

The Arigidi Cluster: An Internal Re-Classification

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Introduction

There have been a lot of controversies regarding the actual classification of the group tagged Arigidi Cluster Ethnologue (2009). This group which comprises of small languages referred to as speech forms are spoken in small towns in the North-western part of Àkókó region in the present Òndó state in the South-western part of Nigeria. Following Ethnologue (2009), the group consists of the following eleven speech forms: Arigidi, Erúsú, Oyín, Ìgáşí and Eşé. Urò and Òjò spoken in Àjowá town and the following ones; Àfá, Ìdò, Àjè and Ògè spoken in Òkèàgbè town. Several writers and scholars have attempted to group these speech forms into language sub-family without success due to the inadequate knowledge of their structure. This study attempts to re-examine these speech forms especially their relationship to Yorùbá language in order to correctly classify them into language subfamily. It is

important to note that Yorùbá a Benue-Congo language is the lingua franca in the South-Western part of Nigeria and Àkókó region where the speech forms are spoken. The speakers of these speech forms understand and speak Yorùbá perfectly well. In fact, they communicate in Yorùbá since the speech forms cannot be claimed to be one hundred percent mutually intelligible. According to Crozier and Blench (1992), Àkóko region is home to five different language families, this is shown in table 1 below:

Table 1

Benue-Congo Languages spoken in Àkókó land according to Group

Language groups Varieties in Àkókó land;

The Yoruboid: Ọkà, Ìkàré, Ìbòròpa, Àkùngbá, Ìfira, Ọbà, Ikún Şúpàrè, Ọgbàgì Ìrùn, Àfín

Arigidi Cluster: Arigidi Erúşú Oyín, Ígáşí Eşé, Urò, Ọjò, Áfá, Ọgè, Ìdò, Àjè

Akpes Cluster: Àkpes (Àkùnnù), Àsè, Dája, Èşùkù, Gèdègèdè, Ìbaràmù Ìkàràrà, Ìyàni

Ukan: (Ikani) Àúga (Ligau) Işè, (Ishieu), Ìkákùmò-Àkókó (Ukaan) Anyánrán (Iyinno)

(spoken in Èdo state)

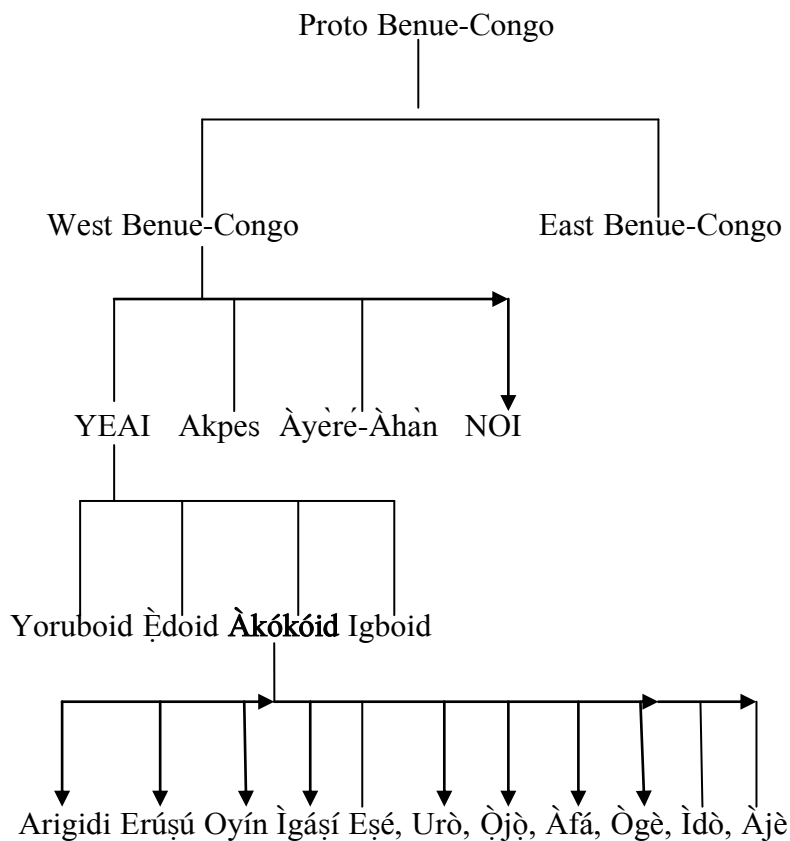
Èdoid: Ehueun (Èkpìnmi), Ùhàmì, (Ìṣùà), Ukue

The above table revealed that the Akókó region is linguistically heterogeneous and this is one of the reasons why it has always presented a challenge to linguists. However, while there is no controversy on the sub-classification of the other sub-groups in Akoko land (Yoruboid, Apkes Cluster, Ukan and Èdoid), the Arigidi Cluster sub-group has been riddled with controversies as no consensus name has been unanimously adopted by linguists.

The first attempt was by Greenberg (1955) who put the speech forms under Yorùbá which was placed directly under the Niger-Congo family. The work was significant because it was the first major work to recognize the speech forms as a group. It also served as the basis on which other researchers built their later classification. Bennet and Stark (1977) referred to them as *Yoruboid*. Capo (1989) suggested the name Amgbé, Hoffman (1994) called them *Northern Àkókó Cluster*, Ohiri-Anichie (2006) refers to them as *Akokoid* while Ethnologue (2009) proposed the name Arigidi Cluster. Awóbùlúyì (personal communication) said they are dialects of a language yet to be determined. Thus, the three questions begging for answers in terms of classification of these speech forms are;

- (1) What is the true status of these speech forms?
- (2) What is the appropriate name for this sub-group?
- (3) Under which language family sub-group do they really fall?

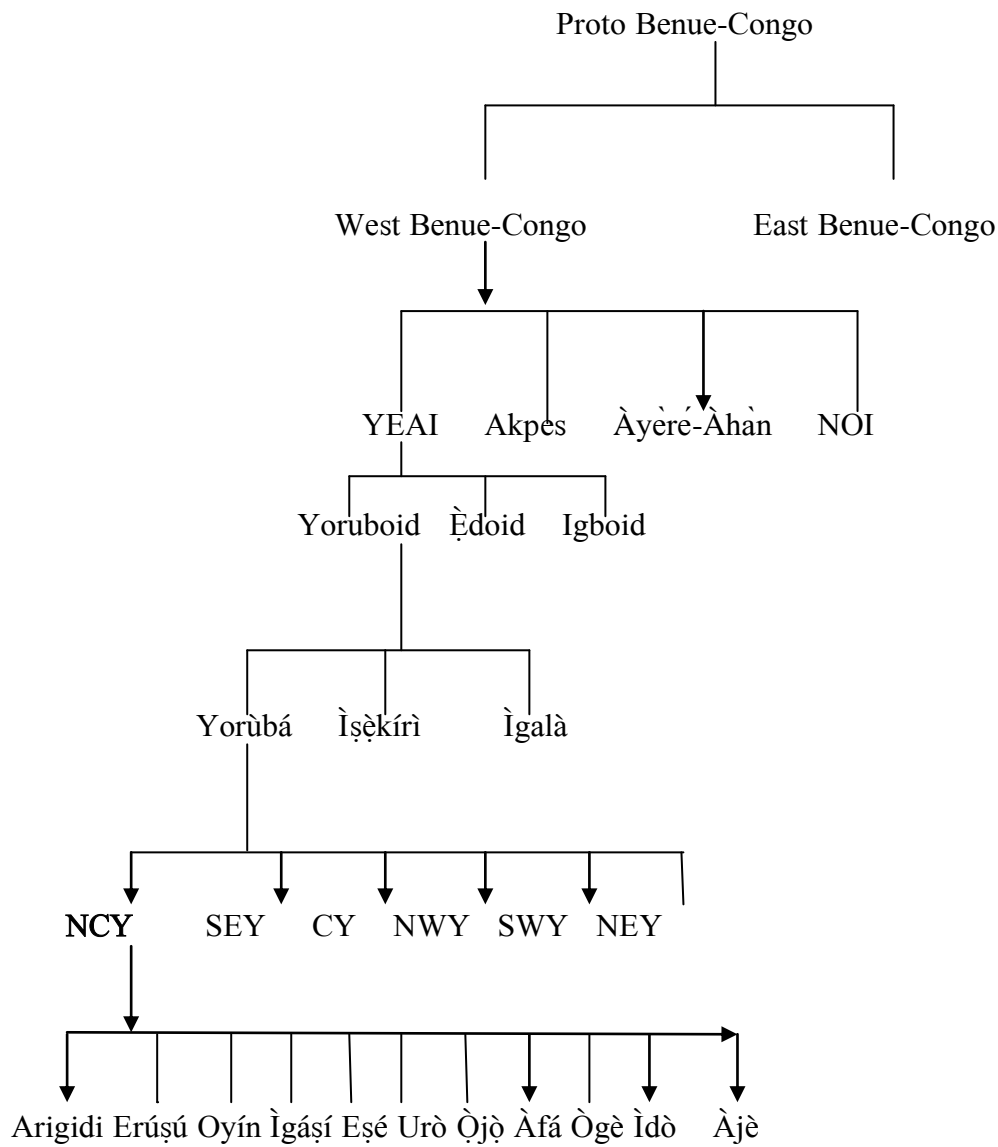
This study seeks to provide answers to these questions by addressing issues relating to language classification with lexical and structural evidence from the speech forms. The language family tree below shows the place of this speech forms as classified by Williamson and Blench (2005) which is the same position adopted by Ethnologue (2009):



Based on the unarguable fact that there is no consensus yet on the actual name of the language sub-family to which these speech forms belong, this paper adopts the typological method by examining the lexical and structural patterns of all the speech forms which constitute the group as claimed by Ethnologue (2009) in order to have significant and veracious facts about them. From the findings, three very important facts were discovered. One, it was discovered that Arigidi and Erúşú are more closely related than the other speech forms in terms of lexical, structural as well as mutual intelligibility. Two, Arigidi and Erúşú also share a lot of lexical, grammatical and structural similarities with the standard Yorùbá as well as some of its structurally diverse dialects. Historically, from oral history gathered from elders of the towns where the speech forms are spoken, they all claim to have migrated from Ilé-Ifè the town regarded as the cradle of the Yorùbá race. This is one factor which has not really been explored in the attempt to classify this group into language family. Three, it is obvious that Eşé does not share any visible similarity with the other ten speech forms structurally and grammatically. In line with these findings, this paper suggests that Eşé should be excluded as a member of the group and the others should be considered

as Yorùbá dialects and thus suggests another name for the group which is **North Central**

Yorùbá Dialects. The proposed language family tree is presented below:



(Adapted from Oshodi 2012; a modification of Awobuluyi 1998)

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