Classification of Abesabesi

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Abstract.

Àbèsàbèsì is the name of the language known in literature as Akpes. The language is spoken in nine communities. The communities are: Ìbaràm(ù), Ìyànì, Èkiròmì (Ìkáràm(ù), Àsẹ, Àkpès, Gèdègédé, Èṣùkù, Dája, Ìlúdọtun. Àbèsàbèsì linguistic communities are bilingual. Agoyi 2008 says Àbèsàbèsì has four dialects: Èkiròmì (spoken in Ìkáràmù and Àsẹ̀), Akpes (spoken in Àkùnù and Ìlúdọtun in Àjọwá), Ìluẹnì (spoken in Ìbaràm(ù), Ìyànì, Gèdègédé) and Èṣùkù spoken in Èṣùkù, Dája). Akpes is classified as a separate branch of the Niger-Congo family. Agoyi (1998, 2001) argues that Akpes (Ekiromi) be reclassified as Edoid. The reasons for her proposal are based on the inflection for number, as well as Lexico-statistics of word lists of about 66 basic items. Agoyi (2008) shows that Akpes and Èkiròmì, two Àbèsàbèsì languages, attest {ATR+ROUND} harmony which is not a common linguistic feature in Africa; nonetheless, there is a striking similarity in the [ATR] and [LOW] vowel harmony that Ilueni one of the Abesabèsi language lects, attests with the {ATR}, [LOW] harmony found in Okpe Pulleyblank (1986). It is argued that [ATR+ROUND] drives [LOW] vowel Harmony in Ọṣùgù, another Àbèsàbèsì lect. The phenomenon can be traced to the [LOW] vowel feature inherent in the proto Language. Gerunds in all Àbèsàbèsì lects manifests down step which is similar to Degema tone system (Elugbe 2011:11), The lects also attests the lost of lexical tone on the verbs. Elugbe 2011:12 refers to such phenomenon as an Edoid innovation.

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