the motif. However, the cloth name ‘City Hotel’ seems not to have any correlation between the signifier and the signified. The City Hotel was once a plush hotel in the city in Accra in the 1970’s. The cloth might have been in vogue at the time when the hotel was operational and so the name of the hotel was coincidentally given to the cloth.

#### 5.5. Names Exclusively in Ga

The following cloth have names in Ga but have no equivalents in Dangme.



**Figure 26. Nyɔngmɔ wɔko/higmei  
‘God is not asleep/eye’**

This cloth bears a name in Ga only. The motif depicts an opened eye. Man is sleeps and there has closed eyes sometimes or at a time of the day. The cloth was named ‘God is not asleep’ because God never sleeps as known from a religious point of view. A closed eye signifies one is asleep. The Ga society thinks that it is God who never sleeps therefore has eyes that are perpetually opened like the one in the cloth.

#### 5.6. Cloths with Names from Other Languages that Are Maintained in Ga and Dangme

The cloths below bear names from Akan. Apart from Akan, no cloth names were found in any other Ghanaian languages in these two societies.



**Figure 27. Woafa me nwa  
‘you have taken me for free as  
a snail is picked freely  
in the forest.’**





Figure 28. *Sɛ aboa bi bɛka wo a, na ɛfiri wo ntoma mu*  
'an insect will be able to bite you only when it is hidden  
outfit/clothing'



Figure 29. *'Dua korɔ gye mframa a, ɛbu'*  
'when one tree faces the wind it breaks'



Figure30. *Obaapa* 'good woman'



Figure 31. *Akyekyedee akyi (T)*  
'the shell of the tortoise'



Figure 32. *Anibere nsɔ gya* 'no matter how serious one is, the  
redness in their eyes can never set fire'



Figure 33. *abɔfra bɔ nwa, na ɔmmɔ akyekyedee*  
'a child cracks the shell of a snail but  
not that of a tortoise.'



Figure 34. *sika wɔ ntaban/sika tu sɛ anomaa*  
'money has wings.'





Figure 35. *wo nsa akyi beye wo de a, ente se wo nsa yamu*  
‘The back of your palm may feel good  
but not as good as good as your palm’



Figure 36. *papaye asa*  
‘people no longer do good’



Figure 37. *okunu pa ye na* ‘good husbands are scarce’



Figure 38. *ɔbaatan na onim nea ne ba bedie* ‘it is  
a mother who knows what her children will eat.’



Figure 39. *Mede me se abɔ adwe ama kwasea bi abefa*  
my teeth to break open a palm kernel  
only for a fool to eat.’



Figure 40. *Akosombo Kanea* ‘the electricity light of ‘I used  
Akosombo’



Figure 41. *ɔboɔ fa, dadeɛ fa*  
‘half stone, half metal’

### 5.7. Cloths that Bear Personal Names

The following cloths bear personal names of real people, names from proverbs, and hotels. The names indicated beneath the cloth are used by both Ga and Dangme people. Most of these names were given to the cloths in days when such names became popular, be it personalities or hotels. ‘Nkrumah pencil’ was names after the first president of Ghana but no one could explain why ‘pencil’ than no other thing was added. One participant thought that motif informed the name ‘pencil’ since the signified, that is the cloth has thin motifs like a pencil.



Figure 42. Yao Dɔnko



Figure 43. Felicia



Figure 44. Angelina

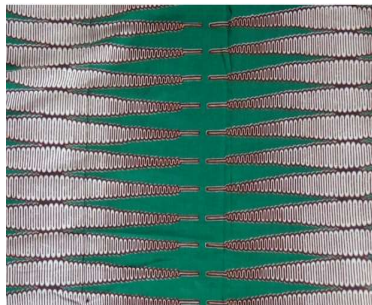


Figure 45. Nkrumah Pencil

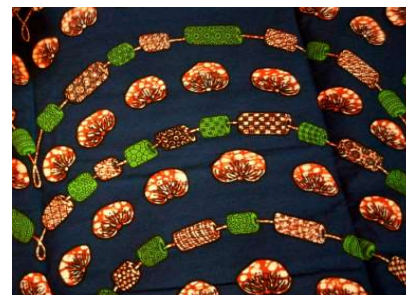


Figure 46. Kɔli

## 6. Findings

The following subdivisions are the findings of the data.

### 6.1 Sources of the cloth names and designs.

Data from the interview reveal that designs were either from the factory or from individuals. Most of the GTP/ATL designs were from the factory whereas most often designs on Printex cloth were from individuals such as agents who send designs to the factories. It was also evident that most of the Printex names were given by the individuals who sent the designs and these individuals (mostly cloth dealers) monopolise these designs and determine who sells the designs. They are sought of owners and wholesalers and have their own retailers.

From the interviews conducted it was narrated that some of these names were coined out from names of important personalities, events and occasions and hot issues around a particular time. Apart from few of the Holland, ATL, GTP which come from the factory with names, they may derive their names from the market women. Recently in this Covid times, GTP has taken advantage of the pandemic and has produce two different cloth designs which they name *fellow Ghanaians* and *lockdown*.

Abɛ Makola literary means ‘Makola is being swept.’ In this cloth, there is the symbol of brooms in one cloth as well as butterflies in another with the same name. This had two narrations. It was narrated that during the reign of King Tackie Tawiah, a day was set aside for sanitation, all the women swept the Ga town neatly, it was during one of these sweeping events that one elderly lady kept sweeping that her cover cloth started falling off her, she was called and notified and she answered, ‘abɛ Makola ‘we are sweeping Makola’ and her answer was used to name her cloth. Another version was that, there a time of bountiful harvest of mangoes though it was an off season. As mangoes usually come along with butterflies, there were butterflies all over, and during this season there was the delivery of some newly designed cloth to Makola, due to the raid of the butterflies,

most of them died around the market. The sweeping of the butterflies delayed the delivery. Anyone who asked to know why was answered, *abɛɛ Mokola*, 'Makola is being swept' or *abei Makola* 'Makola has been invaded by a swarm of butterflies.' Once these two events coincided, the expressions automatically became the name of the cloth.

A story was told about the cloth name *Misumɔɔ bo tamɔ she*, 'I love you like sugarcane'. It was asserted that there was a gentleman in Accra who was courting a lady from Swedru, a town in the Central Region. The gentleman in order to marry her sweetheart made a sugarcane farm and harvested them and used the proceeds to buy different types of cloth to meet the marriage demands according to most Ghanaian cultures. It was said that the cloth appeared first in the Swedru market during the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival by the Ga people. It had the design of sugarcane in it and it was named as such. The moral behind it was that when you love someone, express it.

There was the issue of the name of the cloth named A.B.C. This was a cloth by the Holland merchants who were cloth sellers. This was as a result of the propagation of education in Ghana. It was to increase awareness of formal learning which could be done everywhere. These merchants printed the cloth and put in the letters of the alphabet A to Z and the numerals 1 up to 13. Also, there are books and pencils in addition to the letters. This signifies formal learning. This was to promote learning and it indicates that all must use various strategies to help promote learning.

The designs in the cloth for most of the Printex cloths do not match the names as well as some of the GTP designs. Such a cloth named Bonso 'whale has leaves and stars in it as it is seen the appendix.

In connection with the Printex cloth, the data revealed there were three types. The market women referred to these three types as 'plain', *afuui* 'bubbles' and 'shiny.' We were informed that the same design may come in all these three forms and the buyer makes their choice. The plain type is the cheapest among the three with the Printex shiny type the most expensive. Names of Printex cloth were normally given by individuals and according to the women no one copies another person's designs. It means when the head or owner sends the design, they become the sole copyright owner and sells it to their own retailers. The names are also given by these copyright owners. They revealed that some of the names were carved from songs, such as 'Angelina' and from hot issues. Printex were generally white and black, they also produce some few black and brown which they say is generally used for funerals. The names were either Dangme, Ga, Akan and few had English names. It was noted that the Dangme names have Ga equivalents in most instances.

## 6.2. Morphological and Syntactic Analysis

Now we investigate the cloth names morphologically. We examine them at the word level phrase level and sentence level. We begin with cloth names are single words.

The names are mostly nouns.

Examples 47:

- |                                  |       |                         |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| a. <i>agɔmetaku</i>              | (D)   | 'Ginger'                |
| b. <i>kɔli</i> or <i>Adiagba</i> | (D)   | 'a very expensive bead' |
| c. <i>bonso</i>                  | (D/G) | 'whale'                 |
| d. <i>ɲmlitsa</i>                | (G)   | 'gravels'               |
| e. <i>ɲkatie</i>                 | (G)   | 'peanut'                |
| f. <i>bɔɔɔ</i>                   | (G)   | 'broom'                 |

The followings are the cloth names that are phrases:

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 48. <i>Akwadu shao</i> (D) | 49. <i>Kplotoo kadaa</i>  |
| a. Banana bunch            | pig jaw   |
| 50. akoo yitso             | 51. o- mama mli ɲmoo  |
| a. Parrot head             | 2SG- cloth POSTP lice   |
| b. Parrot's head           | lice from your own cloth' (It is the lice in your cloth that bites you) |

In the above examples in 48-51, the phrases are all Noun Phrases. There is the noun modifying another noun. For instance, *kplotoo* 'pig' in 49 and *akoo* 'parrot' in 50 serve as the modifiers for the head nouns *kadaa* 'jaw' and *yitso* 'head' respectively. This was noted for most of the names listed below. Some of the names that were found in postpositional phrases. See the examples below in 52 and 53.

- |                              |                            |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 52. <i>Kaisa hiɲmei sɛɛ.</i> | 53. <i>akpokplonto sɛɛ</i> |
| a. Caesar's eye POSTP        | tortoise POSTP             |
| b. 'Back of Caesar's eye     | 'Back of the tortoise'.    |
| Caesar's eyebrow             |                            |

In 52 and 53 above, the Head of the phrases is the postposition *sɛɛ* 'back' which indicates the position of the nouns *hiɲmei* 'eye' and *akpokplonto* 'tortoise.' The nouns combine with the postposition, *sɛɛ* to form the phrases. The following contain more noun phrases in Ga.

Example 54:

- |                          |       |                  |
|--------------------------|-------|------------------|
| a. <i>kplotoo kadaa</i>  | (G)   | pig's jaw        |
| b. <i>gramafon plete</i> | (G)   | gramophone disc  |
| c. <i>ɲkatie hetoo</i>   | (G)   | groundnut shells |
| d. A.B.C                 | (D/G) | A.B.C'           |
| e. <i>Sɛɲtsi briji</i>   | (G)   | Senchi bridge    |
| f. <i>Yao Odonko</i>     | (G)   | Yao Odonkor      |



- |                          |     |                             |
|--------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|
| g. <i>wolo kpo</i>       | (G) | scroll                      |
| h. <i>kpiɲ kɔkɔ</i>      | (G) | rabbit's paw                |
| i. <i>omama mli ɲmoo</i> | (G) | the louse inside your cloth |

The following examples in 55 are some names of cloth which are noun phrases in Dangme.

Example 55.

- |   |     |                                |
|---|-----|--------------------------------|
| a. <i>afungu Kpɔ</i>                            | (D) | knots in the sugar cane        |
| b. <i>kusii/Kete sisi</i>                       | (D) | the base of the basket         |
| c. <i>sɛ bo</i>                                 | (D) | the stool cloth                |
| d. <i>mangotso ba</i>                           | (D) | The leaves of the mango tree   |
| e. <i>Ye kasa wu</i>                            | (D) | my side bones (My better half) |
| f. <i>kuadaa ba</i>                             | (D) | the pepper leaves              |
| g. <i>hwɔ bo</i>                                | (D) | guinea fowl cloth              |
| h. <i>tsile susue (Aada) tsle soso mi (Klo)</i> | (D) | the gills of the fish          |
| i. <i>kɔdu sau</i>                              | (D) | a bunch of banana              |
| j. <i>sanga dɔ</i>                              | (D) | the valley of the puff adder   |
| k. <i>kpaku kɛ e nyanɔ</i>                      | (D) | the gaud bowl and its cover    |

It is evident from the names that most of them are noun phrases. The names are mostly from the design in the cloth except few that were from events. Below were few names that were made up of complete sentences which indicated sentiments or feeling.

### 6.3. Cloth Names that Are Sentences

The examples below in 10 show cloth names that are simple sentences.

Examples 56:

- |  |     |   |
|--|-----|---|
| a. <i>Bo edɔɔ</i>                                | (G) | 'It is you that it hurts'                               |
| b. <i>Ye oshia sane</i>                          | (G) | 'Deal with issues in your own house'                    |
| c. <i>Jweɲmɔ ohe</i>                             | (G) | 'Think about yourself'                                  |
| d. <i>Misumɔɔ bo tamɔ she</i>                    | (G) | 'I love you like sugarcane'                             |
| e. <i>Odeka eyi</i>                              | (G) | 'Your wardrobe is full'                                 |
| f. <i>Abɛɛ Makola</i>                            | (G) | Makola is being swept'                                  |
| g. <i>.Ohiafo kpe we tɛ (se le hu e yeɔ ngo)</i> | (D) | 'The poor never chew stones but s/he also eats of salt' |
| h. <i>Obukaamada</i>                             |     | 'You thought I will amount to nothing'                  |
| i. <i>suɔmɔ ngɔɔ</i>                             | (G) | Love is sweet   |

The above cloth names qualify as sentences because match the sentence structure in the languages. The simple sentence consists of a Noun Phrase and a Verb Phrase. Below in 57a and 57b is a simple analysis of a sentence.

Examples 57:

- |                            |                      |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| a. O-deka e-yi             | b. <i>suɔmɔ ngɔɔ</i> |
| 2SG box PERF-full          | love sweet           |
| Your box/wardrobe is full. | Love is sweet        |

From the above examples, the sentence in 57a is in Ga and is in Dangme in 57b. The verb yi 'to be full' is in the perfect and the verb ngɔɔ to be sweet is used in Dangme. The sentences have simple structure as the verbs employed have no object because the verbs are intransitive. Some more sentences are seen in 13-15.

58. Hunoyo munyu nge kaa na fi (D)  
 rivalry case V like. cow dung.  
 Rivalry is like the cow dung, (appears dry outside but wet inside).

The above is the full proverb.

59. Wo mma ne abusua be-hye wo anuonyam (Akan)  
 2SG children CON family FUT-wear 2SG honour  
 Your children and family will honour you.

60. Pɔ tɔ ye he kɛ gba munyu (D)  
 Tiredness beat POSS-self CONJ. marriage issues  
 'I am fed up with marital issues'

The sentence types that were found based on function were mainly declarative and imperative. Examples in 11-14 above show declarative and example in 16-17 below show some imperative sentences. In example 18, we see the interrogative too.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 61. Ye o- shia sane (Ga)<br>Eat. 2SG-POSS house issues<br>'Deal with issues in your home' | 62. <i>Jweɲ- mɔ o- he</i><br>think- IMP 2SG- self<br>Think about yourself |
|---|---|

63. Mɛɛba o- shi wɔ trukaa nɛkɛ? (Ga)  
 Why 2SG- leave 1PL suddenly this way?  
 Why did you leave us unexpectedly?



From the data, cloth names result from an interplay between cloth designs which have a bearing on cloth names were either from the factory or from individuals. Most of the GTP/ATL designs were from the factory whereas most often designs on Printex cloth were from individuals. It was also evident that most of the Printex names were given by the major agents of the cloths individuals who sent the designs and these individuals monopolize these designs and determine who sells the designs. They are the designer owners and wholesalers and have their own retailers.

It was also revealed some of these names were coined out from names of important personalities, events and occasions and hot issues around a particular time. Apart from few of the Holland, ATL, GTP which come from the factory with names, they derive their names from the market women. Recently in the COVID 19 pandemic, GTP has taken advantage and has produced two different cloth designs under the names, “fellow Ghanaians and lockdown”.

In relation to the occasion to which cloth, we observed and noted from the respondents that cloth is worn on most occasions among the Ga and Dangme. The function normally determines the colour of the cloth as for instance cloths that are black, brown and red are normally seen at funerals and white and or black are used mainly for outdoorings and or funerals for the elderly people above 70years in most cases. The cloth type we observed was based on the social class, age, occasion, quality and marital status. It was observed also from focus group discussion with the youth that the names of cloth were not known mainly by them. Further interview conducted revealed that they normally buy the cloth based on design and colour and sometimes what is invoke without necessarily knowing the names of the cloth. The cloth type which was normally referred to as for life was normally worn to places like the market, visiting and ordinary occasions.

It must be noted that some of these names that were in Ga had Akan equivalents such as gramophone plate where the Akans call it gramofon apaawa. It was also revealed that some of the names have been changed overtime and the market women made it known that name change affects the patronage of the cloth, most often, positively for example *afe bi ye esiane* (some years are full of calamities), in order to avert calamities (Ga and Dangme believe in the power of the spoken word) now referred to as *macaroni* or ‘Angelina.’

Cloths with Akan names were mostly ones made by Printex. The names are often from individuals who design them or who request the factory for special designs and named by the one who made the request. The Akan names were mostly sentences.

Linguistically, we noted that the cloth names were made up of single words, phrases and sentences. The phrases were mainly noun phrases which had nouns modifying the head nouns. The sentences were simple ones. Functionally the sentence types were declarative, interrogative and imperative.

Finally, with the semiotics analysis, we noted that the signs give the interpretation in most cases and the names uses are derived from the context and culture of the people.

## 7. Conclusion

The paper has discussed printed cloth names and their relationship with the motifs or patterns in them. It also advanced de Saussure’s signifier, signified theory to explain the nature and pattern of cloth naming among the Ga and Dangme people of Ghana. The cloths under discussion were grouped under those with similar names in the two languages, those with different names the languages, those with English names and lastly those with names in a Foreign language. Concerning cloths with names in foreign languages, only English names were found. Personal names also surfaced in the data. It was discovered that users, especially of the younger generation do not know the names. Cloth naming was based on factors such as historical events, popularity of personalities, plush hotels, and phenomenal natural landmarks. The names form different grammatical structures like phrases and sentences and function invariably as innuendos, insinuations, pieces of advice, and proverbs. The study contributes to morphological analysis and sociocultural knowledge of the Ga and Dangme and Akan people.

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