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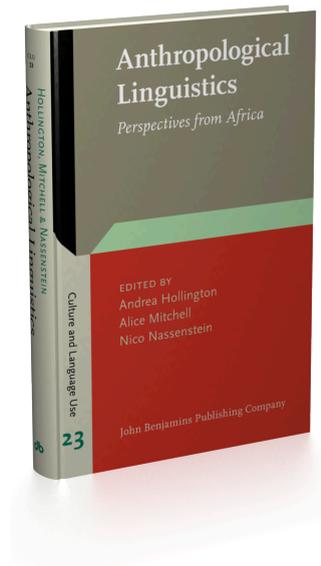
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Catching and classifying fish among the Dwang

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The goal of this chapter is to discuss an endangered fishing practice, and the naming and uses of fish among the Dwang of the Bono East Region of Ghana. I discuss a (defunct) communal fish catching process known as *kese* /késá/, in which the poisonous plant *Adenia cissampeloides*, also called *kese* by the Dwang, was used to kill the fish and harvest them. I then turn to the Dwang names for six freshwater fish, which is a classification of sorts. I explore the semantics of the fish names, especially their classes, such as *ka-* for singular versus *n-* for plural (e.g., *káwá/nkáwá*), on the one hand, and *ɔ-* for singular versus *a-* for plural (e.g., *ɔfwire/atfɪrɛ*), among others. I discuss some medicinal and customary uses of the fish which have almost disappeared. The chapter is therefore a discussion of endangered indigenous knowledge of a plant and fish.

Keywords: fish, ethnobiology, ecological knowledge, semantics, cultural meaning

1. Introduction

In the introduction to his paper “Biology in language documentation”, Si stresses the importance of documenting the traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of non-industrialized societies. He writes (Si, 2011, p.169):

Speakers of small, endangered languages, especially those situated far from urban centers, routinely engage with their natural environment as they go about the mundane tasks of obtaining food, fuel, water, and building material. The languages of such communities come to encode much encyclopedic knowledge about biological and ecological entities and phenomena. This knowledge is as important as the knowledge of religious practices, local customs, and taboos in allowing a person to be a fully functioning member of a community.

Si notes that the obvious entry point for TEK is “the naming and folk taxonomy (classification) of living organisms” (Si, 2011, p.169). The aim of this chapter is to describe the Dwang names for six fish and a defunct method of catching them. The fishing practice is called *kese* /késé/, while the fish are the lungfish (*danepvasi*), freshwater herring (*katsapée*), the bony tongue (*kakpáhkpáh*), the frank fish (*ɔtɔwiré*), the electric catfish (*ampusu*), and three genera of African tetra, all of which the Dwang people call *nsiépu*. Some of these fishes are given names that derive from their appearance, behavior or an attribute. In addition to shedding some light on the local knowledge and cultural practices of the Dwang people, the discussion also shows the effect of contact on the language. The fish names were elicited using pictures in Dankwa et al. (1999).¹ Speakers are shown the pictures, asked to name the fish and, when they are able, asked to talk about them. For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on discussions between the late Mr Dapaah (Mr. D), my principal fieldwork assistant at the time, and Nana Kwame Tapa (Nana KT), a farmer, fisherman and medicine man, for the information about the fishes. Material about the *kese* fishing practice is from a narration of the practice by Mr. D. and later conversations with him. Narrations about the Sene River were made by Nana Yaw Adjei (NYA), who was Acting Chief of Kwame Danso before the current chief was installed.

The chapter is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses the Dwang people and their language, and the Sene River in which they do a large part of their fishing. Section 3 discusses the defunct *kese* fishing practice, while Section 4 discusses the names for six fishes, and Section 5 concludes the chapter.

2. The Dwang people and their language

Dwang is spoken in the newly created Bono East Region of Ghana. According to the current classification, it belongs to the northern branch of the Central Guang branch of the Kwa family, although Dakubu (1988) reports that this classification is not conclusive. Eberhardt et al. (2019) give three dialects for Dwang, with the following population figures as of 2003: Bekye (1600 speakers), Kenyen (3300 speakers), and Wiase (3300 speakers). Research for this chapter was conducted among the Kenyen /kəpənə/, specifically in Kwame Danso, the capital of the Sene district, Lessi and Akyeremade. Dwang, like the other Guang languages, is said

1. Fieldwork for this study was carried out with a grant from the Endangered Languages Documentation Project for the documentation of fishing practices among the Dwang (SG0193). I am indebted to my Dwang consultants, particularly the late Mr. Dapaah and his children, Stephen and Dorcas, and Nana Kwame Tapa. I am also grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their invaluable suggestions.

to be spoken in a “linguistically heterogeneous and highly multilingual context” (Dakubu, 1988, p. 79). In addition to Dwang itself, the people speak Asante Twi or Bono, varieties of Akan, which is the dominant regional language. In fact, the Dwang currently refer to themselves as *Dwanfoɔ* ‘Dwang people’, of which the Akan plural suffix for people *-foɔ* is suffixed to *Dwang*. Eberhardt et al. (2019, p. 16) also report that the Dwang understand Krachi “because of contact”. Finally, educated people also speak English, the official language of Ghana. The main occupations of the Dwang people are farming and fishing in the Sene River or the Volta Lake, although today most of the people who engage in fishing combine it with some form of farming. Many women also engage in trading.

Dwang is an SVO language with grammatical relations determined for the most part by constituent order. Morphemes are mainly agglutinating, and simple sentences are “coextensive with words” (Kenesei, 2007, p. 2). Dwang has 10 vowels which participate in ATR vowel harmony. This is illustrated by the contrast between the prefixes *ɔ-* and *o-* in the words *ɔkɔ́* ‘someone’ and *owú* ‘sun’ respectively, which are determined by the ATR of the initial stem vowel. Initial investigation suggests that Dwang has seven noun classes. The classes are identified with their prefixes, which are *ɸ-*, *ɔ-/o-*, *ki-/ki-*, *ka-/kɛ-*, *ɪ-/i-*, *a-/ɛ-*, and *n-*. The *n-* undergoes homorganic nasal assimilation with a following consonant.² Human entities often occur in the *ɔ-/o-* class while their plural occurs in the *a-* class. Similarly, diminutive entities occur in the *ka-* class while their plural occurs in the *n-* class. These are shown below.

- (1) a. The *ɔ-/o-* class The *a-* class
 ɔɲiéɛ́ ‘man’ *aɲiéɛ́* ‘men’
 ɔtʃí ‘woman’ *atʃí* ‘women’
 ɔkɔ́ ‘someone’ *akɔ́* ‘some people’

2. I am grateful to Drs. Hederick Dankwa and Edward K. Abban of the Water Research Institute (WRI), the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), for giving me permission to use pictures from the book for my paper, and to the Director of WRI, Prof. Mike Yaw Osei-Atweneboana, for promptly reaching out to them to obtain the permission for me when I contacted him.

3. Henceforth, I represent the classes with their -ATR variant, and the nasals will be represented with *n-*. Thus, the classes are *ɸ-*, *ɔ-*, *ki-*, *ka-*, *ɪ-*, *a-*, and *n-*.

The Ghana Institute of Languages, Linguistics and Bible Translation (GILLBT) has recently developed an orthography system that is being used for bible translation and adult literacy. I do not use that orthography in this paper since I learned about it rather late. Instead, I use broad transcriptions for the representations of Dwang words. Dwang is a tone language. Further research is required to determine the number of tonemes that the language possesses. For the purposes of this chapter, I represent phonetic (as opposed to phonemic) high tones alone with the acute accent.

b.	The <i>ka</i> - class		The <i>n</i> - class	
	<i>kafáa</i>	‘small tilapia’	<i>mfáa</i>	‘small tilapias’
	<i>kasiépoi</i>	‘tetra’	<i>ηkasiεpoi</i>	‘tetras’
	<i>kabóι</i>	‘bird’	<i>mbóι</i>	‘birds’

Indeed, *gbi* means ‘child’ or ‘seed’. When it forms a compound with words belonging to other classes, and thereby denotes the child or seed of that entity, the class changes to *ka*-. Examples are *kakrámání gbi* ‘tiny dog’ (from *akrámán* ‘dog’) and *kabóρι gbi* ‘tiny petrocephalus fish’ (from *abóρι*).

Dwang also possesses multiverb constructions, including serial verb constructions (SVC). SVCs are “a sequence of verbs which act together as a single predicate, without any overt marker of coordination, subordination, or syntactic dependency of any sort” (Aikhenvald, 2006, p.1). Consider the example below:

- (2) *ɔ-bó ní-fóré bə-bé le péé*
 3SG-use CM-salt use-rub inside all
 ‘She spread salt all over the inside’

Bv and *bé* are two verbs in a single clause. In sum, Dwang, like all other Guang languages, is a tone language. It has vowel harmony and a noun class system with a paired set of prefixes, the choice of which is based on the tongue root position of the initial root vowel. In the next subsection, I discuss the Sene River.

2.1 The Sene River

The Sene River, which the Dwang people call *Kyeini*, is located 7° 30'21"N and 0° 56'02"W. It is one of the many tributaries of the Volta River. Sene is so important to the area that the district is named after it, i.e., the Sene District. The Dwang also consider Sene to be a god, with a shrine located at Mankwo (see Map 11.1 below). According to NYA, the first chief priest of the Sene god in Mankwo was called Kwabena Gburi. Since Kwabena Gburi, his descendants have served as priests and officiated in an annual ritual for the river during which animals are slaughtered and food is prepared at the riverside for people to eat. Like all river gods in the area, the Sene god at Mankwo has a few taboos, principal among which are that people dressed in black and women who are menstruating are not allowed to go to the riverside on Saturdays.

NYA narrated a tale that shows a curious influence of Christianity. The River Sene and the River Pra (latitude: 5.0191, longitude: -1.626) were both said to be sons of the River Volta. According to the tale, the River Volta was a blind father who doted on the River Sene, its favorite son, and gave it anything it wanted. One day, Sene went to the River Volta to report that it was not happy that it lacked

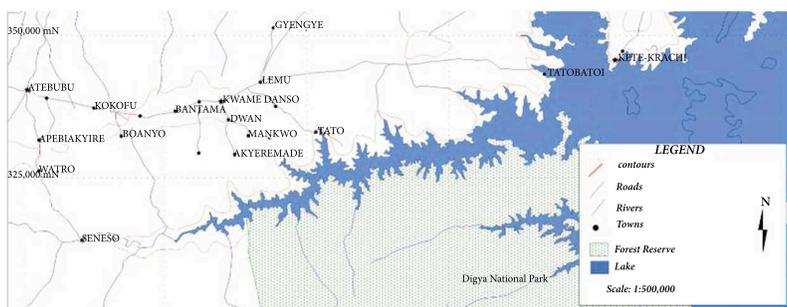
depth. It therefore asked the River Volta for a magic hoe to dig its riverbed so that it would become deep. The River Volta asked Sene to go and come back the following day for the hoe. The River Sene did not know that the River Pra was hiding in the bushes all along and eavesdropping on the conversation. Very early the following day, the River Pra went to the blind father and pretended to be the River Sene. It collected the hoe and went and dug its riverbed so that it became very deep. When the River Sene discovered what had happened, it became very angry and went to fight the River Pra. The River Volta broke up the fight, separated them and declared that the two would never mix. For this reason, any fish from one that is put in the other dies.

The striking similarity between the Dwang tale and the biblical story in which Jacob tricks his blind father Isaac and takes his brother Esau's treasured blessing cannot be a coincidence. It is most likely that the story was created after the Dwang had come into contact with Christian missionaries and learned the biblical version. It should not be surprising that the Dwang people decided to make their river the favorite son, and the foreign river the villain. The River Pra is one of the largest rivers in Ghana. Awotwe et al. (2019) describe it thus: "River Pra and its branches form the biggest river basin among three main basin systems of southwestern part of Ghana." Due to its size and importance, the River Pra has been studied extensively. The Sene River, by contrast, is shallow. It is therefore very susceptible to the rainfall patterns of the area. This is how Awotwi et al. (2019, p.2) describe the patterns:

Two seasons occur in the basin; wet season (major and minor rainy season which occur in May–July and September–November respectively) and the dry season (December–April). Spatio-temporally, rainfall distribution decreases toward the northern portion of the study area with a recorded yearly mean rainfall of 1550 mm.

In 1964, a hydroelectric dam was constructed across the Volta River at Akosombo, further south. At the time, the Akosombo dam was the largest man-made lake in the world by surface area. It is currently the third largest artificial lake in the world. According to the elders, before the construction of the dam, the Sene River used to crest during the rainy season and the level of the water went up. They believed that a lot of fish moved from the Volta into the Sene during this period. By contrast, during the dry season, the level of the water went down. Because the Sene was a shallow river, the water dried up completely in some areas, leaving ponds in the relatively deeper areas. They claimed that some ponds were close to each other so that fish like characins (called *lákə*) could jump from one into another. Things changed with the construction of the Akosombo dam. The website <https://www.ice.org.uk/what-is-civil-engineering/what-do-civil-engineers-do>

/akosombo-dam reports that “The project saw the flooding of part of the Volta River basin and its upstream fields.” In the Dwang area, the flooding of the upstream fields meant the lake expanded westward and swallowed up portions of the Sene River. Dwang people still refer to the huge section of the lake from Tataboi westward to Akyeremade and beyond (shown in Map 11.1) as the River Sene, although the area is currently occupied by the lake. More importantly, the replacement of a once shallow river with the bigger and deeper Volta Lake has had a more deleterious effect on an important cultural practice of the Dwang. I discuss this in the next section.



Map 1. The Sene River and Akosombo Lake⁴

3. *Kese*

Kese fishing used to be an important cultural practice among the Dwang, as narrated by Mr. D. The process began with the cultivation of *Adenia cissampeloises*, a poisonous plant that the Dwang call *kese* (Neuwinger, 2004).⁵ While some people kept the seed that was used for cultivation, others had to purchase it at the time of planting. The text below shows that planting began a month after the beginning of the rainy season:

- (3) a. *mó fí-é-bə-dúú* *kásə a*
 if 2SG-PERF-VEN-plant *kese* TP
 b. *fí-é-mən-dé* *ká-má gbi*
 2SG-PERF-NEG-have CM-IND seed

4. I am indebted to Dr. Prince Ofori Amponsah of the Department of Earth Science, University of Ghana, Legon, for drawing this map for me.

5. I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer who suggested this reference and thereby helped me to identify the plant.

- c. *fí-ké-ye ɔ-mɔ ɔ-dé ká-má gbi*
2SG-FUT-go CM1-REL CM1-sell CM-IND seed
- d. *ná fí-ε-ɔ... síká le*
CONJ 2SG-PERF-buy... money inside
- e. *fí-ε-ɔ trá ε ɔ-fóré ná sà nǎn le*
2SG-PERF-buy finish TP CM1-month four TOP DEF inside
'When you are about to plant *kese*, if you don't have the seed, you go to the one who has the seed and you buy it (with) money. You finish planting it in the fourth month' (kse: 7–11)

The text suggests that there would have been an economy around the *kese* seed, since it was not everybody who had it at the time of cultivation. The plant took as long as a year to mature. However, it appears that it was not harvested right away. Its main use was in October when the rainy season was over:

- (4) a. *á-mə sá ká-mə e-dzi ká-sú*
CM-IND say CM-IND AM-eat CM-year
b. *má kɪ-é-dɛŋ*
then CM-PERF-mature
c. *á-mə sá ɔ-fóré kudu nǎn le*
CM-IND say CM-month ten DEF inside
d. *má ba-á-bɔ kásá bé-e-tjírá m-kpátra*
then 3PL-PERF-take *kese* 3PL-PERF-catch CM-fish
'That is when it gets (eats) a year, then it is matured. That is in October, then they use *kese* to catch fish' (kse: 18–21)

On the special *kese* day, people went and harvested the plant, tied it in bunches, and headed for the rocks. The whole community met at the rocks, where they were divided into groups of up to four, each with a leader. They then competitively beat the *kese* into a pulp under the encouragement of the leader. The group that won got the bragging rights for that particular year.

When the *kese* was finely ground, they cut a leaf that they call *ɔfɔ*. The leaves were spread out and everybody collected the quantity of *kese* pulp that they needed into them and tied them up. They then headed towards the riverside, singing the following song:

- (5) a. *aná ye kásá oo aná ye kásá*
1PL go *kese* INT 1PL go *kese*
b. *nə á-mɔ m-kpátrá oo nə á-mɔ m-kpátrá*
COMP AM-kill CM-fish INT CONJ AM-kill CM-fish
c. *nə á-bɔ a-kó bɔ-bɛ aná gbi'*
COMP AM-use CM-INDEF use-come 1PL child

- d. *nə a-bʊ a-kó bʊ-be aná á-kó*
 COMP AM-USE CM-INDEF use-come 1PL CM-wife
- e. *nə á-bʊ a-kó bʊ-be aná á-báwɔrɛ*
 COMP AM-USE CM-INDEF use-come 1PL CM-concubine
 ‘We are going *kese* fishing oo we are going *kese* fishing, that we kill fish oo
 that we kill fish; that we bring some to our children; that we bring some to
 our wives; that we bring some to our girlfriends’ (kse: 50–54)

When they got to the bank of the river they spread out in a single file. After everybody had found a place, they unwrapped the *ɔfɔ* and dissolved the *kese* pulp in the water.

- (6) a. *má átfia ɛ-bʊ fiɛ ba-á-fwe*
 then now 3SG-do like 3PL-PERF-dissolve
- b. *ké-mʊ b(a)-á-wa n-tfú nəm le*
 CM-REL 3PL-PERF-put CM-water DEF inside
- c. *á-mə sá ɛ-ké-dʒi fiɛ míni ti fiɛ áduasa a*
 CM-IND say 3SG-FUT-eat like minute like thirty TP
- d. *má obiárá ɛ-fwɛ má arə tərə*
 then everybody AM-dissolve 3SG own finish
- e. *á-mə sá míni ti áduasa kóráá ɛ-be-bʊlé má ɛ-bʊ dɔnhwerew*
 CM-IND say minute thirty even 3SG-come-add then 3SG-do hour
kóle
 one
- f. *má m-kpətrá má bé-ʃɛ ka-sá bə-wu*
 then CM-fish then 3PL-go_in CM-under 3PL-die
- g. *m-kpətrá mʊ bá-dié-ʃɛ ka-sá wu páá*
 CM-fish REL 3PL-be_able-go_in CM-under die very_much
- h. *ámá é-dʒi n-kááwá*
 3PL AM-be CM-distichodont
- i. *n-kááwá ʃɛ ka-sá wu*
 CM-distichodont go_in CM-under die
 ‘Then it looks like they dissolve it and put it in the water. When it is like
 30 minutes – then everybody finishes dissolving theirs – when 30 minutes
 is added and it is an hour – then the fish begin to die – the fish that begin
 to die most are distichodonts – distichodonts begin to die’ (kse: 61–69)

The time it takes the fish to succumb to the effects of *kese* depends on the size of the fish or, as the Dwang believe, its strength. This is shown by the next lines:

- (7) a. *í-tfiwi asɪɛ bə-ń-tfwí-tfwá*
 3SG-come_from say 3PL-NEG-RED-be_big
- b. *seséi má de má kəsə nəm ɛ ka-dé ámá má bə-ə-wu*
 now then INT then *kese* DEF TOP AM-reach 3PL then 3PL-PERF-die

- c. *má átfia bə-ə-tfirə amə*
then now 3PL-PERF-catch 3PL
- d. *ámə bə-wóé-tú sá ɛnwé dʒi a-fáa*
3PL AM-REP-hit TOP two be CM-small_tilapia
- e. *a-fáa mə bə-ń-kíe-bu kwá*
CM-small_tilapia TOP 3PL-NEG-also-be_at strong
- f. *kəsə nəń ɛ-kíe-ka amə kpətí ma bə-kie-wú*
kese DEF AM-also-touch 3PL little then 3PL-also-die
- g. *má bá-tfirə ám(ə)*
then 3PL-PERF-catch 3PL
- h. *má átfiá mɔ́ é-bálá má m-kpətrá mɔ́ bi-é-keŋ á pɛɛ*
then now REL 3SG-add then CM-fish REL 3PL-PERF-remain TP all
- i. *átfia má bə-ə-wu*
now then 3PL-PERF-die

‘That is because they are not big. Within a short time, the *kese* overwhelms them and they die. Then the people catch them. The second one is tilapia. Tilapia are also not strong. When the *kese* touches them a little then they also die – then they catch them – next (in addition to that) all the fish that are left – then they die’ (kse: 70–78)

When the fish die, the men who are waiting on the banks move into the water and start harvesting them. There are strict rules about where to harvest, as shown below:

- (8) a. *fə-á-yirɛ maá fə́ kɪ-soba*
2SG-NEG-stand DEM POSS CM-place
- b. *maá yirɛ mfé*
DEM stand here
- c. *maá yirɛ mfé maá yirɛ mfé ná obíará yirɛ ɔ-bɔnká*
DEM stand here DEM stand here CONJ everybody stand CM-bank
- d. *ə-mə sá ka-kpətrá é-tí fə́ kə-sugba fə́ a-ńésírɛ*
3SG-IND say CM-fish AM-emerge 2SG CM-neighbor POSS CM-face
- e. *fə-ə-tfirə ka-mə́*
2SG-NEG-catch CM-PRON
- f. *fí-e-tfirə ka-mə*
2SG-PERF-catch CM-IND
- g. *fɪ-é-tv mɔ́mɔ́*
2SG-PERF-throw laws
- h. *amí-ɛ-bú fə́ yé á-dánsə́ fə́ a-ńésírɛ*
3PL-PERF-take 2SG go CM-elder POSS CM-face

- i. *bε-ké-bó fə kwó*
 3PL-FUT-do 2SG fine
 ‘You don’t stand at another person’s (lit. this person’s) place. This person stands here, this person stands here, this person stands here and everybody stands on the bank. That means when a fish emerges in front of your neighbor, you don’t catch it. If you catch it, you’ve broken a rule. You will be taken to the elders, and they will fine you.’ (kse: 83–91)

Mr D went on to explain that the fine was not monetary:

- (9) a. *kə-kwó mó bá-bɔ e-dzǐ fie...*
 CM-fine REL 3PL-do AM-be like...
 b. *nyé siká nə bá-sɔ fǎ kré*
 NEG:be money FOC 3PL-buy 2SG portion
 c. *fǎ m-kpətrá mǎ fí-é-nyá a*
 2SG CM-fish REL 2SG-PERF-get TP
 d. *bə-kó-kó le asá*
 3PL-FUT-divide inside three
 e. *má bɪ-é-lé fə kré kə-kóle*
 then 3PL-PERF-remove 2SG portion CM-one
 f. *má bɪ-é-bv-yé kəsə nəm fə ɔ-dánsá*
 then 3PL-PERF-use-go kese DEF POSS CM-elder
 ‘The fine that they will impose is not money that they will take from you; the fish that you’ve got – they will divide it into three – then they remove one portion from you – then they give it to the *kese* leader (*bɪ-é-bv-yé* should have been *bɪ-é-bv-ya* ‘they use go give’) (kse: 97–101)

The men collect the fish until sunset, when they head home.

While the men collected most of the fish that day, some of the fish survived until the following day when they died and floated on the water. Some women therefore went to the riverside the following day to collect them. This means that while the main *kese* event was the men’s affair, the following day’s event was for women. Because these fish had been dead for a while before the women collected them, they were processed in a particular manner:

- (10) a. *m-kpətra nəm aná ε-tɪ ámá ε-pɔna*
 CM-fish DEF 1PL AM-call 3PL CM-rotten_fish
 b. *sáá fə ɛpɔna nəm mɔ í-tfwi asɛ ámá lé*
 that POSS CM-rotten_fish DEF REL 3SG-come_from say 3PL inside
ε-ka-súnkun kuɲúsə a
 AM-already-rot reason TP
 c. *f-a-ké-díé bə-dená ... kanáŋ í-dzǐ*
 2SG-NEG-be_able use-cook thus NEG-eat

- d. *ǎ-mə sá má bə-dá bá-bə-bó məmɔné e*
3SG-IND TOP then 3PL-take 3PL-use-do fermented_fish TP
- e. *ǎ-mə sá a-tfí nəm e-sóré be kə-búrón é*
3SG-IND say CM-woman DEF AM-carry come CM-home TP
- f. *má obíará ɛ-páɪ-paɪ mə áre le*
then everybody AM-RED-split 3PL own inside
- g. *má ɔ-bó m-fóré bə-bé le péé*
then 3SG-take CM-salt use-rub inside all
- h. *má be-é-kpárá mfájé mɔ kə-kpátá bú á*
then 3PL-PERF-look_for place REL CM-mat be_at TP
- i. *má bi-é-bá-wɔre ǎ-sɔ sá*
then 3PL-PERF-use-dry CM-sun top
- j. *má ó-wú e-dá m-kpətrá nəm sá anáá se epuna nəm sə*
then CM-sun AM-hit CM-fish DEF top or say E DEF top
- k. *kalé ɛ-ká-bɔ fiɛ n-ká ítwí*
thus 3SG-FUT-do like CM-day eight
- l. *má bi-é-wɔre*
then 3PL-PERF-dry
‘The fish we call them *epuna*, that *epuna*, because the inside is already rotten, you can’t cook it like that and eat. Therefore they used it to make fermented fish. Thus, when the women carry it home, and everybody splits theirs, then they rub salt inside it all. Then they look for a place where there is a mat, then they spread them on it. Then the sun shines on the fish for up to about 8 days. Then they become dry.’ (Kse: 115–126)

The following text shows that children played an important role in the fish-processing process:

- (11) a. *bré mɔ bə-dájé ǎ-sɔ sá mfájé a*
time REL 3PL-lie CM-sun top place TP
- b. *anáá bré mɔ bə-dájé kə-kpátá nəm sá a*
or time REL 3PL-lie CM-mat DEF top TP
- c. *bré bíáá má fi-é-sə n-kɔdáá ba-á-kee sá*
time every then 2SG-PERF-let CM-child 3PL-PERF-look top
- d. *i-tfwi asɛ anə de m-bói kó mɔ bá-tɪ amá lákpəwú*
3SG-come_from say 1PL have CM-bird just REL 3PL-call 3PL L
- e. *amá fra ki-yíé nə bə-dzi útiriw m-kpətrá*
3PL as_for CM-flesh FOC 3PL-eat especially CM-fish
- f. *ǎ-mə sə ɔ-kó e-mán-kéé sə nə ɔ-dzɛ amá*
3SG-IND say CM-some AM-NEG-look top CONJ 3SG-drive_away 3PL

- g. *fɛ-ké-be ma be-é-tʰíé m-kpátrá nóm péé bǎné*
 2SG-FUT-come then 3PL-PERF-peck_at CM-fish DEF all ??
 ‘While they lie up there, or while they lie on the mat, every time you let
 children go watch over it, because we have some birds that are called
lekpewu. As for them they like eating flesh, especially fish, so if nobody
 watches over it and drives them away, by the time by the time you come,
 they would have eaten all the fish

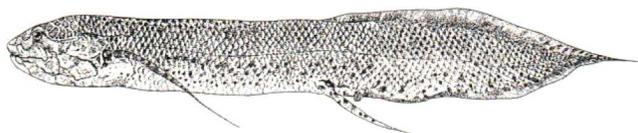
According to Mr D., things changed with the construction of the Akosombo dam. The Dwang people were introduced to a powder which was more effective, in that when they spread it in the water, it killed the fish immediately. He actually called it “poison” (see also page 148 of the FAO document at the following website: <https://www.fao.org/3/i1969e/i1969e02.pdf>).⁶ This may have been introduced to the area by migrant fishermen who moved there following the construction of the Akosombo dam. There were two problems with the powder: it was illegal and, because it killed the fish, the product was not tasty and rotted quickly. The government decided not only to ban the use of the powder, but also of *kese*. This removed the need to cultivate it, and it disappeared.

In sum, *kese* was a cultural activity with structure. There were gendered roles where adults were concerned, and roles for children. There was also language specific to the activity, including the naming of the fish that were caught, and the uses of the fish. I turn to this in the next section.

4. Classification of fish

In this section I discuss six fish names to determine, where possible, the reasons for the naming, and their uses. I use discussions between Mr. D and Nana KT who, in addition to being a farmer and fisherman, is also a medicine man. I provide the pictures from Dankwa et al. (1999) that were used to elicit the description. While most of the fish have common names, a few do not. Only the relevant portions of the exchanges are provided in Dwang.

4.1 *Protopterus annectens* (Owen, 1839) (Dankwa et al., 1999, p.11, fig. 2)



6. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this document to my attention.

The common name for the *Protopterus annectens* is African lungfish. According to Adeyemi (2010), it is the only species of the primitive Lepidosirenidae family found in West African freshwaters. Dankwa et al. (1999, p. 11) describe the fish as possessing “strong crushing jaws”. They add that its young have “four pairs of external gills”, and it is “capable of aestivating in mud for a long period of time”. While all this information is captured in the description that Nana KT gives, he shows that the name of the fish in Dwang comes from the perception that the gills are breasts.

Nana KT

- (12) a. *ɔ-dé á-néɔ nə ba-á-te mə daɲɛɔsáí*
 3SG-have CM-breast CONJ 3PL-PERF-call 3SG D
 ‘It has breasts and so it is called daɲɛɔsáí.’

Mr. D

- (12) b. *a-ɲɛɔ nəm bɔ amána*
 CM-breast DEF be_at how_many
 ‘How many are the breasts?’

Nana KT

- (12) c. *bɔ anó*
 be_at four
 ‘There are four.’
- d. *o-dzí ka-kpətrá kó mɔ́ ɔ-dɪɛ-tfɪna atɛtfé le*
 3SG-be CM-fish SPEC REL 3SG-be_able-sit mud inside
 ‘It is a fish that often stays in the mud.’

Mr. D

- (12) e. *ɔ-dɪɛ-tfɪna mɲána*
 3SG-be_able-sit where
 ‘It often stays where?’

Nana KT

- (12) f. *atɛtfé le*
 mud inside
 ‘In the mud.’

Mr. D

- (12) g. *mɲána ná fiɛ ɔ-tfɪnə-í*
 where FOC like 3SG-sit-Q
 ‘Where does it stay?’

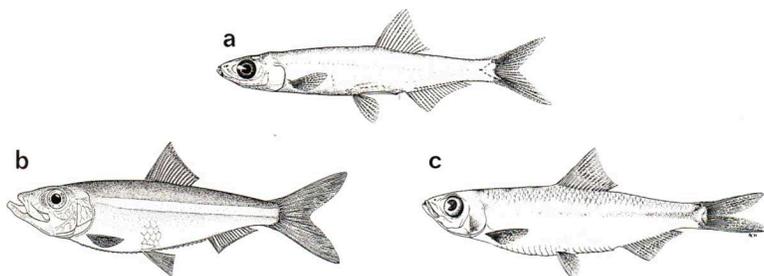
Nana KT

- (12) h. *a-dɔlé le*
 CM-mud inside
 ‘In the mud.’

- i. ɔ-dé á-ní
3SG-has CM-tooth
'It has teeth.'
- j. biesí mós fí-ε-bɔ má súéré o-ká-díé-dū fǎ
therefore REL 2SG-PERF-do 3SG joke 3SG-FUT-be_able-bite 2SG
'Therefore if you play with it, it can bite you.'
- k. mə á-ní dʒí fíε ə-sə fǎ are pépéépé
3SG:IND CM-tooth be like CM-person POSS own exactly
'Its teeth are exactly like human's.'

The discussion shows that the name *dajepoasi* comes from *dé* 'to have' and *ajepo* 'breasts'.

4.2 *Sierrathrissa leonensis* (Thys van den Audenaerde, 1969), *Odaxothisa mento* (Regan, 1917) and *Pellonula leonensis* (Boulenger, 1916) (Dankwa et al., 1999, p.12, fig. 4)



The *Sierrathrissa leonensis* is popularly known as the West African pigmy herring. Whitehead and Teugels (1985) write that the fish, which was first recorded in Sierra Leone, has sometimes been claimed as nothing more than “the unmetamorphosed larva of species of *Pellonula* (or perhaps *Cynothrissa*)” and that fully mature specimens range from 21–26 mm. In the text below (Nana KTepa1), Nana KT begins with a name *ndupa kókɔ* ‘red tails’ that refers to the physical attribute of one of the species of the herring. Mr. D therefore questions him further to determine why:

Mr. D

- (13) a. ná məná lé bε ná ba-á-tɪɪ ámá n-dupa kókɔ?
CONJ what inside come CONJ 3PL-PERF-call 3PL CM-tail red
'Why are they called red tails?'

Nana KT

- (13) b. *ɔ-kʊ fə arɛ kóé*
 CM-some POSS own be_different
 ‘some are different.’
- c. *maá fə arə dʒí fiɛ kɛ-frá bɔbɔ*
 DEM POSS own be like CM-leaf fresh
 ‘This one looks green (like fresh leaves).’
- d. *fiɛ ámá á-tfwá*
 like 3PL AM-be_plenty
 ‘They are many (types).’
- e. *be-dʒí əɲwé nə asá*
 3PL-be two CONJ three
 ‘They are two and three.’
- f. *ɔ-kʊ fə ará dʒí ɪ-kókɔ*
 CM-some POSS own be AM-red
 Lit. ‘Some are red’

Mr. D

- (13) g. *ɔ-kʊ fə mənə́ dʒí ɪ-kókɔ?*
 CM-some POSS what be AM-red
 ‘Which part of some are red?’ (lit. ‘The what of some are red?’)

Nana KT

- (13) h. *mə o-du díá*
 3SG CM-tail DEF
 ‘Its tail,’
- i. *ɔ-kʊ fə arə dʒí fiɛ m-fwá*
 CM-some POSS own be like CM-fat
 ‘one type is yellow.’ (lit. ‘like fat’)
- j. *káná́ mʊ mə o-du nə́n dʒí ɪ-kókɔ á ɔ-kókɔ á sá*
 thus REL 3SG CM-tail DEF be CM-red TP CM-red TP top
 ‘The way its tail is red,’
- k. *ná me-é-tee ɔ-kʊ asɪɛ n-dupa kókɔ*
 CONJ 1SG-PERF-call CM-some say CM-tail red
 ‘and I call some red tails.’

Mr. D

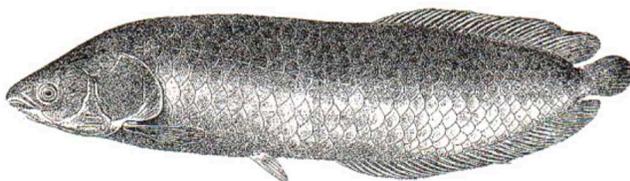
- (13) l. *ná ka-kpətrá mən ba-á-tɪ mə katʃapée?*
 CONJ CM-fish which 3PL-PERF-call 3PL K
 ‘Which fish is called katʃapée?’

Nana KT

- (13) m. *katʃapée nə kə-dupa kókɔ kə-ɲíná kóle*
 K CONJ CM-tail red CM-name one
 ‘Katʃapée and red tail are the same name.’ (lit. ‘one name’).

This discussion shows that Nana KT only remembered the names that have been given to the specific herring types based on the color of their tails. It was only when Mr. D prodded him in (13l) about the genus name *katʃapɛɛ* that he remembered and stated that they are the same.

4.3 *Heterotis niloticus* (Cuvier, 1829) (Dankwa et al., 1999, p.13, fig. 5)



The common name for the *Heterotis niloticus* is bony tongue. The Dwang people call it *kɪkpáɣkpáɣ*. Unlike the first two, the name does not appear to be due to a property of the fish. However, the fish did play an important role in the culture of the Dwang not long ago. The discussion below (Ktepa2: 12–19 and Ktepa 3: 14–30) shows that that men used the fact that the fish is not tasty (cf. Nwabueze & Nwabueze, 2010) to resolve marital problems:

Nana KT (Ktepa2: 12–19)

- (14) a. *abrɛ díá, má saá fə ka-kpətrá maá mɔ bá-tɪ kə-mə kɪ-kpáɣkpáɣ*
 time TOP then that POSS CM-fish DEM REL 3PL-call CM-IND K
a
 TP
 ‘Some time ago, that fish that they call *kəkpáɣkpáɣ*’
- b. *má kɛ-ń-bó de*
 then CL-NEG-be_at sweet
 ‘it wasn’t tasty’
- c. *á-mə sá bré nəm fra mɔ, ba-á-die-pɔŋ a-tʃí*
 3SG-IND top time DEF as_for REL 3PL-PERF-be_able-marry CM-woman
ənwə anáá asá
 two or three
 ‘Because at that time, they could marry two or three wives.’
- d. *á-mə sá mɔ fí-é-ye kəsə nəm kóráá mɔ fə adwéné mbv*
 3SG-IND top REL 2SG-PERF-go K DEF even then 2SG mind NEG-be_at
má sə
 3SG top
 ‘Then when you are going fishing, you don’t even think about her.’

- e. *anáá se mə adwene n-kie-bu fə sá*
 or say 3SG mind NEG-also-be_at 2SG top
 ‘or she too does not think of you’
- f. *fí-ε-ɲa ká-má e, mə ná fí-é-bə-sá má ɔ-bu-dína*
 2SG-PERF-get CM-IND TP 3SG FOC 2SG-PERF-use-give then 3SG-use-cook
ε-pu
 CM-soup
 ‘When you get it, it’s the one you send her to make soup’
- g. *má ɔ-wóé-dé ke-ɲíná ko ba-á-tii mə se ta mə sə mə*
 then 3SG-REP-have CM-name SPEC 3PL-PERF-call 3SG say take 3SG give 1SG
kə bɔ́í
 wife bad
 ‘so you see that... it also has another name that they call it “give it to his bad wife”’

(Ktepa 3: 14–30)

- (15) a. *ná ε-bó fiε fi-dé fě-bu mə kə-bebúó*
 CONJ 3SG-do like 2SG-have 2SG-break 3SG CM-proverb
 ‘Then it would look like you are telling her a proverb.’
- b. *ɔ-mə sá má ká-má ke-ɲíná dzí ta mə sə mə kə bɔ́é*
 3SG-IND say then CM-IND CM-name be take 3SG 3SG-IND wife bad
 ‘That is why its name is “give it to his bad wife”’

Mr. D

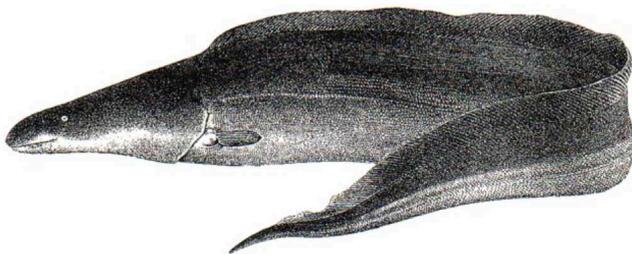
- (15) c. *suná-m sé ntí mɔ́ fi-é-bu saá fə ka-kpətrá nəm bə-sá*
 show-3SG say reason REL 2SG-PERF-use that POSS CM-fish DEF use-give
má a
 3SG TP
 ‘Show her why you have given her that fish.’

Nana KT

- (15) d. *má ɔ-tfí nən ɔ-be-pá fə tfew*
 then CM-wife DEF 3SG-VEN-beg 2SG beg
 ‘Then the woman comes to apologize to you’
- e. *ase fi-í-ye kəsə nən mɔ́ ɔ-brá aséj ko tia fə á*
 say 2SG-PROG-go kese DEF REL 3SG-say word INDEF against 2SG TP
 ‘She would say when you were going to *kese* and she said something against you’
- f. *má ɔ-ké-pa fə tfew*
 then 3SG-FUT-beg 2SG beg
 ‘Then she will apologize to you’
- g. *má átɲia awaríé nɛ́m ε-bɔ́ awaríé*
 then now marriage DEF AM-do marriage
 ‘Then the marriage will be on a sound footing’ (lit. ‘will be marriage’)

According to the discussion, the bony tongue fish was also called “give it to his bad wife”. This is because it was not considered to be delicious, and a man who caught it during a *kese* fishing expedition would only give it to his wife if she offended him. A wife who received such fish from her husband would reflect on what she had done to upset him and apologize to him. Once she made the apology, the problem would be considered resolved and the marriage would be fine again. The fish therefore played an important role in resolving marital conflicts among the Dwang people, although it was always in favor of the man. It is likely, therefore, that this special name was used by men only. While Nana KT was describing the fish, there were a few Dwang elders next to me who were listening to him. When he got to (14g), an old man joined him to shout *mə kə bɔ́í*, suggesting it was a well-known name among the older people.

4.4 *Gymnarchus niloticus* (Cuvier, 1829) (Darkwa et al., 1999, p.17, fig. 11)



The common name for *Gymnarchus niloticus* is frank fish. It is called *ɔ́fwɪɛ* in Dwang. The prefix shows that it belongs to the *ɔ*- class, which means that it is classified with animate entities. The frank fish is very important among the Dwang, both for medicinal and cultural purposes. This is shown in the segment of conversation between Mr D and Nana KT (Nana_Fish_2b: 142–215) below:

- (16) a. *saá fə ka-kpətrá nə́n ka-bɔ kwá n-tfú lɛ páá*
 that POSS CM-fish DEF AM-be_at strong CM-water inside INT
 ‘That fish, it is very strong in water’ (142–143)
- b. *á-mə sá a-lə m-fé maá nə fí-e-kó akɔdaí*
 3SG-IND top CM-thing CM-place DEM FOC 2SG-PERF-give_birth child
 ‘That is, if you give birth to a child’
- c. *ná mi-é-dzi nofóé nofóé, ɔ-m-bɔ kwa*
 CONJ 3SG-PERF-be weak weak 3SG-NEG-be_at strong
 ‘and he/she is very weak, not strong.’

- d. *saá fə ka-kpətrá maá fí-ké-ʃedá kpalé ká-m páá*
 thus POSS CM-fish DEM 2SG-FUT-plan search CM-IND INT
 ‘That fish, you can get it.’
- e. *ka-mə a-kasaí díá, nə fí-bv ka-dadúá bə-lwié-lwie*
 CL-IND CM-bone TOP CONJ 2SG-use CM-nail use-RED-enter
 ‘Its bones, you use a nail to enter them.’ (make holes in them) (150–151)
- f. *ká-mó a-kasaí nəm fə ə-bwə díá le*
 CL-REL CM-bone DEF POSS CM-hole DEF inside
 ‘The holes in the bones,’
- g. *nə fí-bv i-súri bə-wáá lé*
 CONJ 2SG-use CM-thread use-enter inside
 ‘then you put threads through them.’
- h. *nə fí-bv dré ká-bú nəm kalé fíe.... forty days*
 CONJ 2SG-use tie CM-waist DEF thus like forty days
 ‘And then you tie it around the waist for about forty days,’

Mr. D

- (16) i. *n-ká n-ká n-ká dwianá*
 CM-day CM-day CM-day forty
 ‘forty days.’

Nana KT

- (16) j. *n-ká dwianá díá... má fí-é-bú-dré-m*
 CM-day forty TOP then 2SG-PERF-use-tie-3SG
 ‘Those 40 days... then you tie it around him’
- k. *kɔ-fó time mó é-ké-tɪŋ a*
 go-reach time REL CL-FUT-break TP
 ‘till the time that it breaks.’
- l. *ám ε-téré tɪŋ fa-á-ta bíó*
 3PL PERF-finish tear 2SG-NEG-take again
 ‘When they are done (finish) breaking, you don’t take them again.’
- m. *má ɔ-kɛ-bv kwa fíe... ka-kpətrá nəm pepépe*
 then 3SG-REP-be_at strong like CM-fish DEF exactly
 ‘Then he/she also becomes strong exactly like the fish.’

Nana KT

- (16) n. *mə ó-sí lé kalé bə-ye mə kv-kóné le... mə sáná nəm*
 3SG CM-back inside thus VEN-go 3SG CM-neck inside 3SG middle DEF
 ‘Right from its lower back up to its neck its middle.’

According to Nana KT, when a newborn is weak or sickly, bones of the fish are threaded and tied around his or her waist for forty days. The child would then become as strong as the fish. In addition to its medicinal properties, the fish serves other functions, including as a show of appreciation, and for customary marriage ceremonies:

- (17) a. *mə ki-yíé nəm dʒí ki-yíé ko mós*
 3SG CM-flesh DEF be CM-flesh SPEC REL
 ‘its meat is some meat that’
- b. *err ésán se o-dʒí ka-kpətrá mós ká-híá se err kə-də bíará kuŋúsa*
 um since 3SG-be CM-fish REL AM-need say um CM-thing every reason
 ‘since it is fish that is needed for... um everything’
- c. *má fi-e-bú ki-yíé nəm bə-ye ká*
 then 2SG-PERF-cut CM-flesh DEF use-go give_as_present
 ‘then you cut the fish and give it as a present.’
- d. *ɔ-kʊ ɛ-bó kʊ-dókʊ sá fə*
 CM-some AM-do CM-thing give 2SG
 ‘If someone has done something nice for you.’
- e. *mós fə a-ŋésá é-só e*
 REL 2SG CM-face AM-sʊ TP
 ‘if you are grateful’
- f. *fɪ-í-dɪɛ-bó-ye ká mə*
 2SG-PERF-be_able-use-go give_as_present 3SG
 ‘you could go and give it as a present to him/her.’
- g. *fɪ-í-bɛ-póŋ ɔ-tʃí*
 2SG-PERF-VEN-marry CM-woman
 ‘When you are about to marry a woman.’
- h. *nə fi-í-kpəɛ mə ki-yíé bə-sá mə abusuafoś nəm*
 CONJ 2SG-PERF-look_for 3SG CM-flesh use-give 3SG family DEF
 ‘then you look for the fish to give to her family.’
- i. *ba-á-tíkí-tíkí mə yíé nəm ŋkúrən ŋkúreŋ ŋkúrən*
 3PL-PERF-RED-CUT 3SG flesh DEF round_piece round_piece round_piece
 ‘You cut it into round round pieces.’
- j. *fɪ-í-dɪɛ bə-ká-kə ámá o-ŋi ó-sí*
 2SG-PERF-be_able use-RED-give_as_present 3PL CM-mother CM-father
 ‘Then you give it to them as presents, father, mother.’

Mr. D

- (17) k. *á-mə sá fí-ɛ-kɪ ɔ-dó maá má ɛ-tʃíre se mə yó dé mfasós*
 3SG-IND top 2SG-PERF-look ?? DEM then 3SG-means 3SG skin has benefit
páá
 INT
 ‘That means when you look at it, it has a lot of value.’

Nana KT

- (17) l. *bebreə á-má sá ɔ-bʊ lwá tãē*
 several 3SG-IND top 3SG-be_at scarce bad
 ‘A lot, therefore it is very scarce.’

Mr. D

- (17) m. *kaná nəm ɔ-bv lwá a, má é-tfíre se ɔ-men-bv aná*
 thus DEF 3SG-be_at scarce TP then 3SG-shows that 3SG-NEG-be_at 1PL
n-tfú maá lé bɛ
 CM-water DEM inside or
 ‘The way it is scarce, does it mean that it is not in our water?’

Nana KT

- (17) n. *ɔ-bv lé ɔ-bv aná n-tfú maá lé*
 3SG-be_at inside 3SG-be_at 1PL CM-water DEM inside
 ‘It is in, it is in our water.’

Mr. D

- (17) o. *ná məná be ná ɔ-bv lwá*
 CONJ what come CONJ 3SG-be_at scarce
 ‘So why is it scarce?’

Nana KT

- (17) p. *ɔ-má-le m-fǎ́ǎ́ mɔ́ dédé bv a*
 3SG-NEG-like CM-place REL noise be_at TP
 ‘It doesn’t like the place where there is noise.’
 q. *dédé é-dzǐ fiε ... m-fǎ́ǎ́ fi-ké-wá kásó*
 noise AM-be like ... CM-place 2SG-FUT-pour kese
 ‘Noise like ... the place where you go to do *kese*,’
 r. *ɔ-má-le kanǎ́ǎ́*
 3SG-NEG-like thus
 ‘It doesn’t like that.’

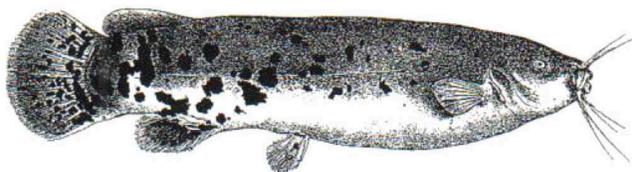
Mr. D

- (17) s. *í-tfwi asɛ á-ɪɛ ba-a-fiε-fiε a?*
 3SG-come_from say CM-person AM-PERF-RED-shout Q
 ‘Is it because people are shouting?’

Nana KT

- (17) t. *ehéε*
 ‘That’s right’

Dankwa et al. (1999) write that the frank fish is not threatened. However, Mr D’s discussion with Nana KT suggests that while they may still be found in the Dwang area, they are not abundant. Mr. D actually lamented in a later conversation with me that the tradition of distributing the fish to family members during marriage has almost disappeared because of the scarcity of the fish.

4.5 *Malapterurus electricus* (Gmelin, 1789) (Darkwa et al., 1999, p. 36, fig. 33)

The *Malapterurus electricus* (Gmelin, 1789) is commonly known as the electric catfish. The Dwang call it *əmpusu*. They say it is tasty but also that it inspires a lot of fear because of its ability to give an electric shock to people who touch it. Obasohan et al. (2006) write that it is used locally for medicinal purposes by people around the Ogba River in Benin City, Nigeria, due to what they call “its mythical powers”. The discussion below (Nana_fish_3: 506–570) shows that it is the same for the Dwang:

Nana KT

- (18) a. *e-dʒí ka-kpətrá mɔ́ ká-mə e-yó ɛ-bɔ́ í-fú a*
 3SG-be CM-fish REL CL-IND CM-skin AM-do CM-fear TP
 ‘It is a fish that is scary.’
- b. *ka-bɔ́ dábá páá*
 CL-do sweet INT
 ‘It’s very delicious.’
- c. *má fí-é-lé ká-mɔ́ fí-é-ɲésé kanóŋ má ka-á-wɔre*
 then 2SG-PERF-remove CL-IND 2SG-PERF-? thus then CL-PERF-dry
 ‘Then you remove it and ??, that way, it dries.’
- d. *fa-á-wə-ɛ-díné kóráá má fí-tfá fé-é-wo ka-má*
 2SG-NEG-REP-cook even then 2SG-just 2SG-PERF-chew CL-IND
 ‘You don’t even have to cook it again before you can just eat it.’
- e. *mə ɔ-wóré diá, ba-á-bv-bó ká-dúú bebree*
 3SG:IND CM-skin TOP 3PL-PERF-use-do CM-medicine several
 ‘As for its skin, it is used to make several kinds of medicine.’
- f. *ná ɔ-tfí kóráá ná ɛ-be sɛ ɔ-dʒí fə ká ná ɔ-kú*
 CONJ CM-woman even FOC 3SG-come say 3SG-be 2SG wife CONJ CM-some
ɪ-tá má
 AM-take 3SG
 ‘If a woman is your wife and somebody takes her,’
- g. *fí-ɛ-bó-bɔ́ kə-dúú i,*
 2SG-PERF-use-do CM-medicine TP
 ‘when you use it to make medicine,’

- h. *mɪ-í-yé mə kré ɛ, má mə tulé é-wu kóráá*
 3SG-PERF-go 3SG side TP then 3SG penis AM-die even
 ‘when he (i.e., the other man) went to her place, then his penis would die completely.’

Mr. D

- (18) i. *ná mánə kə-də kuɲúsə nə ba-á-bʊ əmá bʊ-bʊ álá mʊ*
 CONJ what CM-thing reason FOC 3PL-PERF-use 3SG use-do thing RED
sébi o
 pardon INTERJ
 ‘Why is its skin used to make something, pardon that (expression),’
- j. *fə nə ɔ-tʃí ná ma-ké-díé dɪ-ŋ*
 2SG CONJ CM-woman FOC NEG-FUT-be_able lie-Q
 ‘that you and a woman would not be able to sleep (together)?’

Nana KT

- (18) k. *á-lé bʊ mə lé, ɛr a-le bɔ̃ɛ bʊ mə le*
 CM-thing be_at 3SG inside um CM-thing bad be_at 3SG inside
 ‘There is something in it, there is something evil in it.’

Mr. D

- (18) l. *mənə a-lé ébóasə bʊ mə lé páá, ná əmá kuɲúsə*
 what CM-thing ?? be_at 3SG inside INT CONJ 3SG reason
ba-á-bʊ-bʊ ká-dú?
 3PL-PROG-use-do medicine
 ‘What special thing is in it because of which they use it for medicine?’

Nana KT

- (18) m. *mə súnsʊm*
 3SG spirit
 ‘Its spirit.’

Mr. D

- (18) n. *súnsʊm mə kalé?*
 spirit 3SG thus
 ‘What kind of spirit?’

Nana KT

- (18) o. *m-a-ké-ɲɪ brə əmə aná ke-ɲeɲ lé nəm*
 1SG-NEG-FUT-know say 3SG 1PL Dwang inside DEF
 ‘I won’t know how to say it in our Dwang language’
- p. *í-tʃwi fɪe məná asɪɛ, aná é-brə əmá aná lé*
 3SG-come_from like 2PL say 1PL PERF-say 3SG 1PL inside
 ‘because you’ve said we should speak our language.’

Mr. D

- (18) q. *νέ μι-ί-κρη a?*
 NEG:be 3SG-PERF-shock Q
 'Is it not the one that shocks?'
 r. *νέ κι-κρη νᾶν κυύσά ná a?*
 NEG:be CM-shock DEF reason FOC Q
 'Is it not because of the shock?'

Nana KT

- (18) t. *εε ί-κε-κρη*
 yes 3SG-FUT-shock
 'Yes, it will shock.'

Mr. D

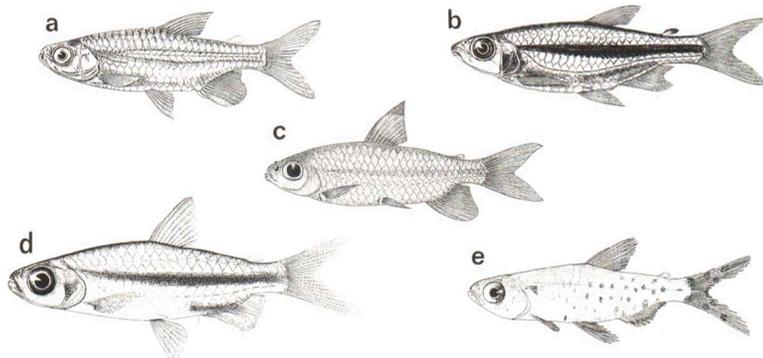
- (18) u. *κι-κρη νᾶν ε-λε σά ρ-δέ power νᾶνα?*
 CM-shock DEF 3SG-inside give 3SG-has power DEF Q
 'Is it the shock that gives it the power?'

Nana KT

- (18) v. *ί-κέ-κρη fά*
 3SG-FUT-shock 2SG
 'It will shock you;'
 w. *μά f-a-ά-wε-die κρα lé kóráá*
 then 2SG-NEG-PERF-REP-be_able hold even even
 'And then you won't be able to hold her (i.e., the woman) at all.'

Nana KT echoes the belief of the Dwang that the ability to emit electric charges which shock people who touch the fish comes from an evil spirit that exists in the fish.

4.6 *Micralestes* (Boulenger, 1899), *Rhabdalestes* (Hoedeman, 1959) and *Lepidarchus* (Roberts, 1966) (Darkwa et al., 1999, p. 21, fig. 16)



The picture above shows five fish which Darkwa et al. (1999) divide into three genera, namely *Micralestes*, *Rhabdalestes* and *Lepidarchus*. The fish *Micralestes pabrensis* (a), *Micralestes occidentalis* (b) and *Micralestes elongatus* (c) belong to the *Micralestes* genus. Image (d) is *Rhabdalestes septentrionalis* and (e) is *Lepidarchus adonis*. Although belonging to three genera, Nana KT's comment (19a) below suggests the Dwang consider all three to be one type of fish. A single one is *kasiépori* while many are *nsiépori*. According to him, they are the primary food for other types of fish. He ends by explaining why the fish bears the name *nsiépori* (Nana_fish_3: 84–108).

- (19) a. *amə maá péé be-dzí a-lə kóle*
 3PL DEM all AM-be AM-thing one
 'All of them are one.'
- b. *m-kpətrá péé be-bv n-tfú lé ámá ə-dzíbə ne*
 CM-fish all AM-be_at CM-water inside 3PL CM-food FOC
 'All the fish in water, this is their food.'
- c. *ámá ká-dá fɛ mó ba-á-tɪ amə n-siépə é-dzí aseə*
 3PL CM-thing like REL 3PL-PERF-call 3PL N 3SG-be say
 'The reason why they are called N is that'
- d. *séséi maá déɛ, fí-ɛ-ye n-tfú lɛ ndé ndé ndé ndé*
 NOW DEM TOP 2SG-PERF-go CM-water inside today today today today
 'right now if you go to the water today today today,'
- e. *fɪ-ké-ɲa esié n-tfú nəm*
 2SG-FUT-get draw CM-water DEF
 'as soon as you draw the water,'
- f. *fɪ-ké-ɲa a-kó ba-bv-bó ɛ-pó*
 2SG-FUT-get CM-some 3PL-use-make CM-soup
 'you will get some to come and make soup.'
- g. *á-mə sə nə ba-á-tɪ amə*
 2SG-FUT-get CM-some 3PL-use-make CM-soup 2SG-FUT-get
 'That is why they are called *nseépo*.'

The differences notwithstanding, the three genera of fish are named based on their accessibility.

5. Conclusion

According to Foley (2013, p.1), anthropological linguistics is “concerned with the place of language in its wider social and cultural context, its role in forging and sustaining cultural practices and social structures.” This study was conducted as part of a documentation project that peels away language to discover the mean-

ings that underlie the naming of fish, the cultural practices associated with harvesting fish, and how both the names and the practices are severely threatened, partly through contact, partly through cultural and ecological changes. We can safely assume that the *kese* practice was sustainable. Mr D pointed out that individual people could use it for fishing. However, its communal use was limited to specific occasions at specific times. As such, there would have been no risk of overfishing. The introduction of poisonous powder to replace the plant (doubtless through contact with outsiders) changed everything. The people may have caught a lot more fish during that time but they also destroyed many fingerlings in the process. This was why the Ghanaian government clamped down hard on the practice. Unfortunately, by including fishing with *kese* in the ban, the authorities killed off an important cultural practice. Since its cultivation appeared to be labor intensive, the plant disappeared within a generation. Thus, although I made several attempts to find it during the two months I spent collecting data among the community, nobody could locate a single plant.

Two of the fish described (*δαλερσασί* and *νσιέπρι*) have genus names that are connected to their physical properties. *Δαλερσασί* gets its name from the misperception that its gills are breasts. Three different genres of tetras are classified as one fish (i.e., *νσιέπρι*) because of their accessibility for a quick meal. They are probably the most common source of fish protein for the Dwang. The people also knew that they are the main source of food for other fish in the river. The name for the genus of a third fish, *κατσαπέε*, is not based on a physical attribute. However, specific species within the genus are identified based on the color of their tails, such as *καδυπα κόκω* ‘red tail’. Although the name *κακπάήκπάή* is also not based on a physical attribute, the fish has a secondary name based on its use by men to punish wives with whom they have had disagreements, which thereby leads to the resolution of marital conflicts. The names *τζφωιρε* and *αμπυσου* are also not based on physical attributes. However, these fish played important medicinal and customary roles in the lives of the Dwang. The naming of the fish throws light on the semantics of noun classes. One woman I interviewed told me in Akan, *adwene biá wobehu se yefre no kákáká no, nketenkete nono* ‘any fish that is called *ka-* is tiny’. The *ka-* diminutive seems to go back to Niger-Congo (Felix Ameka, personal communication). This is not the case for *τζφωιρε* ‘frank fish’.

It is not only the *kese* fishing practice that has disappeared. Much of the medicinal and customary uses described above have also almost died completely. Furthermore, many young people do not know the names of the fish. Eberhardt et al. (2019) describe the language as vigorous because parents use it to communicate with their children. However, the influence of Akan, the dominant regional language, is not only evident on the language of the young ones but of the adults as well, in the form of codeswitching, borrowing and calquing. There are many

instances where Mr. D had to check Nana KT because he used Akan instead of Dwang. For instance, when Naka KT says *atɛtɛ́* ‘mud’ in (12d), Mr D prompts him till he uses the Dwang word in (12h). When it comes to the discussion of the electric catfish, he gets stuck because he could not say ‘give electric shock’ in Dwang, and Mr D had to tell him in (18u).

Abbreviations

1	1st	INTERJ	Interjection
2	2nd	NEG	Negative
3	3rd	PERF	Perfective, Plural
AM	Agreement Marker	PROG	Progressive
CL	Class (Pronouns)	Q	Question
CM	Class Marker	RED	Reduplication
CONJ	Conjunction	REL	Relativizer
DEF	Definite	SG	Singular
DEM	Demonstrative	TOP	Topic
FOC	Focus	TP	Terminal Particle
FUT	Future	VEN	Venitive
IND	Independent		

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