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The Ewe in West Africa: One Cultural People in Two Different Countries (Togo/Ghana) 1884-1960

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Abstract: *The Ewe in West Africa are a people who live actually across three countries. But before the colonization they were living in their own territory without any artificial borders. During the pre-colonial period, the Ewe have been in contact with different European countries and through these contacts and relations, some foreign European words introduced the local language and point out a new style in the linguistic called pidgin language, a mix of European language with African ones. The aim of this paper is to study the evolution of the Ewe language but also the dynamism that appeared in the social life of the Ewe people with the introduction of foreign language like English. To achieve this goal, this research will be based on a specific sociolinguistic literature related to the question but also other historical researches and analyzes. The results of this paper were presented in four stages. The first part will focus on the point of view of scholars about the question, the second aspect will talk about the relation between the African language and the European language before the colonialization. The third aspect of the results will be based on the opposition of the European language and the Ewe language. The last aspect of this paper will present the new challenge of the Ewe and their language during the colonial period.*

Keywords: *Ewe, pidgin, foreign language, social promotion, anglophile*

Introduction

The mankind history and its evolution in the world is the result of lot of contacts between different groups of people. These contacts permit the mix of culture and the acceptance of new lifestyle from the foreigners or from the local people. Languages also have been submitted to many changes through the process of *mélange* and the results are the apparition of new dialects and languages. The Creole language in the Caribbean in West Indies countries in Central America is one of the examples of the contact between European languages and culture and the local ones in the area¹.

In Africa, most of the countries are the product of the contact between Europeans and Africans through colonization. From this colonization, symbolized by the domination situation, African people have been in permanent contact with the Europeans and many aspects of the political, social and cultural life have been submitted to changes. In this situation common linguistic people who were living in their own land have been shared by the process of colonialism and became properties of imperialism nations with different languages to use. The

¹ Peter Truggill, *Investigations in sociohistorical linguistics. Stories of colonisation and contact*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7-8.

Ewe people in West Africa faced this situation in front of the colonization and became actually citizen of two countries (Togo and Ghana) with different European official languages like French and English. These foreign languages have been introduced in the Ewe language and brought the use of new words in the local linguistic². This observation permits to ask this fundamental question: what is the process of the introduction of foreign languages in the Ewe language and their impact in the Ewe's life from the beginning of the colonization up to the independence period? The period that cover this study is between 1884 and 1960 because the Ewe where in contact effectively with the German colonization in 1884 and lost their unity definitively in 1960 with the independence of the republic of Togo.

The general goal of this research is to show, through historical perspectives, the evolution of the Ewe people especially their language in front of the introduction of different foreign languages in their local life through colonialism and the specific goals are to point out the repercussions of the foreign languages on the local languages; to show the changes that happened in the mentality of the Ewe with foreign languages; to demonstrate the impact of the foreign language in the Ewe's political, social and cultural life in colonial situation.

To achieve these goals and to answer the main question of this study, many scholars' researches have been consulted to settle the review of the literature. In this perspective, the researches of sociolinguists about the relation between African languages and Europeans ones and their effect on the local societies have been used to understand the dynamism and the evolution of African languages³ (Alexandre 1961; Okolo 2005) and especially about the relation with Ewe language and English and French⁴. Another researchers especially historians through their thesis, articles and works treated globally about the problem and evolution of Ewe before and during the colonization⁵ and specific analyses on the ewe elites and the use of colonial language to express a certain form of nationalism against colonialism have been consulted⁶.

The review of the literature permits to outline three stages of this work. Firstly we will focus our attention on the relation between African languages and European languages in West Africa before the colonization with the example of the Ewe language. The second aspect of this article will treat about the use of foreign colonial languages by the Ewe for their purpose and the last part talk about the effect of the European language on the Ewe's social life. Before developing these three stages, it is important to show the different scholars' works about the question.

² Sophie Lafage. *French language written and spoken in the Ewe region (South-Togo)*. Paris: SELAF, 1985.

³ Pierre Alexandre. "Problèmes linguistiques des États négro-africains à l'heure de l'indépendance". *Cahiers d'études africaines*. Vol. 2 N°6 (1961):177-195 ; OKOLO, Msc. "Reassessing the impact of colonial languages on the African identity for African development". Dakar: CODESRIA, (2005) : 1-16.

⁴ Lafage, *French language*.

⁵ Nicoué L. Gayibor. *Histoire des Togolais de 1884 à 1960*. Lomé : Presses de l'Université de Lomé, 2005 ; Jean-Claude Pauvert. "L'évolution politique des Ewe". *Cahiers d'études africaines*. Paris, Vol. 1 n°2, (1960) : 161-192.

⁶ Messan A. Aduayom. *Frontières contre peuples en Afrique noire : le cas éwé*. Paris : Université de Paris I-Sorbonne, thèse de doctorat IIIè cycle en Histoire, 1975 ; "Lomé une capitale-frontière". *Le centenaire de Lomé, capitale du Togo (1897-1997)*, Lomé : Presses de l'UB, (1998) : 289-302 ; Pierre Alexandre. "Problèmes linguistiques des États négro-africains à l'heure de l'indépendance". *Cahiers d'études africaines*. Vol. 2 N°6 (1961) :177-195 ; Peter Sebald. *Togo 1884-1914*. Berlin : Akademie Verlag, 1988.

The Point Of View Of Some Scholars About The Question

The relations between European languages and African ones have been studied especially by sociolinguists. Some scholars have been interested about the question by pointing out the impact of the European languages especially English and French on the African local languages. In the perspective of this paper, few scholars have written about the relation and the impact of the European languages such as English and French on the African languages. Two major authors have been consulted for this paper. The first document which has been consulted was intitled *Investigations in sociohistorical linguistics. Stories of colonisation and contact* of Peter Trudgill (2010). In this research, the author mentioned in general way how English language has been the product of mixture of different European dialects.

Generally, language is the acquisition of some complex communication system used by human to live in society and to develop their skills. The evolution of language is the result of contacts with the expansion of geographical space in the world. The English language has been in contact with indigenous and non-indigenous languages for several years at least for 500 years⁷. Peter Trudgill has stated that the contact between English and local languages and dialects has achieved a high level during the colonization and has created a mixture in which new dialects and languages have appeared. Trudgill argues that the English language was the result of the « mixture of West Germanic dialect from continental Europe»⁸ and this process brought variability and new lexical in the English language. He continued saying that the language contact has permitted to distinguish the apparition of a pidjin language or creole which are the result of contacts between English language and another language. The English language borrowed lot of words from different languages like Dutch. This is the result of the contact, as we have said, between the old English and the other European languages in Europe.

The second document was *French language written and spoken in the Ewe region (South -Togo)* of Suzanne Lafarge (1985). She has brought information about the relation between a foreign language, especially, French with the Ewe language. In a sociolinguistical manner, she showed how French language has been introduced in the ewe area and the way this language or one part of this language has been found in the local lexicon. She pointed out the secular relation between Europeans and the Ewe people since the middle of the 15th century. Lafarge worked especially about the French language and its relation with the Ewe language in the south of Togo. But she pointed out that the English language had introduced the ewe language and there were an apparition of a pidgin-English which is used all the time in the south of Togo. Lafarge explained that the apparition of foreign word like French was the result of process which we can mention as two. The first one was the long presence of European in the area and naturally some words have introduced the local language and changed the formal lexicon of the language. The second process was the apparition of education which was held in English but also in French. The result was the mixture of the local language which looks like a pidjin language spoken by the local population.

Apart the works of these sociolinguists, other authors gave information about the evolution of the Ewe like Pauvert (1960) and Alexandre (1961). Pierre Alexandre argues that the linguistic problems of the African states have started since the beginning of the colonization. He stated that the indo-european languages like English, French, and German etc. have been in relation with the local languages. The introduction of a large number of european

⁷ Trudgill, *Investigations*.

⁸ Trudgill, op. cit., 5-6.

words has been done through the establishment of school with the use of these foreign languages by Africans.

Other scholars put their interests to the study of the Ewe people and culture before and during the colonization. Autors like Gayibor (1997; 2006) and Aduayom (1975) have studied the origin of the Ewe and the dynamism that happened in their area. The evolution of the Ewe intelligentsia during the colonial period have been showed and are the major references to understand the evolution this people and their language.

Even though colonization has been the major factor that permits the mixture of the local languages in Africa, it is better to focus the attention of the situation in the pre-colonial period in West Africa.

African Languages and European Languages in the Pre-Colonial Period in West Africa

The geographic area of the Ewe

The Ewes geographically are living between three countries in West Africa which are Ghana, Togo and Benin. Their territory is limited by the Volta River from the West in actual Ghana to the Oueme River in Benin to the East. The South is limited by the Atlantic Ocean and continues to the North up to 150 or 200 km⁹.

Picture 1: The geographic area of the Ewes

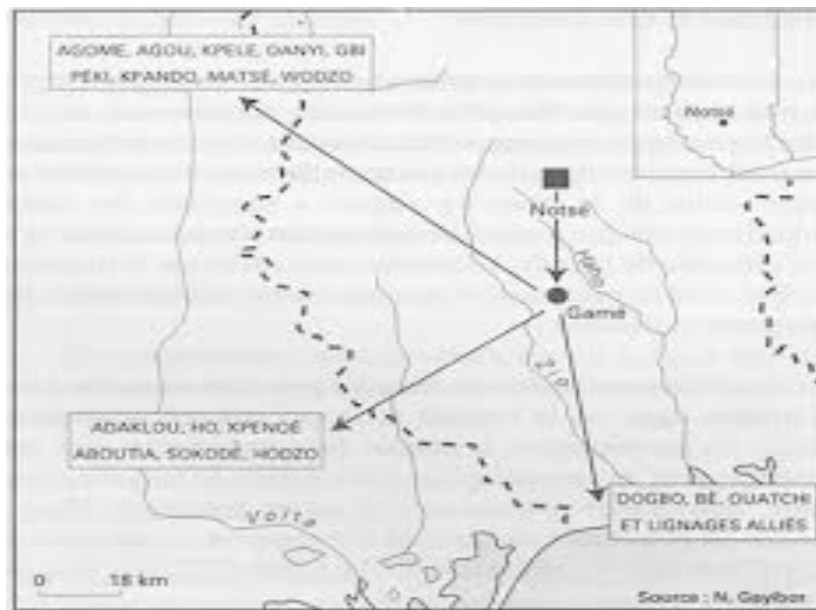


Sources : Gayibor, 1980, Lawrance, 2007. Authors : A. Spire / R. Imbach, 2009.

⁹ The history of the Ewe in West Africa has been done under the direction of Prof. N. L. Gayibor. For more informations see : N. L. Gayibor, *History of the Togolese from 1884 to 1960*, Lomé, Lome University Press, 2005; Lafage, *op.cit.*, p. 14; Pauvert, *op.cit.*, pp. 161-162.

In the case of this study we will focus our attention just on the Ewe in Ghana and Togo¹⁰. The origin of the Ewe was established in Oyo in actual Nigeria and through migrations arrived in Tado. From Tado they moved and continue to Notse in actual Togo. In the 17th century under the rule of King Agokoli some groups left that city and spread off in different directions. One group moved to the south and arrived in front of the sea, the second moved to the southwest in the actual region of the Volta River and the third group moved to the west in the mountains¹¹.

Picture 2: the migration of the Ewe



Source: Gayibor, 1997.

The particularity of this group of people is that instead of living in different locations due to their migrations, the Ewe are speaking the same language, sharing the same culture and even the same political governance.

The Ewe and their language in contact with Europeans before colonialism

From the middle of the 17th century, the Ewe people of the south of Togo and Ghana have been in contact with Europeans. The aspects of these contacts are multiple and have been noticed through matrimonial relations for example with mixed race relations between Europeans and African women, but also by commercial activities which permit Europeans and Africans to be in contact and to settle another way of life. The nationality of these Europeans is different and most of them are Portuguese, who were the first to explore this part of West Africa, followed by the Dutch, Swedish, British, Spanish, German, and French. The contacts between the Ewe and the Europeans brought a certain changes in the social life. The superiority of the Ewe people in the area has increased and most of them have become rich through commercial activities and also slavery trade. But the changes also have been noticed in

¹⁰ See the map. The green color.

¹¹ Lafage, op.cit., 19.

the linguistic aspect because foreign languages especially some words were introduced in the local linguistic¹². But it is important to mention that the introduction of foreign languages words in the local languages especially in the Ewe language is not by force. It was a normal process through several years because of the permanence of the European presence and activities in the area. Since that period of several contacts with foreign language, there is an apparition of new words from all those foreign languages. And the language faced transformations and became a pidgin language which is a mix of ewe and foreign languages. Some example of words that is in use up to now like “duk¹³”, “aguda¹⁴” come from Swedish and Portuguese.

During the period before the colonization in West Africa, the relation between Africans and Europeans were based especially on business activities and the influence of the European civilization is not on imperialism way. So every aspect of local life was influenced and the Ewe language has been modified. The modification came from the regular presence of the Europeans through their activities like slavery trade for example during the 18th century to the 19th century and in the Ewe region the influence of English dominated the social and cultural life so that the language in use in that time was called pidgin-English¹⁵. The contacts and relations which permit the transformation of the social and economical life is not a matter of short period of time. It has been a result of a long process in the case of the language.

From the second half of the 17th century to the first half of the 19th century, the Ewe people's identity didn't face any damage from the presence of the European and even in front of the foreign languages. Before the beginning of the colonization, English language dominated the area because of the long presence of British since the establishment of Jamestown castle in the Accra region in 1662. The British commercial activities throughout the Eweland permits the apparition of a new type of language called pidgin-English which is used by the Ewe to communicate with their European partners. This pidgin brought new words in the local vocabulary but also changes. The Europeans, especially the traders, engaged auxiliary agents like clerks, interpreters, catechists and these intermediates local people received summary instructions in European languages. These agents or intermediates were mostly the Métis or mixed race children from the union between Europeans and African women and through them, new life style appeared because the formed a local intelligentsia and new words appeared and progressively introduced the local language¹⁶. Because they know a bribe of European languages they introduced new words in the local languages. The actions of churches through Methodist and Anglican missions by the introduction of schools also permit the Ewe to adopt new words in their local language. But from the second half of the 19th century the situation has started changing because of the introduction of imperialism and colonization. The partnership between Africans and Europeans stopped and local languages like Ewe also were submitted to imperialism.

Local Language Versus Foreign Language in Colonial Situation

In the second half of the 19th century, the Africa continent has started to be under domination by European states. The domination has effectively started at the Berlin conference (1884-1985) where the imperialist countries without considering the realities about African culture and even languages shared people by artificial borders. With these borders colonies

¹² Lafage, op.cit., 21; Pauvert, op.cit., 176.

¹³ The original word is Halsduk in Swedish which means in English scarf. And in ewe language it is called duku.

¹⁴ This term derived from Portuguese which means lazy or selfish.

¹⁵ Lafage, op.cit., 22; Pauvert, op.cit., 164-165.

¹⁶ Alexandre, op.cit., 181.

appeared and families, ethnic groups, common linguistics groups were separated and now belonging to different spaces. People, who were living in their territories before, belong now to different linguistics European countries like France, Great-Britain, Germany, Spain, Portugal, and Belgium. The Congo River in central Africa which is before the colonialism a symbol of union between local people became a border between the Belgium colony of Congo and the French colony of Congo. The African people became subject to different colonies with foreign languages.

When, Germany took possession of the land that will become the German Togoland in West Africa in 1884, the Ewe were already a homogenous linguistic and cultural group in the area. The German colonization didn't separate them with an artificial border but they were influenced by the nearest British colony of Gold Coast because, before the colonization the presence and activities of the British in the region were effective so that the language in use is a pidgin which is a result of a mix of English and the local language Ewe¹⁷.

Picture 3: map of the German Togoland



Source: Gayibor 2006

During the German colonization especially at the beginning, the German language has been refused to the local people because for the Germans, their language and culture are superior and are the best and no need to teach Africans with this 'civilized language'¹⁸. In this period, the catholic schools which were established in the south of Togo have decided to give instruction and education in English and Ewe. For doing so, English language has been

¹⁷ Hugo Zöller. *Le Togo en 1884*. Lomé: Haho press, 1990, p. 8.

¹⁸ Rober Cornevin. *Histoire du Togo*. Paris : Berger-Levrault, 1962, p. 201.

adopted by the Ewe in their everyday life and most of them, instead of attending school in the German Togoland, preferred going to Gold Coast for education¹⁹. The capital of the German colony, Lome, has been created in 1880 by Ewe people coming from localities under British administration like Denu, Keta, Agbozume, and they became rich due to commercial activities in the area. Instead of living in another colony, their relations with English and their home town have never stopped²⁰ (Aduayom 1998: 3). The economic aspect also has been influenced by the British because it has been noticed that business companies like GB Williams and Swansy has been established in the German colony of Togo and most of the activities were in English and even the British pound, the currency of Great Britain is in use and all the transactions are in English language²¹. The use of English in the colony was finally a big problem for the German administration and in 1903, the German counsel stated that:

‘Instead of being a german possession, the colony of Togo..... is more British than German. In particular, English takes an important place in the relation with the indigenou, not only in private affairs but also with the administration. For the financials operations, the English money is always in use’²².

From this observation, the German administration has seen the importance of English language in the colony and it has been decided to allow the use of German language in the education system in 1905. But when the German administration realized that the influence of English language in the local life is at a certain level, it was too late because in august 1914, they lost their colony during the First World Word.

From 1914 to 1919, the British administration took possession of the Togoland especially the Eweland and most of the rich families send directly their children to Gold Coast’s schools and this situation permits to reinforce the link with the former Togoland. In fact, this was an alternative way to German’s education in that period. This situation brought another challenge in the Ewe’s common life.

The New Challenge of the Ewe and Their Language in Front of Colonization

In 1919, all the former German’s colonies throughout the world have been shared between Great Britain and France. The colony of Togoland also has been shared into two parts and the Eweland faced this situation. The Ewe, who were living together during the German colonization, were separated by artificial borders and became subjects to different linguistic colonial administrations. One part of this people is found in the French Togo administration and the second part became subjects to the British colony of Gold Coast with English as official language. The map below shows the reality and the apparition of artificial borders.

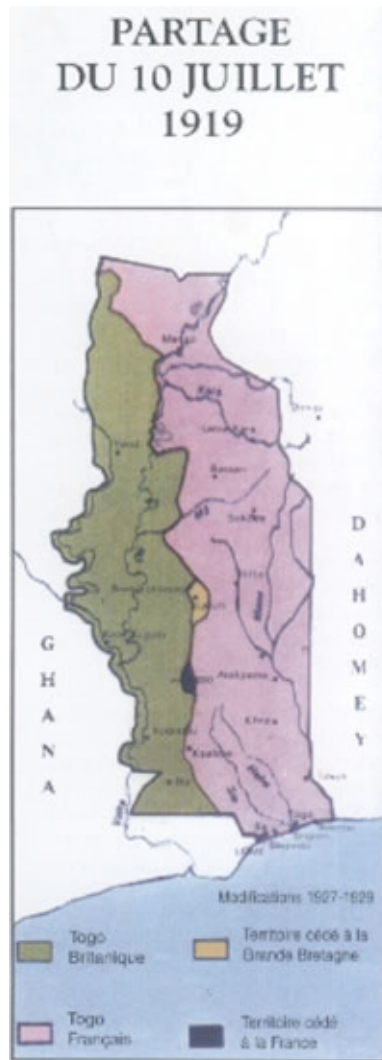
¹⁹ Yves Marguerat. "Dynamique sociale et dynamique spatiale d'une capitale africaine : Lome". *Tropiques Lieux et Liens*, Paris: ORSTOM, 1986, p. 347.

²⁰ Aduayom, op.cit., 3;

²¹ Aduayom, op.cit. 4; Sebald, op.cit., 26.

²² Sebald, op.cit., 58.

Picture 4: map of the colony of Togo after the First World War in 1919



Source: www.wikipedia.org

The western former German Togoland which has been attached to the British colony of Gold Coast didn't face any problems with the European language as well because for several periods the Ewe living in this land were in permanent contact with English. But the eastern side of this territory belonging to France faced a lot of problems with the apparition of French language. The populations living in this territory included the Ewe were at least bilingual in foreign languages known as German and English. The French colonial administration observed this fact and has decided to impose French language in the education system in 1922²³. The education system in the colony was the same as in France. But few people can speak French and this situation brought some frustrations from the former small Ewe elites like clerks,

²³ See Gayibor, 2006, op. cit.

farmers, catechist etc. who speak especially German and English and they even send a petition to the League of Nations in 1929 to reclaim the return of the Germans in Togo²⁴.

The impact of the English language in the Ewes' social life in Togo

Throughout the colonial period, it has been noticed that the introduction of colonial language in the local life of colonized people has an important impact in the cultural and social aspects. The Ewe living especially in French colony of Togo faced the same situation.

The enthusiasm and the interest for the English language by the Ewe in Togo has started since the German colonization and even before and continued during the French administration. The capital of the colony Lome is closed to the Aflao border in Gold Coast and most of the students just crossed the border to attend school in the British side, because the knowledge of English language is the key to a social promotion. As a result, most of the elites and intelligentsia in that period are bilingual or multilingual and the commercial companies in the area looked for them to be assistants or clerks in their branches²⁵.

The Ewe, in that period, especially in the French Togo colony are living at the 'Gold Coast's way of life' and the lifestyle of the society in Togo is typically the same in the Gold Coast especially in the fashion and hair fashion aspects, music, concert-party.

Another aspect of the impact of English in the French colony of Togo and on the Ewe in the territory is the large influence of the newspapers from the next British colony. These newspapers were read regularly and the Ewe intelligentsia used them to post news and revendications too. The newspapers that are regularly read are the *The Gold Coast Leader*, *West Africa*, *Daily Graphic*, *Evening News*²⁶ etc.

The important aspect of the impact of the English language is the introduction of new words in the local vocabulary. The Ewe people living at the two sides of the border have accepted naturally English new words and used them up to now. For example *church*, *business*, *Christian*, *ring*, *bucket*, *butter*, *cheese*, *corned beef*, *belt*, *umbrella*, *baby*, *apple*, *concert-party*, *paramount chief*, *tea*, *cake*, *breakfast*, *bread* etc.

The impact of English language in the political life in Togo

The indirect rule used by the British to administrate their colonies has consequences on the life of their neighbors. The Ewe people living in French Togo colony are attracted by this system and the local colonial administration saw this situation as a danger for the colony. After the Second World War, the elite or the intelligentsia were Ewe people and are anglophile and germanophile and they brought political claims about independence. They used newspapers in English especially *The Gold Coast Leader*, *The Gold Coast Independent*²⁷ to express the feeling of the population against the French administration.

Most of the leaders of the intelligentsia speak more English than French instead of living in a French colony and their activities are liberal or some of them worked for British companies based in Togo like United African Company (UAC) the most important British company and his director is Sylvanus Olympio one of the members of the creation of the Pan-

²⁴ This group is the association of former workers in the German colonization and the name of their group is called the *Bund der deutschen Togolander* or *Togo Bund* and the head Office is based in Accra in Gold Coast (actual Ghana). Most of the leaders of the *Togo Bund* are Ewe and their origins are especially from the Volta region. See also Lafage, op.cit., 26.

²⁵ Pauvert, op.cit., 177.

²⁶ Aduayom, op.cit., 5-6.

²⁷ Aduayom, op.cit., 7-8.

Ewe movement and also of the *All Ewe Conference*. He will become the first President of the Republic of Togo after the independence in 1960. This intelligentsia who wants the unification of the Ewe people has started a certain African nationalism and created also in 1945 the *Ewe Newsletter* to show their willing for independence²⁸.

The status of the British Togoland and the French colony of Togo is specificity because their administration by the Great Britain and France is a mandate under the supervision of the United Nations Organization. The local population has the right to send petition to the United Nations and can complain about their condition of living as a dominated people. The Ewe used this right to send petition to the United Nations and their leaders used English as international language to send these petitions.

As we mentioned it, most of the elites in French Togo colony were Ewe and they used English language to fight against colonialism. After the Second World War, they have started asking about more self-determination and also the union of the Eweland. For doing so, they created lot of associations for this purpose. The language used for the denomination of these associations is English. We can cite for example *All Ewe Conference, Togoland Union, Togoland Congress, The Ewe Benevolent Association, The Ewe speaking catholic Union, The Ewe Charity Union, The Togoville Union...* As Pauvert stated, most of the members of these associations and unions were Ewe from the French Togo colony and they moved to the British side to stay and also to escape from the French system, but continue fighting for the unity of their land²⁹ (Pauvert 1960: 181).

Conclusion

Before the colonial period, it is certain that the Ewe were in contact with Europeans and their languages through several years. From this contact, new European words has introduced the local language and this situation has permitted the birth of another language called pidgin-english which is a mix of local language and is in use up to the beginning of the colonization in West Africa. From 1884 to 1914 period of the German colonization, the Eweland was homogenous because the Ewe didn't face any separation by artificial borders and the English language is used even though they were under German administration. After the First World War, German possessions have been shared between France and Great Britain and the Ewe became people of different colonial nations with different languages. This situation put the Ewe in French Togoland in a hard situation because they don't speak French and continue using English in every life. The use of English brought some changes in the social and cultural life and has permitted the Ewe elites to claim the self-determination of their land through English newspapers and associations and unions. The significance of this study is to show the evolution of languages in general and especially the Ewe language. This research has permitted to understand the dynamism of language and culture by using foreign language as a weapon to fight against domination.

²⁸ Amandine Spire. "Lomé, ville post-frontière". *EchoGéo* (2010) :5.URL: <http://echogeo.revues.org/11974> ; DOI : 10.4000/echogeo.11974. (Date accessed: 29 march 2015).

²⁹ Pauvert, op.cit., 181.

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