

LESSON I

1. The definite article

There are two forms of the definite article in Ewe: *lá* and *-á*. Both forms are placed in the sentence after the noun being determined. The form *lá* stands always as a separate word, but the *-á* form is suffixed to the noun it determines. There is a tendency for the suffix *-á* to become tonally assimilated to the tone of the preceding vowel, i.e. after a low tone, it becomes low:

atí <u>lá</u>	atí <u>á</u>	‘ <u>the</u> tree’
xɔ́ <u>lá</u>	xɔ́ <u>á</u>	‘ <u>the</u> house/building’

Both forms may be used freely with nouns in the Singular. The definite article is also used with nouns in the Plural (see Lesson III).

2. The predication of qualities: stative verbs

The predication of qualities in Ewe is, in most cases, not performed by adjectives (for these, see Lesson IX) but by verbs expressing a quality or state. Verbs of this kind are called stative verbs. Like all verbs in Ewe, stative verbs follow their subject:

atí lá <u>kɔ́</u>	or	atí <u>á</u> <u>kɔ́</u>	‘the tree <u>is tall</u> ’
mɔ́ lá <u>didi</u>	or	mɔ́ <u>á</u> <u>didi</u>	‘the way <u>is long</u> ’

Vocabulary

didi	to be long
lolo	to be big/large/fat
kɔ́	to be tall/high
kpui	to be short/low (in height, length, or time)
sě	to be strong/hard/difficult
bɔbɔ	to be soft/low/easy
fã	to be cold/cool

tri	to be thick
xɔ dzo	to be hot (“to receive fire”)
sɔgbɔ	to be enough/many
keke	to be broad/wide
nyɔ	to be good/beautiful/nice
sɔe	to be little/small/few
xǎxá	to be narrow
xáxé	narrow
gblě	to be bad/wrong/spoiled
atí	tree, wood
náke	firewood
tsi	water
agble	farm
ga	metal, money
ame	person
fésre	window
mó	way, road, path
xɔ	house, building
táflo	board
yé	chalk, white clay
akɔɖú	banana
kpé	stone, rock
adidó	baobab
ʋɔtrú	door
kplɔ̃	table
ablegɔ	chair
agbalě	book, paper, letter
zikpui	stool
ě	yes
ao, o	no
mé- ... o	not
xeví	bird

Exercise I-1: Read

1. Atí lá kó.
2. Mǎ́a didi.
3. Agbleá lolo.
4. Tsi lá fá.
5. Ga lá xɔ dzo.
6. Amea sɛ́.
7. Fésrea keke.
8. Mǎ́ lá xáxé.
9. Xevíla nyó.
10. Akɔ́dúá bɔbɔ.
11. Ame lá kpui.
12. Xɔ lá kó.
13. Ʋotrúá keke.
14. Kpé lá sɛ́.
15. Adidóá tri.
16. Nákea sɔgbɔ.
17. Táflɔa keke.
18. Yé lá bɔbɔ.
19. Kplɔ́ lá kpui.
20. Ablegó lá gblé.
21. Zikpui lá sɔe.

Exercise I-2: Translate into Ewe

1. The tree is tall.
2. The way is long.
3. The farm is big.
4. The water is cold.
5. The metal is hot.
6. The person is strong.
7. The window is broad.
8. The way is narrow.
9. The bird is beautiful.
10. The banana is soft.

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11. The person is short.
 12. The house is high.
 13. The door is broad.
 14. The stone is hard.
 15. The baobab is thick.
 16. The firewood is enough.
 17. The board is broad.
 18. The chalk is soft.
 19. The table is low.
 20. The chair is spoiled.
 21. The stool is small.

3. How to ask questions

A simple way of asking questions in Ewe is by ending your sentence with a low-toned suffix *-a*: e.g.:

Atí lá kóá?	‘Is the tree tall?’
Móá didia?	‘Is the way long?’

Exercise I-3: Questions and answers

Using the above pattern, change all the sentences in Exercise I-1 into questions, and try to give answers in Ewe as follows:

Atí lá kóá?	Ẽ, atí lá kó.	
‘Is the tree tall?’	‘Yes, the tree is tall.’	
Agblea loloa?	Ẽ, agblea lolo.	
‘Is the farm big?’	‘Yes, the farm is big.’	... and so on.

Exercise I-4: Translate into Ewe

1. Is the tree tall? Yes, the tree is tall.
2. Is the way long? Yes, the way is long.
3. Is the farm big? Yes, the farm is big.

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4. Is the water cold? Yes, the water is cold.
 5. Is the metal hot? Yes, the metal is hot.
 6. Is the person short? Yes, the person is short.
 7. Is the window wide? Yes, the window is wide.
 8. Is the banana soft? Yes, the banana is soft.
 9. Is the baobab thick? Yes, the baobab is thick.
 10. Is the table low? Yes, the table is low.
 11. Is the person short? Yes, the person is short.
 12. Is the stone hard? Yes, the stone is hard.
 13. Is the stool small? Yes, the stool is small.

4. How to express negation

Negation is expressed in Ewe by the phrase *mé- ... o* ‘not’.

The first part *mé-* is prefixed to the verb, and the particle *o* comes at the end of the sentence.¹

Example:

Adidóá <u>métri</u> <u>o</u>.	‘The baobab is <u>not</u> thick.’
Agbalẽ lá <u>ményó</u> <u>o</u>.	‘The book is <u>not</u> good.’

Exercise I-5: Read

1. Xɔ lá mékɔ o.
 2. Zea mélolo o.
 3. Gasó lá mésé o.
 4. Abatía mékeke o.
 5. Avɔa métri o.
 6. Akɔɖú lá mébɔɔ o.
 7. Kpé lá mésé o.
 8. Ame lá mékpui o.
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¹ In Mr. Kumah’s language courses, the participants regularly forgot the sentence-final particle *o* when forming negations, especially in longer sentences. In these cases, Mr. Kumah used to say: “You still have something in your pocket!”

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9. Ʋotrúá mékó o.
 10. Náke lá mésɔgbɔ o.
 11. Kplɔ́ lá mékeke o.
 12. Glia métri o.
 13. Agble lá mélolo o.
 14. Ablegó lá mégblé o.
 15. Kétéke lá médidi o.
 16. Ɖeví lá mésé o.
 17. Avɔa mékeke o.

Vocabulary

gasó	bicycle (“metal horse”)
ɖeví	child
avɔ	cloth, material
agbă	plate
kétéke	train
abatí	bed
zě	pot
gazé	metal pot
gli	wall

Exercise I-6: Translate into Ewe

1. The house is not high.
2. The pot is not big.
3. The bicycle is not strong.
4. The bed is not broad.
5. The cloth is not thick.
6. The banana is not soft.
7. The stone is not hard.
8. The person is not short.

9. The door is not high.
10. The firewood is not enough.
11. The table is not broad.
12. The person is not thick.
13. The farm is not big.
14. The chair is not spoiled.
15. The train is not long.
16. The child is not strong.
17. The cloth is not wide.
18. The plate is not good.
19. The wall is not thick.