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**NIGER-CONGO LANGUAGES IN AKWA IBOM STATE: A COMPARISON AND
RECONSTRUCTION OF PROTO-FORMS.**

ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the comparison and analysis of speech forms of Lower-Cross languages of the Niger-Congo language phylum. The speech forms are all spoken in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. It is undertaken with the objective of discovering their major types of systematic sound correspondences and the confirmation of their common origin using both the majority and natural principles of comparative reconstruction. A detailed analysis of cognate forms from eleven speech communities – Ibibio, Anaañ, Ọrọ, Ọkọbọ, Ekịd, Ibenọ, Itu Mbo Usọ, Iko, Obolo, Efi̋k, Ejai, and Eñwañ Uda was undertaken to discover the reflexes and reconstruct proto-forms, using the reflexes to draw a family connection tree illustrating how closely or distantly related the languages are to each other. The methodology is that of comparative reconstruction using the Ibadan 400 Wordlist. Lexicostatistics was also used to draw conclusions about the genetic relationships of these languages as depicted in the family tree. Ethno-historical facts were corroborated by linguistic evidence about the genetic relationships and common origin of the speakers of these speech forms. Feedback from the research reveals that Obolo was the first to break away and it is the most divergent, while Ibibio, Anaañ, and Itu Mbo Uso display a high degree of diachronic relatedness. Since the speakers of all other speech forms have a good mutual intelligibility and share with Ibibio common characteristics linguistically, culturally and traditionally, it is proposed that the speech forms be called ‘Ibibiod’ to re-echo Essien’s (1990) proposal. Minor differences in the linguistic and cultural tendencies should not be magnified but accepted as natural tendencies in order to aid unity in diversity