

Comparative Akedoid and West Benue-Congo

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For a long time, the received classification of Kwa and Benue-Congo was that of Greenberg 1963, revised in 1966. Greenberg's Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo Phylum extended from the Ivory Coast in the West to the Benue and Cross River valleys in south-eastern Nigeria and ended in the Niger Delta in the south of the country. Greenberg numbered his groups of Kwa languages a-h, with c-h in Nigeria. Later, Greenberg's group 'h. Ijaw [= Ijo – BE]' was removed, following Bennett and Sterk 1977. Neither Greenberg nor Bennett and Sterk knew about the small languages some 80 miles (about 120 Kilometres) southwest of the Niger-Benue Confluence at Lokoja. The discovery of these small languages in the hilly Akoko country in northern Edo State and north-eastern Ondo State has thrown up additional issues of classification in West Benue-Congo (WBC). The small languages involved are:

--Arigidi, Erushu, etc., belonging to the Akokoid Cluster;

-- Ahan-Ayere, now christened 'Ahanoid';

--Akpes and AIKA, now inside Akedoid; and

--Oko-Osanyin, spoken in the same area but politically in Kogi State, and now called Okoid.

What is currently called West Benue-Congo is the same as the eastern part of Greenberg's Kwa without Ijo. All the languages in this putative, probably geographic, nomenclature are in Nigeria – with the exception of the cross-border and discontinuous parts of Yoruba in the Republics of Benin and Togo.

The increase in the amount and quality of data now available has focused some attention on what is the internal classification of WBC. In this regard, it has come to light that Akpes and Ikaan (earlier wrongly called Ukaan), are Edoid's closest relatives – a claim first made by Agoyi (1997). Unlike Agoyi, who claims that they are two additional arms of the Edoid family tree, I have found linguistic evidence to the effect that Akpes and Ikaan are indeed Edoid's closest relatives, but are two co-ordinate arms with Edoid on an Akedoid branch within West Benue-Congo. Ikaan is in fact a dialect of AIKA, which is an acronym for Ayanran, Ishe, Kakuma, Auga, where different dialects of the same language are spoken. The last, Ayanran, is in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of Edo State. The first three are in Akoko-Ondo, Ondo State.

I will provide supporting evidence from regular sound correspondences, Akedoid-specific innovations in sound change (including tone), and a very small amount of possible Akedoid-specific lexical change for my Akedoid hypothesis. In this abstract, I give some insight into the nature of the evidence in support of Akedoid as a single branch of WBC in which the languages are more related to each other than to any others within WBC. The task is made difficult by the amount and divergence of the classifications that have been proposed for Akpes and AIKA.

From the early 1970s to the end of the last millennium, Akpes and, especially, AIKA, were regarded as puzzling and with unclear linguistic affiliations (Jungrathmayr 1973). For reasons such as Jungrathmayr's 1973 observations, linguists and those who use the results of linguistic

studies – archaeologists, ethnologists, historians, etc. – began to identify most of the languages of the area as ‘remnant’ (Ballard 1971), ‘unclassified’ (Hoffmann 1974), and ‘isolate’ (Blench 1989).

In the 1990s, scholars began boldly suggesting affiliations for AIKA, using data mainly from the Ikaan (so-called Ukaan) dialect. The extent of the divergence in opinion is summarised by the following:

- Williamson 1989: The little that is known about them indicates they are quite distinct both from each other and from the larger groups surrounding them.
- Ohiri-Aniche 1994 (published in 1999): AIKA is more probably East Benue-Congo.
- Blench (1994): The Ukaan language: Bantu in south-western Nigeria?
- Connell (1998): ‘Ukaan may more appropriately belong with Cross River. Further needs to be done to test this hypothesis’ (p. 23).
- Agoyi (1997): Akpes and AIKA are part of Edoid, being two additional coordinate branches on the Edoid family tree.

After dismissing the cases put forward by Blench, Connell, and Ohiri-Aniche in the above-mentioned sources, I will present evidence to support my own case, which is based on phonetic character in general but also tied to certain lexical items in Akedoid. For example, there is a set of lexical items from which I expect an Akedoid language to have a fair share with some given phonetic characteristics. The list includes *buy, cry/weep, doctor, earth/ground, eat, eye, fall, fight/war, hand, market, moon, mould, oil, plant, roast, and tooth, ask, sleep, etc.*

Innovations in regular sound change, observable from regular sound correspondences, offer probably the best and easiest way to confirm a classification. In the case of Akedoid, the stem vowel for the item ‘to weave/thatch (roof)’ is ɔ in all three branches. The consonant in the stems for ‘market’, ‘egg’ and ‘plant/sow’ is k . As for ‘fight, go to war’ the consonant is k in Akpes and in AIKA, but is $*kh$, a voiceless lenis velar plosive, in Proto-Edoid and in some of its daughters. In ‘egg’ Proto-Akedoid (PAKE) has η as a $-C_2-$, a second consonant in the stem. It is so reflected only in Akpes while it is reflected as nasalisation in AIKA and Edoid. An oral version of this situation is to be found in ‘ear’. There I reconstructed PE $*ghu -ch\text{ɔ}G\text{I}$ (plural $a-$). We now find that the AIKA word for ‘ear’ is $\text{ù} -s\grave{g}\grave{u}$ ($\grave{a}-$) in Ikaan; $\text{ù} -r\grave{g}\grave{u}$ ($\grave{a}-$) in Iigau; $\text{ù} -r\grave{g}\grave{u}$ ($-$) in Uyegbe (Ishe) and $\text{ù} -s\grave{g}\grave{u}$ ($\grave{a}-$) (Ayanran). This line of investigation is fully, in Iyinno presented in the paper.

In verb morphology, the gerund morpheme has a tonal structure that is peculiar to Akedoid: It is $*\acute{U} \dots \acute{'} (\text{A})m\grave{h}\text{I}$, which can be expanded as $*\acute{u} \dots \grave{'} (\text{ə})m\grave{h}\text{i}$, used with stems with [+ATR] vowels, and $\acute{u} \dots \grave{'} (\grave{a})m\grave{h}\text{i}$, used with stems with [-ATR] vowels. In AIKA, this is reflected as $\acute{U} \dots \acute{'}$, which is expanded on ATR basis as $\acute{u} \dots \acute{'}$ and $\acute{u} \dots \acute{'}$. In Akpes, it would appear to be $\acute{'} \dots \acute{'}$, purely tonal and therefore what I call a tomorph. In both AIKA and Akpes, the stem tone, being a tomorph (a grammatical tone), dominates any lexical tones of the verb stem. For example, :

AIKA-Ikaan: $w\grave{a}\grave{g}$ ‘come’ gerund: $\acute{u}w\grave{a}\acute{g}$ ‘coming’

Akpes: $b\acute{a}$ ‘come’ gerund: $b\hat{a}$ ‘coming’

In both languages, the gerund tomorph dominates the lexical tone of the verb stem. Elsewhere in West Benue-Congo, this is normally formed by partial reduplication of the verb stem as in

Yoruba wá ‘come’, wíwá ‘coming’. Atoyebi (2010: 76) discusses this under ‘gerundives’ with examples including Oko sú ‘to marry’ ò-sí-su ‘(the) marrying’ and ná ‘to collect’ ǎ-né-na ‘(the) collecting’.

Although I have not done a lexicostatic study, I find it interesting that Ohiri-Aniche (1999) actually said that AIKA apart, the ‘closest relative of’ Akpes is Edoid.

Other areas that have been examined in search of supporting evidence include syllable structure and noun classification. Syllable structure is basically a typological feature. But there is no doubt that the existence of closed syllables has played a part in dressing Akpes and AIKA in an aura of exoticism and possible distance from surrounding languages. Two points are worth noting here. First is that it is fairly easy to explain the source of closed syllables in Akpes and AIKA. Second is that the situation in Akpes and AIKA has happened in Degema which, being in the Niger Delta, is the farthest Edoid language from Akpes and AIKA. As with Akpes and AIKA, it is possible in Degema to recover the lost vowel. A general rule is that a final /i/ or /u/ is dropped if it has the same tone as the first stem syllable or bears a low tone. Some examples are given in (1) below.

1) Examples of syllable-final consonants by loss of final vowel

in CVCV stems

Degema (Delta Edoid) Akpes AIKA-Ikaan

head ù -tóm ì -tʃùm(ù) ì -tʃúm

Tail ù -túm - ò -rùm

Oil è -bír m -bíṛ ù- bíṛ

ébití (Ibaram) ù -bíṛ),(Iyinno

Animal è -nám é -nám è -nóm

fight (v.) kɔn kɔn kɔn

Another point about stem-final consonants is that some of them probably reflect earlier compounds. If two VCV nouns or a CV verb and a VCV noun were to form a compound, we could have (2).

2) The development of word-final consonants

a. VCV + VCV

→ VC + VCV (by loss of the V before the boundary)

→ VCVC (by loss of the final vowel)

b. CV + VCV

→ C + VCV

→ CVC

Blench's reference to AIKA as 'Bantu in Southwest Nigeria' was based on a purely typological use of noun classification in Ikaan. It is puzzling that he mentioned Oloma in the paper but did not see that that Northwestern Edoid (NWE) language has a more Bantu-like agreement system in its noun class system. Secondly, AIKA's agreement is purely phonologically determined whereas Oloma has grammatically-determined agreement. For example, both 'tooth' and 'egg' have the singular prefix *lhe-* in Oloma. In the plural, they have different pairings and attract different agreement forms. Knowing the singular prefix of a noun does not tell us what its plural prefix and its agreement form would be.

There are also words which more or less stand alone but reflect identical prefixes or pairings across Akedoid. For example, the word 'name' is *ì-ní* in Degema as well as in AIKA. In both languages, the plural prefix is *à-*. Similar a-plural words referring to 'parts of the body' are clearly descended from Proto-Benue-Congo. They include 'eye', 'ear', 'arm/hand', 'leg', etc.

The current composition of West Benue-Congo is as follows:

- Yoruboid (Yoruba, Isekiri, Igala),
- Akokoid (the Owon dialects of Oke-Agbe, Arigidi, Erushu, Uro, Igashi, Oyin),
- Ahanoid (Ahan (Omuo)-Uwu (Ayere)),
- Akedoid (Edoid plus Akpes dialect cluster and the AIKA dialects),
- Okoid (Oko of Ogori and Osanyin of Magongo),
- Nupoid (Nupe, Gwari, Gade),
- Ebiroid (Ebira Kwoto, Okene, Etuno of Igarra in Edo State),
- Igbooid (Igbo and closely related languages/dialects), and
- Idomoid (Yatye, Idoma, Igede, Yala) Okoid (Ogori).

In the area of lexical innovations, I have found that the item 'sleep' has a bilabial nasal/implosive/approximant only in Akedoid. Where it does not have a nasal, it has a voiced bilabial implosive **ɓ** or approximant, *v*. In the other arms of WBC, the common stem starts with

an alveolar fricative or rhotic (r-sound). Thus Igbo ru ‘sleep v.’ uran/ula ‘sleep n.’, Yoruba sun ‘sleep v.’, orun ‘sleep n.’, Ebira šu ‘sleep v.’, ārā ‘sleep n.’, etc.

(3) ‘sleep’ in Akedoid [Note: [m] was the nasal allophone of /bh/ in PAKE.]

*PAKE PE DE SWE NCE NWE Akpes AIKA-Ikaan

*bh *bh ʋ ʋ β/m m m

PAKE PE Osse (NWE) Akpes AIKA

sleep *ʋ-bhŋichŋɪ *ʋ -bhiNchiN ì -βĩɛ̃ (Ehueun) ì -mòs ʋ -mɔ

to sleep *bhŋichŋɪ *bhi(N)chiN biĩɛ̃ miʃ̃ (kùrà)

The item ‘father’ had at least two stems in Akedoid: *ɔ-ci and *i- tha. The evidence from Oloma NWE and AIKA suggests that one stood for father (probably *ɔ-ci) while the other stood for ‘an old or a very old man’. Elsewhere the stem consonant is voice – ada/nda in Ebira, nna in Igbo, etc.

My position is that with the weight of evidence in support of an Akedoid hypothesis in West Benue-Congo, the onus is on any opposition to prove or demonstrate otherwise. The existing fancy statements on the status of AIKA (the so-called Ukaan) were never supported with any systematic comparative work.

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