

DETERMINING THE STATUS OF ỌKỌ WITHIN BENUE-CONGO

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Abstract

Ọkọ within Benue Congo (BC) is examined through pairwise comparisons at inter/intra-group levels using Lexicostatistics and the Comparative Method. Average cognation range among them is twenty-seven percent (27%). Investigation with different wordlists show minimal differences in cognation between two arms revealed as closest: Yoruboid and Ebiroid (Ọkọ/Yoruboid- a. thirty-two percent (32%), b. twenty percent (20%); Ọkọ/Ebiroid a. thirty percent (30%), b. twenty-six percent (26%). Significant difference is observed between Ọkọ and the Akpes and Ukaan cluster (Ikaan, Ishe, Auga, & Ayanran (AIKA)), at eighteen (18%) and seventeen (17%) percent respectively, relative to 27% average with other WBC groups. Innovations present Ọkọ closer to Ebiroid and Yoruboid, but remotely to Edoid, Nupoid, Akpes and Ukaan. Ọkọ's higher cognation figures with geographically distant Yoruboid and Ebiroid than with geographically closer groups (Edoid and Nupoid) cum slight shift in closeness from Yoruboid to Ebiroid observed in tree diagrams by different scholars indicate ongoing convergence in the area. Inferences then are that Ọkọ may not necessarily be coordinate WBC groups which compare at twenty-four percent (24%) - thirty-three (33%), especially as its cognation figures with WBC span between seventeen percent (17%) and thirty-three percent (33%). An intermediate node is proposed to accommodate this range of relatedness. Ọkọ intra-examination proved two dialects, (Ọkọ, Osayen) not three. Ọkọ/Eni (supposed third variety) constitute one variety as cognation is almost one hundred percent (100%). Ọkọ/Osayen - eighty-eight (88%) cognation support two varieties. Geographical proximity and diffusion largely account for status of Ọkọ within BC tree.

Keywords: Ọkọ, Genetic affiliation, Lexicostatistics, Innovation, Diffusion, Benue Congo

Àṣamò

A ẹ̀ ẹ̀fiwe Ọkọ pẹ̀lú àwọn isòrí èdè Benue Congo (BC) tó súnmọ̀ on nípá lílo ogbón iwádíí isàfiwé idàòrò. Ìdà mètádínlógbòn (27%) ní ìjọra tó wà láààrin wòn. Iyàtò isèdà-òrò láààrin isòrí èdè fojúhàn báyii: Yoruboid àti Ebiroid (Ọkọ/Yoruboid- idá mejilélógbòn (32%), idá ogún 20%; Ọkọ/Ebiroid- idá ogbón, idá m̀erindínlógbòn. Iyàtò pàtàkì ló fojú hàn láàrin Ọkọ àti Akpes àti àpapọ̀ Ukaan (Ikaan, Ishe, Auga, & Ayanran èyí tí a túnmò sí (AIKA)), tí Ọkọ ní ìjọra ọ̀rò idá mejidínlógún pẹ̀lú Akpes, idá mètádínlógún pẹ̀lú Ukaan, èyí tó yàtò sí idá mètádínlógbòn tó ní pẹ̀lú isòrí WBC. Iwádíí fí hàn pé Ọkọ súnmọ̀ Ebiroid àti Yoruboid, ó sì takété sí Edoid, Nupoid, Akpes and Ukaan. Ìjọra ọ̀rò Ọkọ pẹ̀lú Yoruboid àti Ebiroid tó jú tí isòrí àwọn èdè agbègbè rè lẹ̀ (Edoid and Nupoid), àti iyàtò diẹ̀ tó wà ní isúnmọ̀ra láti Yoruboid sí Ebiroid gégé bí àwọn onímò ẹ̀ sáfihàn rẹ̀ lórí àwòrán atọ̀ka-igi n sàperẹ̀ pé idàpò kan wà ní agbègbè yí. Ohun àrìdímú ní pé Ọkọ le m̀asẹ̀ é pin mọ̀ isòrí WBC yòókù, tó ní ìjọra-ọ̀rò idá m̀erindínlógún sí idá mètálélógbòn, pàápáá gégé bí ìjọra-ọ̀rò Ọkọ pẹ̀lú WBC ẹ̀ wà láàrin idá mètádínlógún sí idá mètálélógbòn. A dábáá igóríta agbedeméjì láti fáayè gba ìjọra yí. Agbéyèwò Ọkọ fihàn pé ó ní eka èdè méjì pèrè (Ọkọ àti Osayen). Ọkọ/Eni ní ìjọra-ọ̀rò tó tó idá ogórùn-ún (100%). Ọkọ/ Osayen ní idá mejidínlágún-ún (88%) ìjọra ọ̀rò. Ifarakínra èdè agbègbè kó ipa pàtàkì nínú pinpin Ọkọ láààrin BC.

Àwọn kókó ọ̀rò: Ọkọ, Ìsòpò ajemọ̀ orírùn èdè, Ìjọra-ọ̀rò èdè, Ogbón àtínúdá, Ìtánkálè, Benue-Congo

1. Introduction

Òkò language, known in the International Standardization Organisation (ISO 639-3) as oks, and in Glottolog with Glottocode okoe1238 - is spoken at the intersection of three States in Nigeria: Edo, Ondo and Kogi States (see Fig 1 (Red dot Mine)).

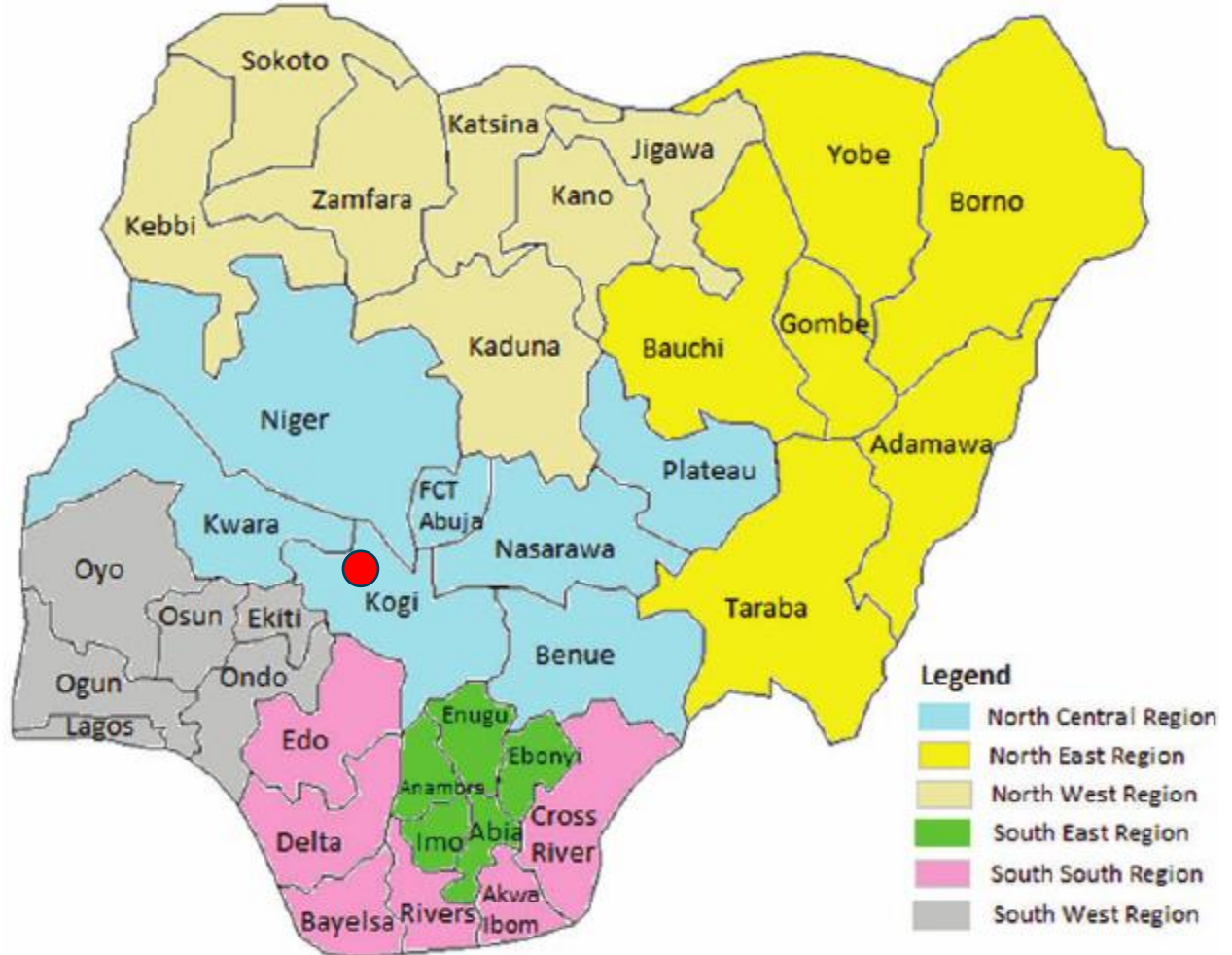


Fig 1. Map of Nigeria showing the States and the Federal Capital Territory (Gayawan et. al 2014:37).(adapted)

According to Òkò-Osayan-Eni Visualisations (Ethnologue, 2023), it is spoken in Akoko Edo Local Government Area (LGA) of Edo State and in Okene LGA/Ogori-Magongo LGA of Kogi State. The Ogori (Òkòrì)/Magongo LGA was carved out of the former Okene LGA in 1996) is situated approximately ‘on the intersecting point of Longitude 6 * 13” E and Latitude 7 * 27” N on the map of Nigeria’ (Atoyebi 2010:2) with the headquarters at Akpafa. Òkò speakers are largely domiciled in the two communities: the Òkòrì and the Magongo communities in Kogi Central which are 15 km south and southwest of Okene respectively. Okene is a major city and the headquarters of Okene LGA which is adjacent to Ogori/Magongo LGA and where the groups of language compared with Òkò are spoken. The Òkòrì and Magongo communities are thus surrounded by different and larger linguistic groups such as Yoruboid, Ebiroid, Edoid and Nupoid.

South West and South East of Òkòrìland are Edoid communities such as Uhami, Okpamheri, Emhalhe, Ososo. Other Edoid communities around Òkòrì and Magongo communities are Uneme, Makeke and Bekunma, Lampese and Ibilò. All these areas are interspersed with Yoruba speaking peoples and a large geographical expanse of Yoruba speaking area is observed further south and

west. Akekoid, Akpes and Ukaan are observed north west of Òkòri and Magongo land. In the Òkòri community, the language is known as Òkò, while in the Magongo community, it is called Ósayen. Non-natives often refer to the language as Ògòrior Ògòri-Magongo and Òkò speakers call themselves Okuro.

According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2006 Census, the population of Òkò speakers is 39,300 (Ethnologue, 2023) whilst Joshua Project (<https://joshuaproject.net/languages/oks>) puts the population at 63,000. The current estimated population is about 60,000 according to the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), which also records the language as vigorous (i.e. in vigorous use among all generations), though unstandardized. The language is classified as Benue Congo (BC), an arm of the Atlantic Congo Division within the Niger Congo language phylum by Williamson (1989) by Blench (2012) in the Atlas of Nigerian Languages and in the Ethnologue (2023). According to Crozier and Blench, its dialects include Òkò, Ósayen, and Eni (Crozier and Blench 1992:71). The language is said to be distantly and equally related to Yoruba, Ebira, Edo, Igbo, and Idoma (Ethnologue, 2023). Although Òkò is spoken in Edo State, (largely in North Western Edo), and is surrounded by several languages, scholars have not classified it as belonging to any of the groups - Edoid, Yoruboid or Nupoid- found in the region. Williamson (1989:270) opines that Òkò and Ukaan/Akpes, have always been in the original homeland or dispersal center of Proto-BC which is situated South West of the Confluence going by the principle of least moves.

Our first two divisions are all tiny languages spoken in a small area south west of the Niger-Benue Confluence. There is no reason to assume that they have moved from anywhere else since the Benue Congo dispersal.

(Williamson (1989: 270)

Lewis (2013:1) noted that

“Indeed, linguistic complexities in North-Western Edo are akin to those of a residual zone theorized by Nichols (1992). Likely, North-Western Edo served as prehistoric refugium, and its geographical layout is germane to linguistic diversity.”

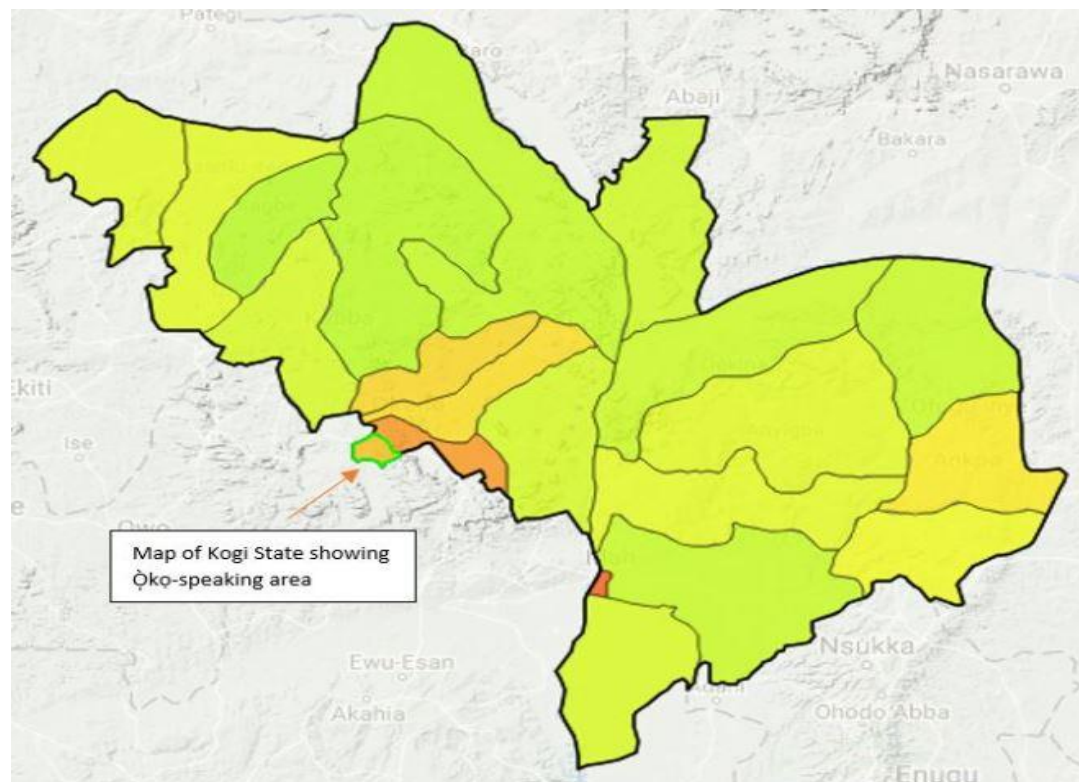
“...the hilly terrain of North-Western Edo with its high density of languages, fits perfectly with prototypical homelands as advanced by several scholars (Elugbe, 1979; Dixon, 1997; Hill, to appear)”. “As a matter of fact, if you drove 41.5km from Igarra to Ososo, you would meet speakers of at least six distinct languages, Etuno (Ebira in Igarra); Enwa; Akuku; Okpamheri; Uneme and Ososo. Many of their villages have physical demarcations none other than a patch of domestic farm between two buildings.”

(Lewis 2013:1)

Legbeti while presenting the subdivisions and Edoid languages, following Elugbe (1989:26), also did not classify Òkò as Edoid. (Legbeti, (2016:5)). Elugbe, writing on Issues in the Classification of WBC, stated that

“The classification of Òkò remains an enigma” which he called, Okoid. Most residents of Ogori and Magongo speak Yoruba and Ebira in addition to their native language. This is one reason why we should be careful how we propose a classification for Okoid. At the moment, proposals vacillate between placing Okoid inside Nupoid and making it a direct descendant of West Benue-Congo, making it coordinate with Nupoid and the others. This particular issue remains open.

Elugbe (2010:5)



Adapted from <https://www.citypopulation.de/php/nigeria-admin.php?adm1id=NGA023>

Fig. 2 Ọkò speaking area of Kogi State

2. Historical background

The more widely accepted lore is that the Ọkuro migrated from Ile-Ife, the ancestral home of the Yoruba. Their departure is linked with a Prince of Ife named Akinbiyi, the last of seven children. He left with his nuclear family and servants about five hundred years ago for an unknown destination though guided by the oracle called *Ifa*. It is said that Akinbiyi left Ile Ife with some royal regalia which are still retained in Ogori, smack of their Kith and Kin affinity with the Yoruba. These include a brass sword, considered relic of marauders campaigns aroused by the Ife deities and initiating relocation of the Okuro disgusted with the then style of governance in the palace after a revolt, old, beaded crowns presented to the descendants of the founders of Ogori – Akinbiyi and Oni – the Owa of Ilesha and possibly alongside the Oni of Ife. Their terminus was called *Ogori* (Ogori) meaning place of prosperity, protection, and wealth. In Yoruba Ogo means ‘glory’ and *ori* means ‘head’ or ‘peak/pinnacle’ It was also known as ‘*Ekoyame*’ meaning ‘this is the place’. Those led by Prince Akinbiyi called the Onu or Uku (Oku?), were first settlers, on the Agada-Hill who later moved to the Omonenyen and Odiobo hills about 300 years ago. They were followed by the Ojogbolos after 100 years. The hills provided protection from external attacks. Stones, big and small served as weapons of war against approaching enemies. Today, Ogoriland is in the valleys or plains (i.e., *Iluteju*) around the three hills because of civilization and absence of communal wars. The open valleys form three quarters: Okesi, Osobane and Eni (Enidede) which serve as entrances and exits to and from the town. The Eni were a later arrival into the Uku group. The various tribal wars fought by the Okuro caused the clans to split into ten sub-clans.

The whole migrant Uku group consist of Adu’bane (Adeloju clan) Okibo (Akinbo clan) Oso’bane (Oso clan), Eni’ro (Eni-dede clan) Arigo, Ogbegbe, Oturu, Okpowo, Obere, clans which convened at Ogori at different times.

The culture of the Okuro is much like that of the Yoruba and over ninety percent (90%) of the Okuro speak Yoruba yet not having lived in the Yoruba lands. Children also bear Yoruba

names such as Adewole, Akinbiyi, Adekunle, alongside Ogori names, a reflection of their Yoruba ancestry.

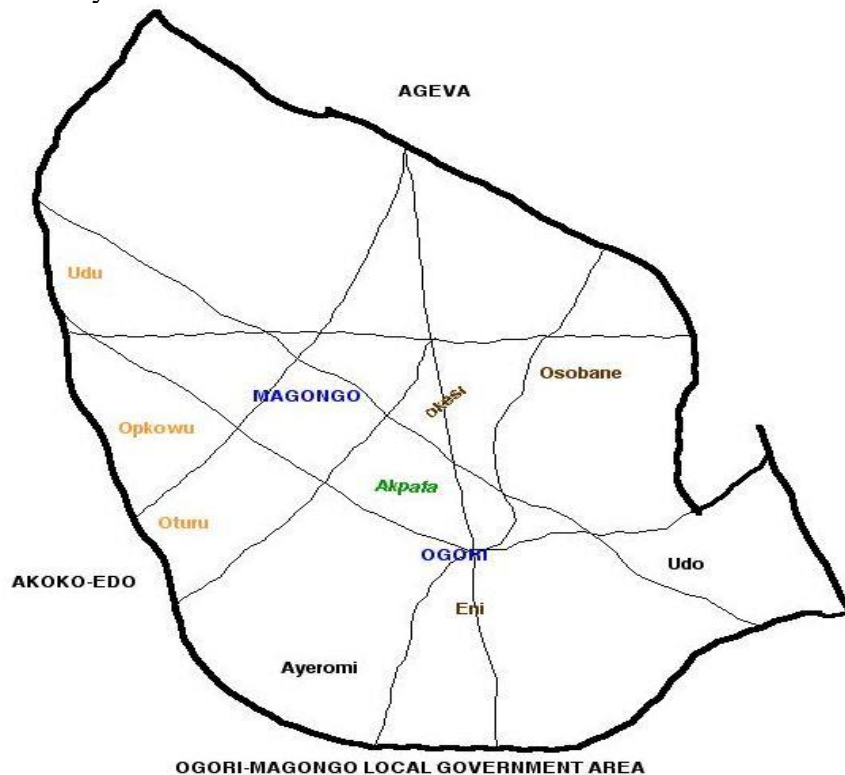


Fig. 3 Ogori Magongo Local Government Area (<http://okolanguage.com/map-of-ogori-magongo-local-government-area/>)

3. Culture, tradition and religion

The Ogori people bear four marks on their temple or two tribal marks on their cheek. This served as a mark of identification especially during the tribal wars. This act has been largely overtaken by civilization. Children are no longer incised. A renowned festival for virgins 18 years and above is the *Ovia Osese* festival specifically for honouring the virgin ladies and their families by the community, The theme of this festival has however evolved over time to simply recognize a maiden's maturity for marriage. Other Ogori festivals are the Uma festival during which chieftaincy titles are conferred, the Ukpe festival which marks the beginning of every year and the Eweji festival to indicate the first week of the month of January or the beginning of the year. Dance is a great part of the Okuro and the varieties include Ogun and Ayigo dance conducted during a funeral ceremony, Ogenge dance basically for women, Okitorokò dance, Ogbele dance, Opa dance where a hand fan is used to generate music and Oke dance for the *Ovia Osese* festival.

The major gods worshiped are the Oto-oku, Omonenyen and Odiobo, each having a shrine on Agada hills, a location close to the heavens. The minor deities are; Odo-Otare, appeased with goat and *pito* 'liquor' for rainfall during droughts and the Ugbogbo which is believed to expose offenders. Christianity has in recent times overshadowed all forms of idol worship.

4. Records of Òkò

Williamson (1989:266-267) noted that the first publication on Òkò is a wordlist by Thomas (1914). The second publication on Òkò was by Herrmann Jungraithmayr (a German) in 1973. The title of his work is "Eine Wortliste des Òkò, der sprache von Ogori" (1973) (i.e., a wordlist of Òkò, the language from Ogori). The work was the outcome of a field trip he conducted to Ogori and Mangongo in October 1970. He had used the wordlist based on an extended Swadesh 100-wordlist.

Other works on the language include Popoola (1989) and Chumbow (1982a). There also is the contribution of HRM, the *Ologori* of Ogori (accompanied with notes by Elugbe) to Kropp-Dakubu's Data sheets published in 1980; (1980:OGO1-4). Other works on the language include a Reference Grammar of Ọ̀kò was [published by Atoyebi (2010), a Yoruba book on Ọ̀kò syntax titled - *Ìtúpàlẹ̀ sǐntáàsì inú èdè Yorùbá àti ọ̀kọ-ósànyèn* by Sàlàwù (2006) and a few other materials online.

The first classificatory attempt of Ọ̀kò was by Williamson (1989:261) where she identified Ọ̀kò as a (New) BC language within Niger-Congo. Akerejola, (2008:1) also noted that “Okó is spoken in Kogi State – the Middle Belt of Nigeria, West Africa – by a population of about 60,000 people. It belongs in the West-Benue group of the Niger-Congo family. At present, the language exists only in the spoken mode
Akerejola, (2008:1)

Brown, (2008), having used the Automated Similarity Judgement Program (ASJP) (designed to objectively evaluate words from different languages, which are similar in sound and meaning to the end of classifying them computationally) on Ọ̀kò classifies it as Idomoid. A standardized list of 40 words were used in the classification having tested the procedure with the revised 100 item Swadesh wordlist and same results achieved. However, ASJP is not widely accepted among historical linguists as an adequate method to establish or evaluate relationships between language families and so is not considered in this work.

5. Theoretical frameworks and methodology

Extant literature on frameworks and theories on language classification abound. Childs (2003) explained that the classification of languages may be genetic or non-genetic. ‘In some cases the criteria used for classifying African languages have been and continue to be typological and even areal or geographic.’

Childs (2003:31)

African languages classification when based on non-genetic procedures (areal and typological perspectives, geographic names may be used to classify (e.g. “West Atlantic” Atlantic Group of Niger-Congo because its languages are spoken along the Atlantic seaboard of West Africa), geographic proximity (resulting in certain non-genetic nomenclature - Northern, Southern, and Central branches of Khoisan,) required additional information (like formal similarities such as shared sound-meaning correspondences), to demonstrate that the typological features were highly systematic and not merely typological, unlike with Genetic classifications. For example, in typological classifications, analysts often use a prominent, feature to group languages into same linguistic group - using clicks, similar noun class systems (in the case of Kordofanian with Niger Congo) .

In this study our interest is on genetic classification. Crystal D (1997:294) provided insight into the investigation of language relatedness by noting that “The first scientific attempts to discover the history of world’s languages were made’ when ‘scholars began to compare groups of languages in a systematic and detailed way to see where there were correspondences between them. If these could be demonstrated, it could be assumed that the languages were related....that they developed from a common source.’ He further noted that “....the *comparative method* is a way of systematically comparing a series of languages in order to prove a historical relationship between them.’ Crystal 1997:294). He described Genetic classification as ‘a historical classification, based on the assumption that languages have diverged from a common ancestor. It uses early written remains as evidence and....deductions are made using the comparative method to enable the form of the parent language to be reconstructed. The approach has been widely used... and provides the framework within which all world-wide linguistic surveys to date have been carried out.’ (Crystal, 1997:295). Genetic relationship is further explained by Childs (2003:32) that “languages are said to be genetically related only if they share linguistic properties and items which could not have been borrowed, thereby demonstrating that they have a common “parent”.” Ibid.(2003:32) expatiates on the comparative method thus: ‘Using the comparative

method, the agreed upon approach to language classification, the analyst seeks cognates, pairs of form-meaning correspondences between possibly related languages, to establish whether the two languages are related and to reconstruct their parent or proto-language.

In other words, the Comparative Method (CM) largely involves the comparison of speech forms to the end of reconstructing the parent form, has often been accompanied by Lexicostatistics another method of classification. In this study however, cognates are identified on the bases of correspondences in sound and meaning, albeit no reconstructions are made. Some of the data compared are reconstructed forms from a number of the language groups (Yoruboid, Ebiroid, Edoid, Nupoid). According to Bastin & Piron (1999:149) in Childs (2003:41) ‘Lexicostatistics measures how much two languages have in common in terms of shared basic vocabulary. The technique is an important one in determining genetic relationships, albeit one of several that can be used.’ Childs (2003:41) further explained that “Lexicostatistics was based on the Neogrammarian model, which sees languages as related when they could be shown to have come from a common ancestor.... The ways in which the languages under consideration are different from that common ancestor are assumed to be historical changes that they have undergone since they were part of that common ancestor. If two or more of the daughter languages share common changes or innovations, then they are seen as more closely related than are other daughter languages. This technique of “shared innovations” (see Newman 2000a) is an important tool for determining branching.” Williamson defines Lexicostatistics as “a method of calculating the percentage of cognates, or related words, on a standard wordlist collected for a number of languages. The higher the percentage of cognates shared by any pair of languages, the more closely related the languages are” (Williamson 1988:13). Lewis, further explained that “ Lexicostatistics simply is the pair-wise computation of the percentage of words of the same origin shared by languages. Such values are used to determine the genetic status of languages or dialects of language.” (Lewis 2013:26). Lewis discussing matters arising from Elugbe’s (1989) classificatory methodology noted that “In language classification however, lexicostatistics is often used to re-enforce reconstruction” (Lewis 2013:18), but “The caveat, however, is that even the most convincing reconstruction remains but a guess, whereas lexicostatistics is a straightforward calculation based on empirical evidence. ... and that “intelligibility, and cognation percentage,’... is nearly the best index of mutual intelligibility. (Lewis 2013:27).

Bennett and Sterk (1977) also noted that “Lexicostatistics, while useful for preliminary gross subgrouping, is not--if used alone--adequate for indication of fine degrees of relationship.” because “The nature of lexicostatistics is such that geographic and social proximity tends to increase cognacy scores significantly” and as such ‘the portion of the study dealing with group-internal relationships, therefore, rests not only on the statistical studies mentioned, but also on investigations aimed at establishing the distribution of shared lexical and phonologic innovations. Where the two types of study disagreed, the innovation-based evidence was usually given priority.’ (Bennett and Sterk 1977:245). They stated that “Much importance is given to lexical innovations and clusters of innovative isoglosses marking significant subgroupings.’ (Bennett and Sterk, 1977:1). Another research conducted through Lexicostatistics is by Ohiri-Aniche (1999). Elugbe noted it as “The first lexicostatistic study of Akpes and AIKA and that it is one of the sources cited by Williamson and Blench (2000) in support of their position on AIKA. (Elugbe 2010:12).

In view of the above, this research adopts the recognized and attested best practices and methods already identified and adopted by earlier scholars in determining interrelatedness among languages and language groups investigated (Bennet and Sterk (1977), Williamson (1988), Elugbe (2010), Bankale (2006 & 2015), (Lewis (2013)) apart from reconstruction. Lexicostatistics and shared innovations which are more reliable in establishing genetic origins or relatedness are adopted as means of determining the status of Òkó, especially as areal diffusion cannot be completely ruled out in view of the span of time the different language group speakers have co-existed or been in contact due to geographic proximity and human migrations from the BC homeland believed to be the confluence area of Rivers Niger and

Benue. (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/dc/Dispersal_of_the_Benue-Congo_languages.svg).

Traditional comparative methods (comparisons of lexical items / identification of shared innovations particularly of sounds) and Lexicostatistics are adopted in establishing the status of Ọkọ within WBC. Bennett and Sterk (1977) adopted same principles in delimiting units within South Central Niger Congo (SCNC). This paper does not attempt glottochronology with the lexicostatistical results.

6. Ọkọ and old Kwa

Old Kwa, i.e., Kwa according to Greenberg (1963) comprised Ọkọ neighbouring languages now classified as Benue-Congo according to Bennett and Sterk (1977). Atoyebi, (2009), noted that languages which once correspond to Eastern Kwa (Greenberg 1963a:7), are now classified as WBC by Williamson & Blench (2000:29) and that Ọkọ falls in this new BC group. Jungrathmayr, stated that “Okọ did not belong to any of larger surrounding languages (Yoruba, Edo, or Epira), but should belong to one of the more distant branches of (Old) Kwa”, (Williamson, 1989:266). Old Kwa comprised, Kru, Avatime, Yoruba, Nupe, Bini, Idoma, Ibo, Ijo (Greenberg 1963:8). Of these, Yoruba, Nupe, Bini, Idoma and Ibo which constituted Eastern Kwa are now classified as BC. In determining the status of Ọkọ, we thought it necessary to check if truly Ọkọ does not belong to any of the larger surrounding languages, by comparing data from those languages with Ọkọ, sourced directly from indigenes in the ten wards of Ogori/Magongo land: Six (6) in the Ogori community: Akpafa, Iluteju, Okesi, Osobane, Okibo and Aiyeromi and four (4) in the Magongo Community: Ogugu, Obinoyen, Obatigben and Oturu. A personal comparison of Ọkọ with data by Koelle cited in Hair (1963:1-24), revealed that Ọkọ was most affiliated with the Yoruba as it shares the highest number of items with Yoruba within the Aku group of the Upper-Guinea languages (Middle-Coast languages). This is contrary to Jungrathmayr’s claim (Williamson 1989:266) that Ọkọ did belong to any of the larger surrounding languages. Other cognation figures in this work indicate that Ọkọ is not so distant from Yoruba geographically and linguistically.

7. Ọkọ and West Benue-Congo (WBC) groups

Following from the aforesaid, it is necessary to check the status of Ọkọ within WBC given that Greenberg’s (1963) Eastern Kwa i.e., Old Eastern Kwa, was merged with his Benue-Congo. As noted earlier, the first classificatory statement on Ọkọ is by Williamson (1989:261). She identified Ọkọ as a language isolate along with Ukaan (the language of AIKA) and Akpes, within BC. The status of these languages is however still being investigated, (Elugbe 2001& 2010, Bankale 2006, Bankale 2008). Ọkọ according to Williamson (1989) Ọkọ is coordinate with other BC groups, (see Fig. 4).

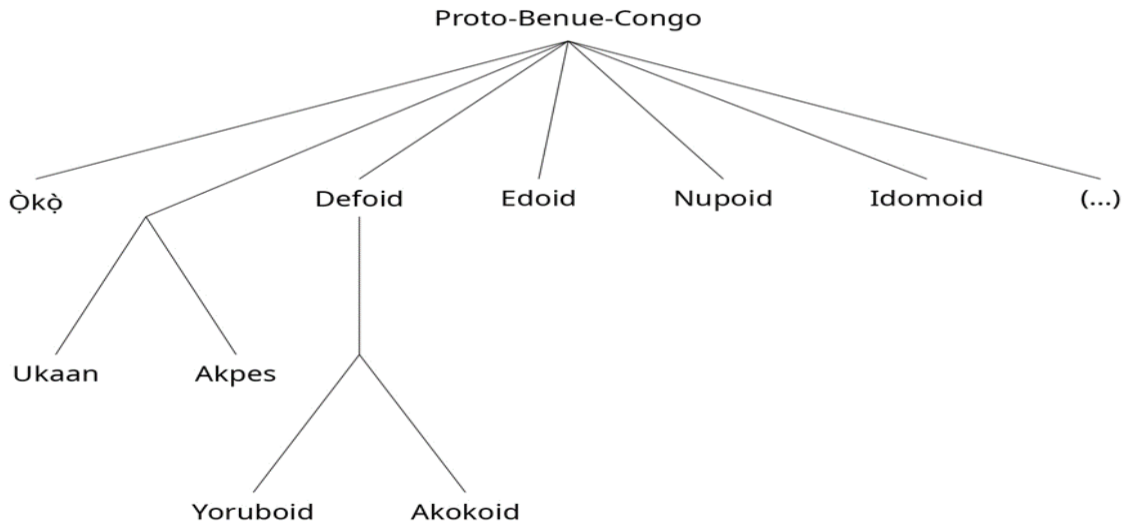


Fig. 4 Proposed Subclassification of Benue Congo (Williamson 1989:261)(adapted)

Williamson's (1989) tree further suggests that Ọkọ is closer to Defoid (Yoruboid and Akokoid which Blench (1989) calls Ifoid) followed by Edoid, than it is to Nupoid. Her classification was informed by lexicostatistical comparison of Ọkọ with Yoruba, Ebira, Edo and Idoma by Popoola (1980) in Williamson (1989:267). She therefore concluded that Ọkọ was equidistant to all the languages. Williamson noted that the little that is known about the first two divisions of her tree (Ọkọ, Ukaan /Akpes) indicate they are quite distinct from one another and from the larger groups surrounding them. She therefore set them up as isolates.

Unlike Williamson, Blench (1989:130), presented Ọkọ as sister to Nupoid, with both as descendants or offshoots of the same parent, Ọkọ-Nupoid, which according to him is coordinate with Idomoid and both of which developed from one node: NIO (i.e., Nupoid, Idomoid and Ọkọ (see Fig. 5). According to Blench (1989:130), NIO is coordinate with Akpes & Ukaan (AU) and Ifoid, Edoid & Igboide (IEI). His tree, like Williamson's, suggests that Ọkọ is closer to Akpes & Ukaan arm than to the Ifoid arm since NIO and AU are adjacent. However, Akpes is seen to be closer to the NIO branch than Ukaan in the tree.

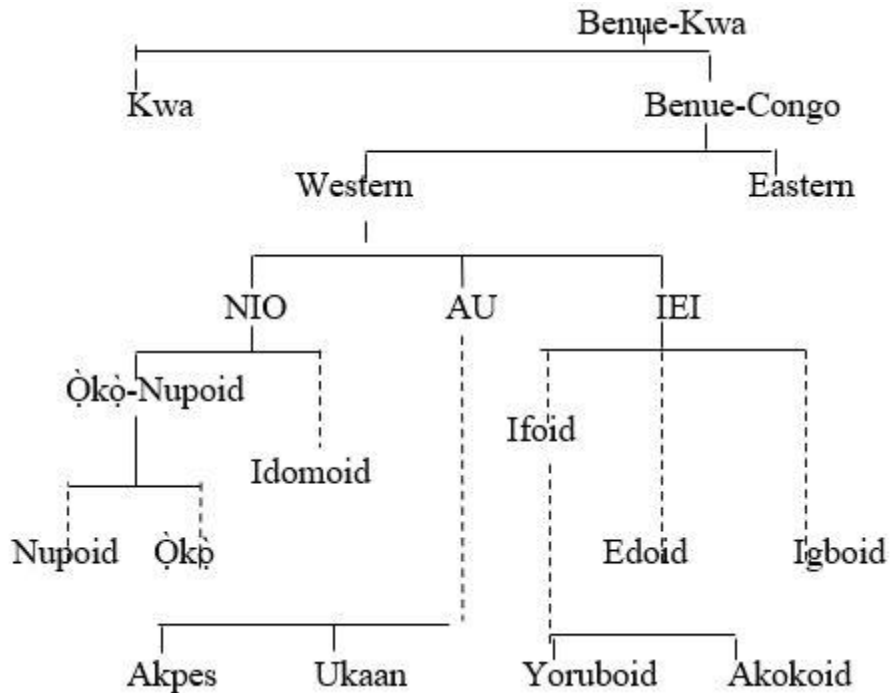


Fig. 5 Proposed New Internal Classification of Benue Congo (Blench 1989:130) (adapted)

Williamson and Blench (2000:130) revised the classifications and present Ọ̀kọ̀ as equidistant with Nupoid and Idomoid (see Fig 6). The classification of Ọ̀kọ̀ differing the three tree diagrams (Figs. 4, 5 & 6, &). Firstly, Williamson (1989:267) presented Ọ̀kọ̀ as a direct arm of BC, coordinate with other BC groups whilst Blench (1989:130) presents Ọ̀kọ̀ as sister to Nupoid under a node which in turn is presented as sister to Idomoid under another node named NIO. NIO is then presented as coordinate with AU (i.e., Akpes and Ukaan) and IEI (i.e., Ifoid, Edoid and Igboid) such that all three constitute Western BC. The third classification of Ọ̀kọ̀ was by Williamson and Blench (2000:3). They present Ọ̀kọ̀, Nupoid and Idomoid as deriving from one parent NOI (i.e., Nupoid, Ọ̀kọ̀ and Idomoid). Their tree diagram also presents this parent NOI, as coordinate with Akpes and YEAI (i.e., Yoruboid, Edoid, Akokoid and Igboid) though as closer to Akpes than to YEAI on the tree diagram.

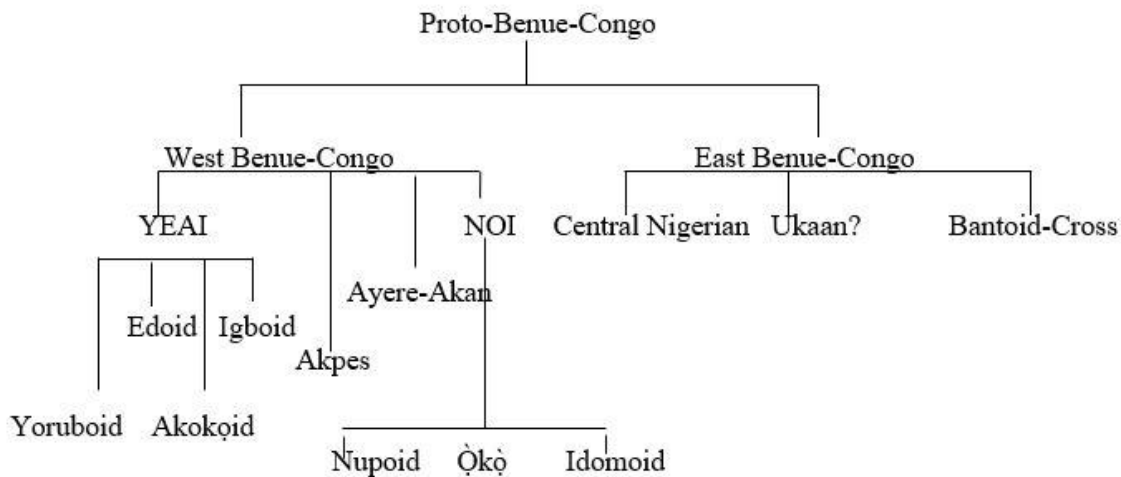


Fig. 6 Proposed Classification of Benue Congo (Williamson and Blench 2000:3) (adapted)

Inferences from the aforesaid then are that Ọ̀kọ̀, which in 1963 was closest to the Upper Guinea (i.e., The Aku-Igala Languages: Yoruba Group) evolved to be closest to Nupoid in 2000 AD. A shift in relatedness or closeness with Yoruba to Nupoid is observed. Also, Ọ̀kọ̀ is not regarded as coordinate with Defoid, Edoid, Nupoid and Idomoid but with Nupoid and Idomoid (Nupoid, Ọ̀kọ̀ & Idomoid-NOI) which together are considered coordinate with YEAI, parent of Yoruboid, Edoid, Akokoid and Igbooid. By inference, NOI and YEAI existed as sisters before YEAI split. Ọ̀kọ̀ is also presented as closer to Akpes to than to YEAI in the tree. Lexicostatistical percentages between Ọ̀kọ̀/ Akpes and Ukaan (AIKA) relative to that between Ọ̀kọ̀ and Yoruboid in this study suggest different (see Table 1). The figures mark Ọ̀kọ̀ as closer to Ebiroid and Yoruboid before Akpes/ Ukaan. (Cf. Fig 6 and Fig. 9). We cannot say they are exactly coordinate as a difference of about 10% is found between average cognation percentage between Ọ̀kọ̀/ Ebiroid, Yoruboid, Nupoid and Edoid (27%) on the one hand and Ọ̀kọ̀/ Akpes and AIKA (18%) on the other.

8. Inter-group comparison

Ọ̀kọ̀ is compared with the WBC groups to determine their degrees of relatedness since they are all presented as coordinates, (Williamson (1989)) and as noted earlier, much of the data compared are reconstructed forms. The inter-group comparisons were conducted using two lists; the revised Swadesh 100 wordlist and the Ibadan 400 wordlist. was necessary to discover any significant differences in cognation percentages and subsequently relatedness. The cognation percentages are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Cognation percentages between Ọ̀kọ̀ and other BC groups (with the revised Swadesh100 & Ibadan 400 wordlists)

| Table 1A. | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|----------|--------|-------|-------|
| Cognation % b/w Ọ̀kọ̀ and nearby BC groups based on the 100 wordlist | Ọ̀kọ̀ | Ebiroid | Yoruboid | Nupoid | Edoid | Akpes |
| Ebiroid | 30 | | | | | |
| Yoruboid | 32 | 37 | | | | |
| Nupoid | 23 | 37 | 30 | | | |
| Edoid | 24 | 29 | 30 | 20 | | |
| Average | 27% | 33% | 32% | 26% | 26% | |
| Table 1B. | | | | | | |
| Cognation % b/w Ọ̀kọ̀ and nearby BC groups based on the 400 wordlist | Ọ̀kọ̀ | Ebiroid | Yoruboid | Nupoid | Edoid | |
| Ebiroid | 26 | | | | | |
| Yoruboid | 20 | 27 | | | | |
| Nupoid | 15 | 30 | 25 | | | |
| Edoid | 14 | 14 | 21 | 15 | | |
| Average | 19% | 24% | 23% | 21% | 16% | |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|--------|-------|-------|------|---------|
| Akpes | 18% | | | | | |
| AIKA (see Table 1C. below) | 17% | | | | | 30% |
| Table 1C. | | | | | | |
| Cognation %s b/w Òkò and nearby languages based on the 400 wordlist % | Òkò | Ibaram | Akpes | Ikaan | Ishe | Ayanran |
| Ibaram | 18 | | | | | |
| Akpes | 18 | 65 | | | | |
| Ikaan | 16 | 29 | 30 | | | |
| Ishe | 17 | 33 | 28 | 59 | | |
| Ayanran | 16 | 31 | 30 | 60 | 72 | |
| Auga | 19 | 32 | 28 | 54 | 68 | 65 |
| Average | 17% | 35% | 33% | 41% | 46% | 46% |

It is observed that, Òkò is closest to Yoruboid (32%) followed closely by Ebiroid (30%), Edoid (24%) and lastly Nupoid with (23%) cognation in Table 1A (percentages derived using the 100 wordlist). The ratio between cognation counts based on both wordlists is not much different. (cf. Table 1A & B). Figures in both tables, reveal the fact that Yoruboid and Ebiroid are closest to Òkò followed by either Nupoid or Edoid. The 100-wordlist present Yoruboid, Ebiroid, Edoid and Nupoid, as closest neighbours and in that order too, while percentages using the Ibadan 400 wordlist show Ebiroid Yoruboid, Nupoid, Edoid as Òkò's closest neighbours and in that order as well. The case is not the same with Akpes and Ukaan (AIKA). The percentages are lower than 20%, they are 18% and 17% to be precise. This indicates a lower level or degree of relatedness with them.

In Table 1A, inter-group average cognation percentages range between 33% and 26% with a systematic reduction in Table 1B where it is between 24% and 16%. This means that the 100-wordlist present higher level of relatedness than the 400-wordlist. These figures are in consonance with Williamson's (1988:86) Benue-Congo branch percentages which range between 20 and 34 (see Fig. 7). (Cf. figures within Benue-Congo Table 2).

20 BRANCH

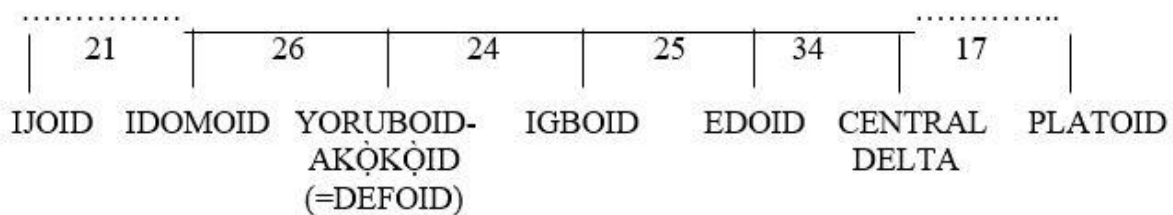


Fig. 7 Average Benue-Congo Cognation Branching Percentages (Williamson (1988:86))

Table 2: Lexicostatistic Figures from different Scholars (Bennett & Sterk 1977 (B&S), Oyelowo 1990 (Oye)

| | Ebira (B&S 1977) | Yoruboid (B&S 1977) | Ebiroid (Oye 1990) | Yoruboid (Oye 1990) | Ebiroid | Yoruboid | Edoid |
|---------------|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------|----------|-------|
| Nupe (-oid) | 49% | | 25% | | 37% | 30% | 20% |
| Yoruba (-oid) | 38% | | 25% | | 37% | | |
| Edo (-oid) | | 34 (Bini) | 22% | 19% | 29% | 30% | |

These percentages range between 20% and 40% (with the exception of Bennett and Sterk's 49% between Ebira and Nupe for which Bankale (2006, 264) has 37%). They are equivalent to those in Fig. 7 and therefore not anomalous. Elugbe and Bankale (2004:1) noted that 'In a normal and consistent practice of lexicostatistics, all co-ordinate daughter arms of a common ancestor should be approximately equidistant.' One is tempted by these figures to say Ọkọ is coordinate with the WBC groups but lexicostatistic figures between Ọkọ and neighbouring Akokoid languages (Akpes, Ibaram & AIKA) (see Table 1C) as noted earlier are much lower -18% average cognation with Akpes/Ibaram and 17% with AIKA. Ọkọ even presents higher cognation with Yoruboid in the 400-wordlist - 20%, a geographically more distant group than with Akpes or AIKA (see Table 1). The level of relatedness between Ọkọ and other groups is thus higher and in the following order Ebiroid, Yoruboid, Nupoid, Edoid, (see Table 1) than with Akokoid. Cognation between Akpes and Ukaan (AIKA) (33%) is also a pointer to the fact that Ọkọ is not Akokoid nor nearly as close to them as it is to other Benue–Congo groups given that it shares higher cognation percentages with the latter.

It is important to note that there is remarkable difference in cognation between Ọkọ and some of the WBC: Ọkọ is 12% less cognate with Edoid than it is with Ebiroid, 11% less cognate with Nupoid than it is with Ebiroid and 6% less cognate with Yoruboid than it is with Ebiroid. The differences are instructive as there is a difference of over 10% cognation between Ọkọ and Nupoid/Edoid and that between Ọkọ and the other groups and which Dyen (1964) in Lewis (2013: 68) noted as significant in sub-grouping within family trees, because it reduces the likelihood of equal level of relatedness among groups of languages or their being coordinate.

To present Ọkọ as coordinate with all WBC groups would then not be appropriate as it shares 27% (see Table 1A) and 18% (Table 1C) average cognation with groups classified as WBC. The significant 73% / 82% non-cognation between Ọkọ and the groups largely sets Ọkọ out as a separate branch within WBC. Amongst the WBC groups, Ọkọ exclusive, cognation is usually between 20% and 36% not below.

9. Shared innovation/diffusion

Shared innovations are tools in determining subgroups within a genetic family. The only generally accepted criterion for sub-grouping is *shared innovation*. A shared innovation is a linguistic change which shows departure (innovation) from some trait of the proto-language and is shared by a sub-set of the daughter languages.

(Campbell 1998:170)

By diffusion we mean the gradual spread of sound changes in words from language to language. Shared innovations show the extent of diffusion between languages in contact, be it in sound or lexical items. The generally believed culture-free basic vocabulary has been criticized as not so basic (Lewis 2014). By implication they are equally susceptible to change just like the non- basic vocabulary and within the same time frame i.e., a millennium. Campbell (1998:180) noted that 'many of the items are not culture free but rather are borrowed for cultural reasons in many languages. Identified basic items like dog, heart, sun, moon, water, and a few others have been found to be borrowed in different parts of the world. This means then that '... there is no universal culture – free vocabulary...' Campbell (1998:183). In this study we focus on isolating the sound innovations, especially the stem initial consonant sounds in cognate items with Ọkọ across language groups. There were 74 cognates in the Ibadan 400 wordlist and of these 72 items cut across at least three of the groups. In these items, only 67 sound innovations were observed

and selected. The following lexical items: ‘Ground’, ‘mouth’, ‘palm wine’, ‘river’, ‘swallow’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tooth’ are sometimes not cognate with Ọkò though they may amongst other groups. They were therefore not considered in determining the sound innovations.

The sound innovations identified are of two types, those having similar phonetic shape and those with differing phonetic shapes which may be accounted for or explained on plausible phonological grounds. The number of shared items or cognates between Ọkò and the groups and the shared sound innovations are presented in the Tables below.

Table 3: Sound Innovations of identical Phonetic shape and Lexical Items between Ọkò and other groups

| Shared items | Ọkò/ Ebiroid | Shared items | Ọkò/ Yoruboid | Shared items | Ọkò /Nupoid | Shared items | Ọkò/ Edoid |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
| hand, two, forty breast (female) | b | shoe, give birth | b | | | shoe | b |
| | | hand | b' | | | | |
| | | arm | w | | | | |
| cat | m | cat, mould (pot) | m | oil, mould (pot) | m | cat, | m |
| ear, tobacco, three, stone | t | ear, tobacco, three, stone | t | ear, tobacco, three, stone | t | tobacco | t |
| elephant, father | d | | | elephant, father | d | | |
| orange | r | | | | | orange | r |
| | | | | God | s | | |
| four, lose (smth.) | n | lose (something) | n | four, meat, animal | n | | |
| | | | | buffalo , dance v., woman | j | | |
| donkey, small, well ground- nut, war | k | donkey, small, well | k | donkey, war | k | donkey, ground nut | k |
| banana, plantain | g | banana, vulture, plantain, say | g | banana, vulture, plantain, say | g | banana, vulture, plantain | g |
| egg | dʒ | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|
| steal, eye, buffalo (bush cow) | j | steal eye dance v. | j | | | | |
| duck, pepper, maize | kp | duck | kp | | | | |
| | | jaw | gb | jaw, thirty | gb | thirty, spear (war) | gb |
| | | | | | | thread | I |
| kill hear | w | | | kill hear | w | | |
| Totals | 29 | | 22 | | 25 | | 13 |

Ebiroid has the highest number of shared sound innovations of identical phonetic shape with Ọkọ – 29, followed by Nupoid (25), Yoruboid (22) and Edoid (13) (see Table 5). Sound innovations with differing or having un-identical phonetic shape with Ọkọ are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Unidentical Phonetic shape Sound Innovations between Ọkọ and other groups observed in the 67 cognates.

| Shared item | Ọkọ | Ebir-oid | Shared items | Ọkọ | Yorub-oid | Shared items | Ọkọ | Nup-oid | Shared items | Ọkọ | Ed-oid |
|-------------|----------|----------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|-----------------|----------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------|
| shoe | b | d | | | | shoe | b | d | | | |
| arm | b | v | arm | b | w | | | | two | b | v |
| leaf, goat | m | b | goat | m | b | | | | | | |
| give birth | b | m | | | | give birth | b | m | water | b | m |
| | | | | | | breast (female) | b | ɸ | give birth, hand, arm | b | ɸ |
| | | | leaf | m | w | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | hand | b | gb | | | |
| | | | | | | arm | b | g^w | | | |
| die | f | s | | | | die | f | t | die | f | gh |
| oil | m | ɲ^w | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | leaf | m | ɸ |
| water | b | ɲ | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | goat, oil | m | bh |
| | | | die | f | k | | | | | | |
| tree | t | tʃ | tree | t | g | tree | t | c | | | |
| | | | father | d | b | | | | elephant | d | n |
| | | | elephant | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|--------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| louse | ts | hy | | | | louse | ts | s | | | |
| | | | egg | dʒ | g' | egg | dʒ | zi | egg | dʒ | ki |
| | | | fire | r | n | fire | r | n | | | |
| house -fly | r | s | house -fly | r | c | house -fly | r | z | house -fly | r | kh |
| | | | meat, animal, four | n | r | | | | | | |
| God | s | f | | | | | | | God | s | f |
| feather | f | s | feather | f | j | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | meat | n | nh |
| | | | buffalo | j | f | | | | | | |
| | | | one | j | n | one | j | nh | | | |
| one, dance v., woman | j | ɲ | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | steal, eye | j | w | | | |
| white | k | b | white | k | f | white | k | b | white | k | p |
| | | | | | | | | | war | k | kh |
| say | g | k | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | war | k | g | | | | | | |
| vulture | g | gb | | | | | | | | | |
| ashes | w | t | ashes | w | r | ashes | w | t | | | |
| thorn | w | k | thorn | w | g | thorn | w | k | | | |
| | | | kill | w | kp | | | | | | |
| | | | hear | w | gb | | | | | | |
| cotton | l | w | cotton | l | w | cotton | l | lh | cotton | l | dh |
| thread | l | o | thread | l | w | | | | | | |
| tortoise | kp | p | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | wind | kp | f | wind | kp | ph | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | dig | kp | t |
| corpse | kp | k | corpse | kp | k | maize corpse | kp | k | maize | kp | k |
| | | | | | | pepper | kp | j | | | |
| | | | tortoise | kp | n | | | | tortoise | kp | gh |
| dig | kp | gb | maize | kp | agbad o | dig | kp | gb | | | |
| | | | | | | duck | kp | (gban- gba) | | | |
| | | | dig | kp | g^w | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | feaces | gb | b | | | |
| jaw | gb | k | spear (war) | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | spear (war) | gb | k^w | jaw | gb | gbh |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|-----------|----------|-------|-----------|-----------|-------|-----------|----------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| | | | | | | child | gb | g | | | |
| child | gb | z | | | | | | | | | |
| feaces | gb | m | child | gb | m | | | | child | gb | m |
| ten | f | w | ten | f | gb | ten | f | w | ten | f | gb |

The differing innovations may in some cases be explained under plausible phonetic and phonological sound change procedures. E.g., In the word ‘arm’, [b] in Ọkọ corresponds to [v] in Ebiroid and corresponds to [w] in Yoruboid. The sounds are all labial sounds. Also, [b] may be weakened to [v] or [w]. in the word ‘feather’, the sounds correspondences [ʃ],[s] and [j] may be explained thus: [s] may be palatalized to [ʃ] in the environment of a close front vowel such as [i] and [j] is equally a palatal sound. There are however instances where differing correspondences remain unexplainable other than to regard them as differing.

Table 5: Total Number of Sound Innovations

| Out of 67 | Ọkọ/ Ebiroid | Ọkọ/Yoruboid | Ọkọ /Nupoid | Ọkọ/Edoid |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| No. of Identical innovations | 29 | 22 | 25 | 13 |
| No. of Unidentical Innovations | 27 | 30 | 26 | 21 |
| Total | 56 | 52 | 51 | 33 |

Table 5 shows that Yoruboid has the highest number of un-identical sound innovations with Ọkọ (30), then Ebiroid (27), Nupoid (26) and lastly Edoid with the least number (21). What these figures portend is that Ọkọ has the highest level of diffusion with Ebiroid

Of the 67 items, Ebiroid has 84% cognation with Ọkọ (56 cognates) whilst Yoruboid has 78% (52 cognates), Nupoid 76% (51 cognates) and Edoid 49% ((33 cognates). The two groups, Ọkọ and Ebiroid are therefore presently closest in terms of language diffusion within Benue-Congo. Ebiroid has the highest number of identical sound innovations with Ọkọ (29) whilst Yoruboid has the highest number of un-identical sound innovations with Ọkọ (30).Bankale (2008) identified shared innovations amongst the Benue-Congo groups having used 61 items, for which she had data and her figures are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Bankale (2008,) Number of shared innovations of 61 items in WBC Groups

| | Akokoid | Yoruboid | Ebiroid | Nupoid | Edoid | Akpes | Ikaan |
|----------|---------|----------|---------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| Yoruboid | 36 | | | | | | |
| Ebiroid | 23 | 17 | | | | | |
| Nupoid | 25 | 22 | 27 | | | | |
| Edoid | 25 | 24 | 12 | 19 | | | |
| Akpes | 25 | 23 | 19 | 20 | 22 | | |
| Ikaan | 18 | 17 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 21 | |
| Ọkọ | 16 | 13 | 16 | 18 | 10 | 11 | 13 |

Considering the figures in Table 6, it is obvious that Ọkọ presents low figures with all the groups here too and Ọkọ/Nupoid outstrips Ọkọ/Ebiroid and Akokoid by just two innovations. Also, only 13 innovations (21%) were observed between Ọkọ and Yoruboid/Ikaan whilst only 10 (16%) are observed with Edoid. These indicate relatively closer relationship between Ọkọ and Nupoid (30%), Ọkọ and Ebiroid (26%), Ọkọ and Akokoid (26%) followed by Yoruboid (21%) and then Edoid (16%). Based on figures in Tables 1B & and Table 3, it may be adjudged that, Ọkọ and Ebiroid are currently the closest in terms of language diffusion within Benue-Congo. A historical perspective to consider is the degree of interaction that has transpired and still ongoing between Ebiroid and Ọkọ, politically and socially. Before 1996, Magongo subsumed under Okene Local Government, before the Ogori/Magongo Local Government was created. Intermarriages and other social / communal activities are recorded. It is therefore not surprising that Ebiroid has the highest figure of shared sound innovations with Ọkọ. It is also important to note that the lexical items which manifest innovations are not just cultural but also basic in nature.

10. Non cognation

Non-cognition, in this work describes a situation whereby there is no similarity in sound and meaning of lexical items between Ọkọ and languages or groups it is compared with. Two sets of wordlists were used in the analysis. The Ibadan 400 wordlist and the revised Swadesh 100 wordlist. Of the former, the total number of shared cognates between Ọkọ/Ebiroid is 102, Ọkọ/Yoruboid is 80, Ọkọ/ Nupoid is 66 and Ọkọ/Edoid is 66. The figures no doubt indicate significant differences in relatedness between Ọkọ and these groups and that Ọkọ with Ebiroid and Yoruboid should have a higher branching node than with other groups in a tree diagram showing their relatedness. In agreement with Lewis (2013) and “Following Swadesh, (1951, 1952), the received grid of language relationship based on cognation percentages is provided” in Table 7. “Thus, it is common practice to combine the variables of shared innovation (i.e., systematic correspondences and cognation percentages) to plot languages on family trees.”

Table 7: Cognation and Relation (Crowley and Bower 2010:139) in Lewis (2013: 26)

| Cognate% | Relationship |
|----------|-------------------------------|
| 81 – 100 | Dialects of a Language |
| 36 – 80 | Language of a Family |
| 12 – 35 | Family of a Stock |
| 4 - 11 | Stock of a Micro-phylum |
| 1 - 3 | Micro-phylum of a Meso-phylum |
| < 1 | Meso-phylum of a Macro-phylum |

The lexicostatistic figures and shared innovation figures presented in Tables 1 and 5 establish Ọkọ as belonging to a node between the Family of a Stock and the Language of a Family. Its relationship with neighboring languages is such that it is coordinate with parent to such languages. Historical facts and oral tradition establish a time of seclusion or isolated living of the Ọkọ from the outside world. This further explains the linguistic diversity from the other language groups. Tree diagrams presented by other earlier scholars on the classification of Ọkọ within WBC are presented below. The composition of each node is presented below each diagram.

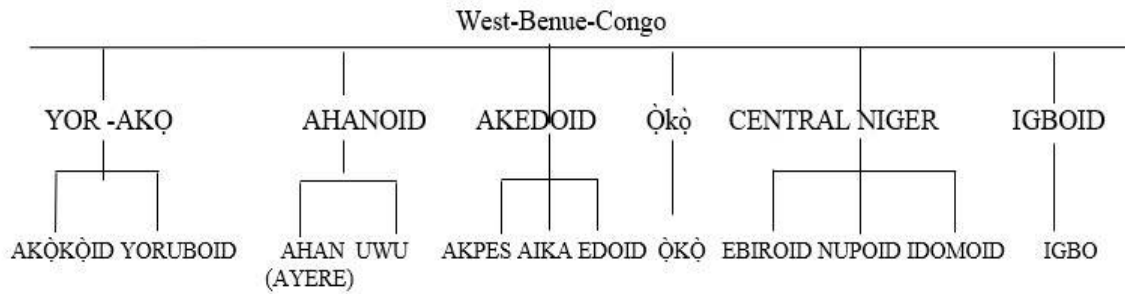


Fig.8 Proposed WBC Tree2 (Note: not drawn to time or percentage scale) Elugbe (2011:66)(adapted)

YOR(YORUBOID)-AKO(AKOKOID)=Yoruboid-Akokoid; AHANOID = Ahan (Ayer and Uwu); AKEDOID = Akpes, AIKA and Edoid; CENTRAL NIGER = EBIROID (EBI) NUPOID (NUP) IDOMOID (IDO); IGBOID = speech forms like to Igbo),

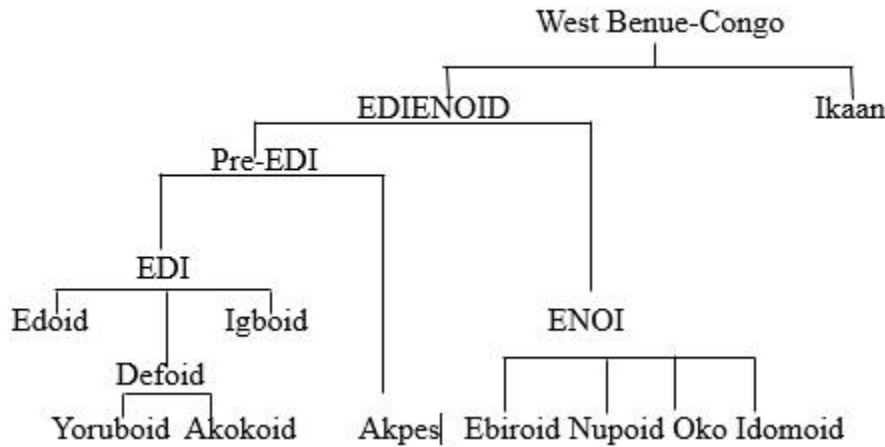


Fig.9 West Benue Congo Reclassified (Bankale (2008))

(EDIENOID = EDI (Edoid, Defoid (Yoruboid/Akokoid) & Igboid) and Akpes); ENOI = Ebiroid, Nupoid, Òkò and Idomoid))

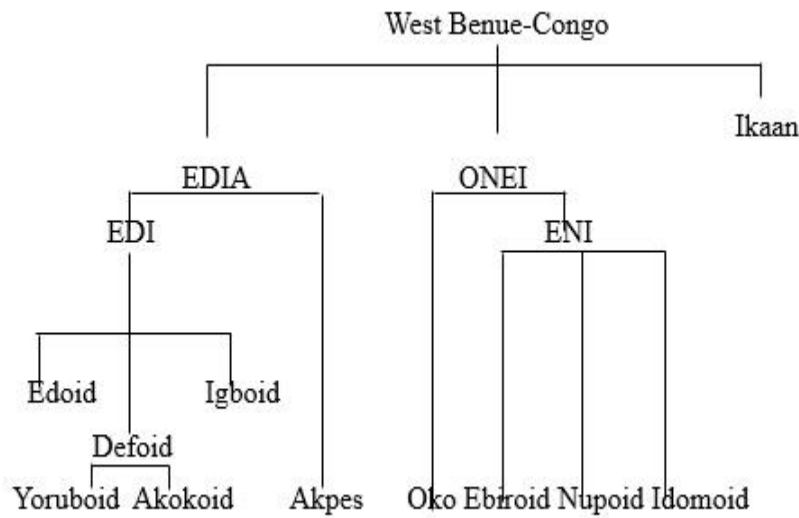


Fig. 10 A Reclassification of West Benue Congo (Bankale (2015))
 (EDIA = EDI (Edoid, Defoid (Yoruboid/Akokoid) & Igboid), and Akpes); ONEI = Òkò and ENI (Ebiroid, Nupoid & Idomoid)

All the tree diagrams of WBC by different scholars present different internal structures with Òkò either being an immediate coordinate arm with other groups or being at a lower level within the internal structure. Sometimes it is presented as closest to Nupoid and Idomoid while at other times it is presented as near close to Ebiroid and nor anywhere near close to Yoruboid. Two tree diagrams are proposed here- figures 11a and 11b.

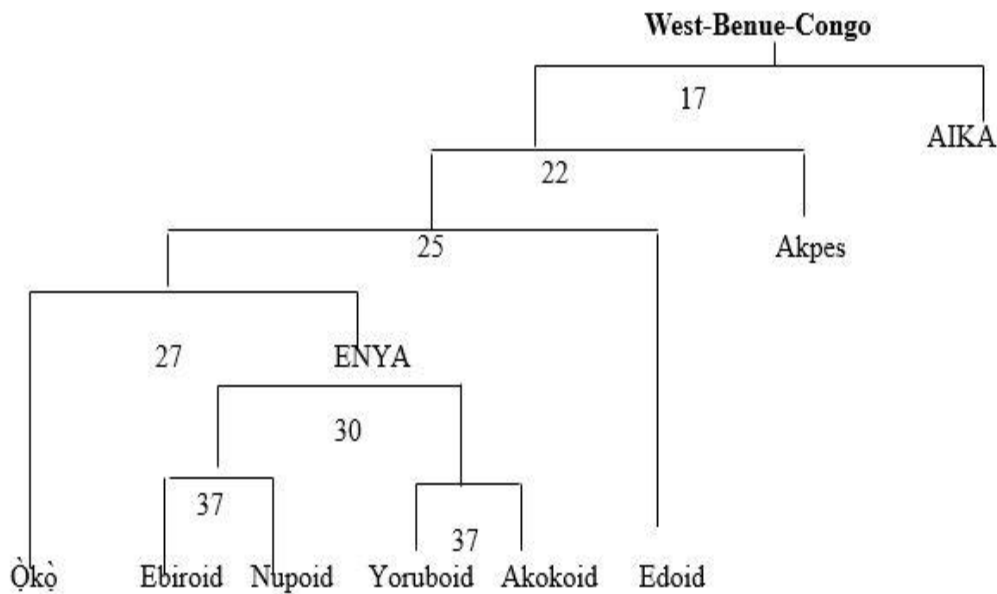


Fig. 11 a Proposed internal classification of West Benue Congo
 (ENYA = Ebiroid, Nupoid, Yoruboid & Akokoid)

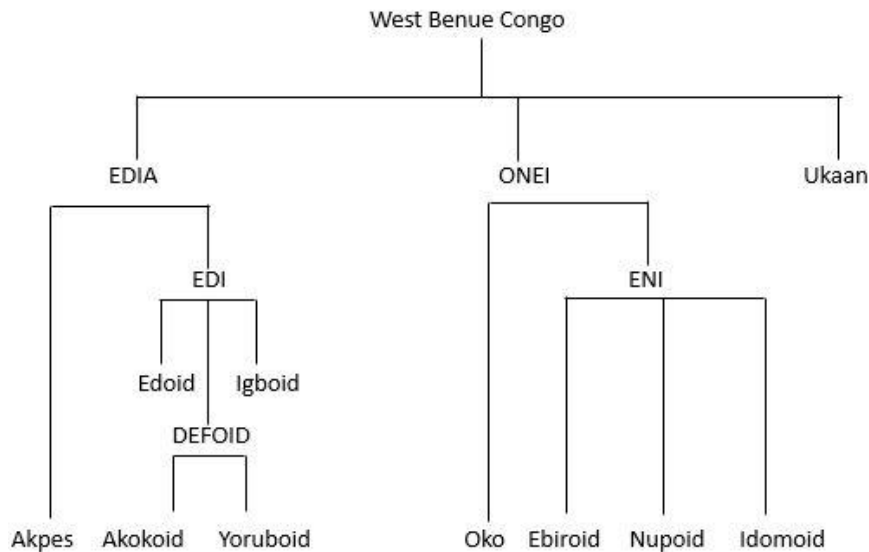


Fig. 11b Proposed internal classification of West Benue Congo

EDIA = (EDI = Edoid, Defoid (Yoruboid & Akokoid), Igbooid) and Akpes; ONEI = Òkò and ENI (Ebiroid, Nupoid & Idomoid).

In Figure 11a, Òkò is presented as coordinate with all of Ebiroid, Nupoid, Yoruboid, Akokoid (ENYA) under one node which in turn is coordinate and sister to Edoid with Akpes and AIKA as higher nodes to them. The second option which we adopt is Figure 11b where Òkò is classified as closest to Ebiroid which falls within the same node as Nupoid and Idomoid (ENI) and with which Òkò is coordinate. Also, Òkò is observed as close to Yoruboid in another arm (EDIA) with which the proto of Òkò (ONEI) is coordinate.

11. Substantiation

Genetic classifications are only one, albeit one very useful, way of grouping languages, but much can be learned by adopting areal and typological perspectives, especially coupled with a good knowledge of socio-historical facts.

Childs (2003:33)

In this section we try to substantiate the degree of relatedness between Òkò and other groups or its status within BC with non-linguistic data alongside innovations and figures got from the comparative study. Lore has it that the Okuro resided in the mountains before moving to the valleys after the Nupe wars before colonization. When security was no longer an issue, fertile lowland was necessitous as there had been great influx of persons to the crags during the wars.

Òkò and Ukaan/Akpes, according to Williamson in Bendor Samuel (1989) are The first two divisions are all tiny dialect (or language?) clusters... the little that is known about them indicates that they are quite distinct both from one another and from the larger groups surrounding them. They are therefore classified as distinct divisions of Benue-Congo.

Williamson (1989: 266)

In her conclusion, Williamson said ‘... There is no reason to assume that they have moved from anywhere else since the Benue-Congo dispersal.’ (Williamson 1989, 266). Also, a brief history of Magongo as documented by HRM Obin Anthony Olua Iyelafe II (2008, iv) has it that ‘Magongo has ever remained a “kingdom” unto itself and no so-called “power”, past or present can claim to have subjugated her at any point in time and place in her historical evolution.’ He also noted that not all Magongo people migrated from Ile-Ife as generally believed. Only the Udu clan

did... the Ogorians with whom we share the same language and culture. Other clans arrived from different locations in Edo State. We believe that the Okuro existed as a group not infiltrated in the South West of the Niger-Benue confluence after the Benue-Congo dispersal and escaped the Nupe wars during the rampage of the region since they then were resident in the mountains. The group also had no cause to relocate after the dispersal for a long time. They existed as an autochthonous group for many years until other clans such as the Udu, came to settle amidst them during and after the wars. The Okuro being very hospitable accepted migrants. Indications are that they welcomed the Eni who are believed to be a different community by the Okuro but who speak Ọkò. The hypothesis here is that a language shift situation developed after the arrival of the Eni in Ogoriland. They adopted Ọkò, as means of communication and for the purpose of total integration. Existence of Ọkò as a lone arm in some of the tree diagrams is a subtle affirmation of the lore. Cognation percentages within AIKA is 63%, whilst it is 88% in the Ọkò cluster. This shows that Ọkò has higher internal cognation than the other groups and thus may have remained uninfluenced by any group for long and as such not directly coordinate with them within BC.

Native speakers noted that almost all Okuro speakers speak Yoruba, and that about 50 %-60% Ogorians speak Ebirá while about 30% - 40% speak Okpamheri. It may be inferred that in the case of Ebirá and Okpamheri population of speakers is consequent upon trade and inter-marriages among the communities. The fact that everyone speaks Yoruba suggests that the Okuro have had greater and longer time of interaction with the Yorubas.

12. Conclusion

Ọkò, a WBC language has been on the scrutiny radar of scholars as regards its status within BC. The language groups surrounding it are Yoruboid, Ebiroid, Nupoid, and Edoid. Its affinity with these groups bothers on genetic relationship and contact. Earlier scholars are suspicious of its relatedness to distant languages given the low cognation and limited affinity in terms of sound and meaning with neighbouring languages. This work through the comparative method, lexicostatistics, scrutiny of diffusion and innovations found Ọkò to be related to neighboring languages particularly through diffusion and sound innovations. Its distance in terms of sound and meaning is explained as consequence of being isolated for a long period from other languages around it. Its relatedness is thus at different levels in the family tree as lexicostatistic figures and the number of innovations show higher affinity with Yoruboid and Ebiroid than with Nupoid and Edoid. Clearly, Ọkò is related with the other groups at a lower level than other groups do with each other, presenting it at a higher node in the tree as figures showing its relatedness is in the range of 'Family of Stock' within the Swadesh (1952) grid of language relationship. More lexical items are cognate and by extension more innovations with Ebiroid than even with Yoruboid considered to be the second language of most Okuro and language of the peoples with which they are said to have same origins., Ọkò's relationship with other WBC groups is at lower levels. Independent studies on Ọkò, Williamson (1989), Blench (1989), Williamson and Blench (2000), presuppose that affiliations with Ọkò have altered in the last 20 years. In view of the findings with Ọkò, the need therefore arises for a reassessment of established genetic affiliations within language families and groups in the light of areal classification.

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APPENDIX

| Gloss | Òkò | Ukaan | Akpes | Yoruboid | Akokoid | Edoid | Nupoid | Edoid |
|---------------|---------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Animal/meat | o-ni | ε-nam | ε-nambu | ε-rĩā | a-ruja | ε-nhamhi | nākā | u-je |
| Ashes | e-wunu | i-huko | u-hūhū | e-rĩrũ | o-ηo/ɔ-ndɔ | a-mhunə | v-tunu | a-titɔ |
| Axe | o-dɔɔ | u-dugo | a-kεkε | o-keke/ εdo (sey) | o-hɔ/ɔ-ηgɔ/ ε-ηγε | u-jueni | gbakun | iraga |
| Arm | u-ba | u-wɔ | u-huakabɔ | u-b'ɔ | u-wɔ | ghu-bɔ | cv-gbɔɔ | oɔɔ |
| Bird | onini | ε-kɔ | ε-nama | ε-we | o-rā | a-pl- | cv-luki | inomi |
| Blood | εɔ | o-dja | ηkɔn | ε-bje | ε-je/ε-dze | v-ja | v-gjə | a ja |
| Blow with n | e wure | fūn | fi | fε | he | phupho | gbhi ə | kuahr /fɛfɛ |
| Break (calab) | a pinɔ | fεge | jai | fɔ | fɔ | va | ba | tiaka |
| Burn | a kini | hari | tɔ | jo | tũ | tochi | dionə | dionə |
| Buy | jĩjā | jājā | de | ra | da | dε | si | ji |
| Catch | sija | nεε | muse | mu/ηu | hũ/ηgu | mu | wɔna | za/gɔ |
| Corpse | e poro | oniox ^w ox ^w o | oniohuhu | o-ku | kuokuo/ ikuku | o-dhimhi | -ku | o-ku |
| Chicken | a-bisi | ε-kɔkɔ | i-koko | a-diwe | o-wɔrɛrɛ/ ε-he | o-khɔkhɔ | pitie | v-jiɔε |
| Dance | jajo | si | jo | jo | rε/jε | gbhe | jiən | nεzε |
| Die | e fo | χ ^w o | hu | ku | kũ/ku | ghu | tiu | su |
| Dog | u-wo | ε-wu | e-bo | e-bja | o-fo | o-pu | a-bhoa | əbui /ɛfigi |
| Drink | a dε | η ^w ũ | ηɔ | ηmũ | bɔ/gbabɔ /g ^w ɔ | yɔnɔ | phini | fu |
| Dry | e jeji | hɔ: | e-kehu | gbε | u-sε/i-gogo | ka | kawiə | ɔwe |
| Ear | o-to | a-ruk | a-suku | e-ti | u-to | ghu- chəgi | cv- tunakp | o- tɔkpa |
| Eat | dzi | je | dze | jε | dzu | dhi | gi | a-dzε |
| Egg | e-dzi | i-tfɛɛ | a-ntfi | εηɛ | ε-jaha/ε-sa | dhi-kin ə | gi | a-dzε |
| Elephant | ε-dagba | e-ni | o-ni | ε-ñ | e-rĩ | e-ni | cv-dagba | o- dɔgba |
| Hoe (dig) | kpe | kɔn | hua/h ^w a | ro/wa | kpe/gbε | goa | gba | gba |
| feaces | egbũ | a-ji | i-biη | iwi/ewi | ε-me | a-cənə | v-bini | e-mi |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------|------------------|----------|--------------|----------|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------------|
| Fish | a-jɛɛ | ɛ-romumo | ɛ-tɛn | ɛ-ja | e-sɔ/i-x ^w e/i-ku | -chiɛnhi | v-ji ɛkɔn | i-sepi |
| Five | u-pi | toon | ifon | a-roa | i-tɔ̄ | ii-chin ɔnhi | cv-tiunu | ɛ-fi |
| Goat | u-mũ | ɛ-wi | ɛ-bu | ɛ-b'ɔ | a-rā/ara | ɛ-bhɔɪ | ɔ-na | ɛ-bu |
| Ground | i-dʒɛ | u-sa | a-tɔ | v-lɛ | e-sī/e-ʃi | u-tɔ | v-kini | ɛ-tɛ |
| Housefly | i-ri | ɛ-tʃo | i-netʃi | v-cici | e-sīsī | a-khɪna | v-zini | ɛ-tɛ |
| Kill | ɪ ^w ā | ju | wei | kpa | kpu | gbegi | wo | wo |
| Make | e-sije | kɛnɛ | mɛ | ce | ke | dhu | zi | mɛ |
| Market | ɛ-dʒi | a-tʃɔk | e-tʃi | ɔ-ja | a-ja | a-ki | cv-ghiko | ɔ-fu |
| Moon | ɔ-fi | ɔ-dʒo | a-dɔm | ɔ-tʃokpa | e-rija/e- tʃgba | u-ki | ɔ-pi ɔ | ɔ-h ^w ɛ |
| Gloss | ɔkɔ | ukaan | akpes | yoruboid | akokoid | edoid | nupoid | edoid |
| Name | i-wuru | i-ni | i-mun(u) | u-do | ejī | dhi-ni | c-je | irɛ-dʒɛ |
| Navel | i-bobo | ɔ-kpɔdu | ɔ-ɲkɔ | u-do | ɛ-kpɔ̄/i-pɔ/ i-dodo | u-kh ɛn | cv-ka | irɛ-ʃa |
| Nose | ɔ-mudɔrɛ | ɔ-kɔnɔ̄ | i-nũ | i-ɲmɔ̄ | ɔ-juwɔ̄/u- wɔ̄ | -chuvɛni | v-bhɔɔ | a-ʃi |
| Oil | a-mɔ | u-bit | i-miti | e-kpo | ɔ-go/u-go | a-bhidhi | ɔmi | ɔɲ ^w ɛ |
| Plait | wo ɛ- pɛ/wɛpɛ | sis | bɔɲ | ba/di | pa/ba | bana | tsini | za |
| Pound | e fwɪʃā | sɔ | tʃo | gũ | bu/gwũ | dumhi | tiu | tu |
| Rope | ɔ-ji | ɔ-kɔ | ɔ-nju | v-kũ | ɔ-kũ | u-dhuni | e-gbhɔ | ɔ- rukpa |
| Saliva | e-fua | a-sa/ | ũ-sua/nsua | i-tɔ | i-tɛ̄/u-tɛ̄ | a-ɕranɪ | minikini | a-tɛ |
| Sell | madʒɛa | nɔɔ | jai | ta | sa/ʃa/tʃa | dɛgɪ | kunu | na |
| Shoot | bɛ | ʃa | ɲā | ɲi/ta | ʃijɪbɔ̄ | ca | tsie | tʒɛ |
| Song | ɔ guru | u-ɲmɔ | ɔ-humɔ̄ | e-rī | i-ʃi/u-sī/u-sɛ̄ | i-yodho | ɔ-ni ɛn | a-ʃɛ |
| Stone | ɔ-tarɛ | e-kpɔ̄ | - | ɔ-k ota | ɛ-ta/i-ta | u-doghi | ɔ-kuta | irɛ-ta |
| Swallow | rɔɛ | mɪ | bor | mī | tʃiromi /sirɔmi | dhɔnɪ | minɪ | mɔnɛ |
| Tall | ɔ-ʃi | ɔ-rum | ɔ-mɔ | u-rũ | u-ja/i-ru | u-thi ɔmhi | ti ɛnti ɔ | ɔ-mu |
| Ten | ɛ-fɔ | ɔ-pu | i-jof(u) | ɛ-gwa | i-je/keje | -gbeni | cv-wo | ɛ-wo |
| Thirty | ɔgbɔluka | ɔ-gbɔ̄ | i-jofiniɲmgl | ɔ-gbā | ɔ-ɲmgbɔ | ɔ-gban | - | ɔ- furɛwa |
| Three | ɛ-ta | ta:s | i-sas | ɛ-ta | i-da/kida | u-chagɪ | gu-ta | ɛ-ta |
| Tie | a parɛa | kun | ɔ kpenɔ | so | pe/gbu | pi | ci ɔ | ne |
| Tongue | ɛ-larɛ | ɛ-mɔ | nda | ɔ-b'ā | ɛ-rɛ̄/i-rɛ̄ | u- dhamhɪ | a-gintara | ira-rɛ |
| Tree | ɔ-ti | ɔ-hon | ɔ-hũnɛ | e-gi | ɔ-hɔ̄/u-ɲgɔ | v-thanɪ | v-cigbɔna | ɔ-tʃi |
| Twenty | ɔ-gbɔɔ | u-gbɔrɔ | ɲmgbɔɔ | ɔ-gũ | u-gbɔrɔ | u-ghɛgi | e-tsi | ɔ-fu |
| Two | ɛ-bɔrɛ | wa | i-diaɲ | e-ji | - | i-vɔ | gu-ba | e-ba |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------|----------|--------|-------|------|---------------------|--------|---------------------|------------------|
| Untie | a-bɔrɛ | xwijo | wɔɔ | tu | tudu/fudu/t fudi | than | ɔ | ŋ ^w a |
| Water | e-bi | u-mɔ | i-mi | o-mi | e-ŋi/u-dzi/ | a-min | nunŋ ^w a | e-ŋi |
| Weave | wo | jo | jo | ŋɔ | rɔ/hu | do | lu | fi |
| Wet | ɛ-jɔŋ | ŋjãtɕi | e-fũ | tũ | sɛhɛ/i- tũtũ/u | pɔchi | da | o-fuefu |
| White | o-kukuru | u-hãhã | ɛŋɔ | fũ | e-tũ-tũ/i- hoho | pona | bɔ | ɔ-bɔ |
| Wind | e-kpe:ri | o-ju | o-hɔm | v-fu | a- tɛgũ/hɛhɛ/i- | a-fofo | -phe | afe |
| Year | i-mũ | i-waga | i-ji | ɔ-dɔ | e-bo/u-dɔ/ɔ- du | u-kpe | a-ja | ira-je |