

Abstract

Reconstruction of the Ghana-Togo-Mountain languages: a revision

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This essay is essentially a revision of Heine (1968). In view of the reservations expressed by several scholars on the validity of aspects of his work, the approach is deliberately conservative. Heine's data have been drastically pruned in an attempt to ensure the acceptability of the proposed correspondence series. At the same time, data from more recent work on the GTM languages have been added, and cognates in other Kwa languages taken into consideration. Heine's primary classification into NA and KA branches is accepted. The possibility that proto-Ga-Dangme belongs within GTM is also considered.

Proto-NA

NA includes seven languages: Basila, Gidere (Adele), Buem (Lefana and Lelemi), Siwu (Akpafu and Lolobi), Sɛlɛɛ (Santrokofi), Sɛkpeɛ (Likpe) and Ikpana (Logba).

Tones: High tones often correspond across languages, especially in nouns. The data and the state of reconstruction within the group are not such as to allow reconstruction of non-high tone(s), although proto-NA probably had a lexical contrast between high and non-high syllable tones, and no downdrift.

Vowels: The following change rules account for a reconstructed eight vowel system, and leave the question of a ten vowel system open.

1. *a, *i, *u are retained unchanged.
2. *e was lowered to *ɔ in Anii, raised to *i in Siwu, retained unchanged elsewhere.
3. *o lost ATR to become /ɔ/ in Buem, but lost rounding (or +back) in Sekpele to become /ə/, and was retained unchanged elsewhere.
4. *ɛ was generally retained, but /ɛ/, /e/ and /ə/ alternate under as yet undefined conditions.
5. *ɔ was raised to /u/ in Anii, and retained unchanged elsewhere.
6. The occurrence of /i/ in some languages apparently corresponding to /e/ in others suggests *i.
7. Similarly, apparent correspondences between /ɔ/ and /u/ suggest *u.

Consonants:

We propose a proto-NA consonant system that differs in several respects from Heine's proto-GTM, and what he implies about proto-NA. In particular, we reconstruct *d and *s.

Proto KA

Tones: High tones correspond on roots, but (as in NA) the data available do not provide correspondence series for mid and low tones.

Vowels: Proto-KA must have had nine or ten oral vowel phonemes.

Consonants

The proto-KA consonant system appears to have been different from that of NA in several respects. To account for the data we propose *p and a series of three voiceless implosives, but no *d̥ or *f, and a fricative *c as well as an affricate *ts.

Proto-GTM: Consonant correspondences NA : KA

The consonant system reconstructed for proto-GTM is:

*b	*d̥				
*p	*t̥	*t	*k	*kp	
*β		*f	*k̥	*k̥p	
*f		*s			
			*y	*w	
*m		*n			

In proto-NA the contrast ± implosive was lost, so that implosives merged with the non-implosive equivalents. Also, dental and alveolar voiceless stops merged as the alveolar (if they were not already allophones).

GTM *β > NA *p; GTM *f, *t̥ > NA *t; GTM *k̥ > NA *k; GTM *k̥p > NA *kp.

One shift defines proto-KA, namely lateralization of the voiced dental stop, which thus became a continuant:

GTM *d̥ > KA *l.

Reference:

Heine, Bernd, 1968. *Die Verbreitung und Gliederung der Togorestsprachen*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer.