

Towards a reconstruction of the Proto-Ekoid phonological system

Galina Sim

Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences

sim.ge@yandex.ru

In my talk I am going to present the current results of ongoing work on the reconstruction of the Proto-Ekoid phonological system.

The Ekoid languages is a group of closely related idioms (a glottochronological time-depth of ~2000 years) spread in southeastern Nigeria and in the adjacent areas of Cameroon. Commonly they are attributed to the South-Bantoid branch of the Bantoid languages within Benue-Congo, the Niger-Congo phylum.

At the present time the main materials juxtaposing different idioms are represented by lists of words in phonetic transcription from the latter half of the 20th – early 21th centuries.

On the basis of the available materials (wordlists in [Crabb 1965], [Yoder 2008], [Blench 2014] and examples from [Watters 1981, 2001], [Sibomana 1986], [Bamgbose 1967], etc.) an etymological database was compiled by means of the [Starling software](#). It includes 19 Ekoid variants (maximal subdivision) and Mbe, the nearest language to the Ekoid group proper. The main database is also accompanied by supplementary databases containing the earlier data ([Clarke 1848], [Johnston 1919-22], [Mansfeld 1908]).

Applying the comparative method, the regular sound correspondences between idioms were established separately for the segmental inventory and tones.

Presumably, the Proto-Ekoid language has the following segments:

vowels *i e ε a ɔ o u*

consonants *p b t d/r l ʃ dʒ k g kp gb m n ŋ/n (ŋm) (f) s y w*

and 2 level tones.

Taking into account the common innovations in the idioms it is possible to suggest an internal classification of the group.

References:

- Bamgbose, Ayo, *Notes on the Phonology of Mbe*. // *Journal of West African Languages*, 1967, 4: 5-11.
- Blench, Roger, *Ekoid: Bantoid Languages of the Nigeria-Cameroun Borderland*. Ms, 2014.
- Clarke, John, *Specimens of Dialects: Short Vocabularies of Languages and Notes of Countries and Customs in Africa*. Berwick-upon-Tweed: Daniel Cameron, 1848.
- Crabb, David W., *Ekoid Bantu languages of Ogoja, Eastern Nigeria. Part 1: Introduction, phonology and comparative vocabulary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965.
- Johnston, Sir Harry H., *A Comparative Study of the Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1919-1922.
- Mansfeld, Alfred, *Urwald-Dokumente*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer (Ernst Vohsen), 1908.
- Sibomana, Leo, *An outline of Nkem Language*. // *Afrika und Übersee*, 1986, 69:22, 251-292.

- Watters, John R., A phonology and morphology of Ejagham, with notes on dialect variation [PhD. thesis]. University of California at Los Angeles, 1981.
- Watters, John R., *Some phonological characteristics of Ejagham (Etung), an Ekoid Bantu language of Cameroon and Nigeria.* // Mutaka, Ngessimo M. and Chumbow, Sammy B. (eds.), *Research Mate in African Linguistics: Focus on Cameroon (A Fieldworkers Tool for Deciphering the Stories Cameroonians Languages Have to Tell): in Honor of Professor Larry N. Hyman.* // *Grammatische Analysen Afrikanischer Sprachen* № 17, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2001, 55-78.
- Yoder, Zachariah & Hannelová, Katarína & Otronyi, Linus, *A Sociolinguistic Survey of the Bakor languages of Cross River State, Nigeria.* Ms, 2008.