

AN INTERNAL CLASSIFICATION OF THE
YORUBOID GROUP (YORUBA, IŞEKIRI, IGALA)

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1. Aim of Study

In this study, we propose an internal classification for the Yoruboid group of Kwa. The languages in this group are Yoruba, Işekiri and Igala. The group of languages here called Yoruboid have been classified as the Yoruba group in earlier works on the classification of African languages (Greenberg 1955 and 1963; Williamson 1963; and Hoffmann 1974). Following Williamson (personal communication) we are adopting the label Yoruboid for the group because such a label makes possible a distinction between Yoruba as a language on the one hand, and Yoruba, Işekiri and Igala as a genetic group on the other.

The proposed sub-grouping is based mainly on evidence of phonological and lexical innovations. Some of the sub-groupings we propose here for the Yoruba dialects in particular have earlier been identified by linguists working on the Yoruba language, for example, Adetugbo (1967). However, because of the wider scope of the present study, embracing not only more Yoruba dialects but also languages closely related to the Yoruba dialects like Işekiri and Igala, more light is shed on the true nature of Proto-Yoruba (PYOR). This better understanding of the nature of PYOR in turn provides a stronger basis for postulations that are made about the course of divergence of present-day Yoruba dialects, Işekiri and Igala from Proto-Yoruboid (PY), their parent language.¹

2. Introduction

Earlier and recent classification and sub-grouping of Kwa languages have consistently noted the genetic closeness of Yoruba, Işekiri and Igala. As early as 1854, Koelle in his classic, the Polyglotta Africana, had drawn attention to this closeness. His group C languages consist of the Aku (i.e. Yoruba)-

1 All reconstructions cited for Proto-Yoruba (PYOR), Proto-Yoruba-Işekiri (PYIS), and Proto-Yoruboid (PY) are as contained in Akinkugbe (1978), except that, there, the reconstructions cited here as PY are cited as PYIG i.e. Proto-Yoruba-Işekiri-Igala.

Matching the lexicostatistic results with the impressionistic classification of earlier linguists, the implication for the genealogy of Yoruboid is that Igala must have separated early from the rest of the group, and that the split of Yoruba-Ighekiri (YIS) into Yoruba and Ighekiri is a more recent one. In addition to the lexicostatistic evidence already presented, there is in fact evidence of common sound shifts and lexical innovations which corroborate the genealogy now assumed for the Yoruboid group.

One phonological feature which immediately separates Igala from YIS is the total loss of significant vowel nasalisation in Igala. One of the consequences of this innovation for Igala has been the restructuring of the consonant system of that language: while nasalised allophones of PYIG e.g. *ŋ have simply lost their nasalisation and merged with their oral counterparts, nasal allophones e.g. *n have assumed phonemic status in Igala, as a result of the loss of significant vowel nasalisation. Their occurrence is no longer conditioned by a following nasalised vowel. In present-day YIS dialects on the other hand, l and n are still found in a complementary distribution: n before nasalised vowels, and l before non-nasalised vowels.

A series of shifts involving some alveolar consonants and which are found to be peculiar to Igala also argue for an early separate Igala branch. They include the following shifts:

<u>PYIG</u>		<u>Igala</u>		<u>PYIS</u>
l	>	n		l
r	>	l		r
s	>	ʃ		s

One interesting thing about these sound shifts in Igala is that they seem to have occurred chronologically in the order in which they are displayed above. Silverstein (1973:113ff) has tried to explain these sound shifts in terms of the drag chain model: *l first merged with n, leaving a gap by the absence of

⁷ The discrepancies in the cognate scores across the three tests could be accounted for partly by the differences in the wordlists used.

l in the language. Next, *r became l filling the vacuum created by the merger, but itself leaving a gap by the absence of r in the language. *s then shifted to r, filling the gap created by *r > l. The last development i.e. *s > r would explain why the fricative s is absent in present-day Igala.⁸ Evidence from Yoruba and Isekiri shows that none of the alveolar shifts occurred in Proto-Yoruba-Isekiri (PYIS).

Another feature which characterises Igala on the one hand and YIS on the other, and which is clear evidence for the split of Yoruboid into a YIS and an Igala branch, is the way postulated PY lenis sounds have developed in the two branches.⁹ While PY lenis sounds have mostly merged with their fortis counterparts in Igala resulting in consonants with reinforced strictures, in PYIS they have either merged with consonants having less reinforced strictures or have simply been retained as lenis consonants. Thus

<u>PY</u>		<u>Igala</u>		<u>PYIS</u>	
b' / -V [b'á]	>	w [wá]		w [wá]	'cons'
b' / -V̄ [o-b'ú]	>	m [ó-mú]		ṹ [o-ṹú]	'salt'
m' [m'í]	>	ṹm [ṹmí]		m' [m'í]	'swallow'
d' / -V [d'í]	>	d' / -i> [gí]		r [rí]	'bury (object)'
d' / -V̄ [ò-d'ú]	>	d [ò-du]		ṹ [ò-ṹú]	'night'
k' [V-k'ík'ú]	>	g [ó-gugu/ á-cík'ú]		? but cf PYOR k' [a-k'ík'ú]	'bone'
g' [ε-g'í]	>	g [é-gé]		ṹ /gh/ [ε-g'í]	'egg'
g' [a-g'ó]	>	ṹ [á-g'ó]		ṹ /gh/ [a-g'ó]	'skin, hide'

The development of PY *g' in both Igala and PYIS is interesting in the sense that in the item for 'egg', PYIS shows a nasal reflex *ṹ where we expect *v.

⁸ The fricative s has however been reintroduced into the language through loan words from English, e.g. 'Israel' (Israel) and 'Jerusalem' (Jerusalem) found in the Igala translation of the Holy Bible.

⁹ The evidence for reconstructing lenis sounds for PY is discussed in an article titled 'Reconstructing the Consonants and the lenis feature of Proto-Yoruboid' by Femi Akinkugbe (forthcoming).

and in the item for 'skin, hide' Igala also shows a nasal reflex ɔ where we expect g. The probable explanation for this apparent irregular development of PY *g is treated in much detail in Akinkugbe (1978:161-5).

Apart from the evidence from sound shifts discussed above, there are also lexical innovations which can be used as evidence to separate Igala and YIS branches. For example, evidence from Iṣẹkiri and the Yoruba dialects points to PYIS *o-lè 'thief' while Igala has the form ḡ-ḡf which we consider to be the original PY stem in view of PY *ḡf 'steal'. Not only that, Igala ḡ-ḡf has wider Niger-Congo connections and is thus borne out as an old Niger-Congo stem while PYIS o-lè is a YIS group innovation. Also, while PYIS has preserved what seems to have been the original stem for 'thirty' as *o-gbà in view of its fairly widespread distribution in Kwa (cf. for example PE. *o-gbà, (Elugbe 1973), and Westermann's evidence, (1927:217), Igala has the form ḡgúfḡgḡ ('20 + 10'). Hoffmann (personal communication) notes that Ebirá, another neighbouring Kwa language, has a construction for 'thirty' which is parallel to the Igala form. We also observe that some of the Northern Akoko languages of Nigeria (e.g. Ayere and Erushu) have similar parallel forms (Akinkugbe 1978:865ff.). It is probable therefore that Igala lost the original PY form for 'thirty' after it branched off into another cultural area which also encompassed Ebirá and some of the Northern Akoko languages.

There are also certain processes of compounding which have occurred within YIS but not in Igala. For example, PY *o-d'ú 'name' has been compounded in PYIS as *o-rúko in contrast to Igala ḡ-dú which has preserved the older uncompounded form. The source and meaning of the compounding in PYIS is not yet known.

So far, we have tried to justify the split of Yoruboid into a YIS and an Igala branch with evidence of common linguistic innovations. What now requires to be shown is what kind of divergence occurred within the YIS branch. The evidence before us suggests the split of the YIS branch into a YOR (Yoruba)

and an Iṣṣkiri/SEY (South-eastern Yoruba) branch, with SEY later converging geographically with the rest of Yoruba.

Part of the linguistic evidence which argues strongly for a separate Iṣṣkiri/SEY branch from the YOR branch are certain grammatical innovations which Iṣṣkiri and SEY share to the exclusion of all the other Yoruba dialects. In contrast to the YOR situation in which the 2nd and 3rd persons plural subject pronouns are kept distinct (cf. Akinkugbe 1978: C.S. 35 and 37), Iṣṣkiri and SEY lack such a distinction, the forms ḡnḡ (subject pronoun) and nḡ (object pronoun) being used for both persons. Because Igala also makes a distinction between the 2nd and 3rd persons plural pronouns and more so because the Igala forms are cognate with YOR ones thereby implying a PYIG origin for the two pronouns, the merger or lack of distinction of the two pronouns is considered an Iṣṣkiri/SEY innovation.

We also observe that Iṣṣkiri and the Ijebu dialect of SEY share the same stem in the forms ḡnḡ and ḡnḡ respectively, for the 1st person plural object pronoun, while all the other Yoruba dialects (including the rest of SEY) have the shorter form, wa, ya or a, (as the case may be) of the 1st person plural subject pronoun (cf. Akinkugbe 1980: C.S. 30).

In addition to these grammatical innovations, Iṣṣkiri and SEY also share certain lexical items to the exclusion of all other Yoruba dialects. For example, the form for 'market' in both Iṣṣkiri and SEY is ḡbḡḡ, but ḡjḡ in all the other Yoruba dialects. It is also interesting to note that Igala has a form ḡjḡ which appears to be cognate with YOR ḡjḡ. In that case ḡbḡḡ would have to be regarded as an Iṣṣkiri/SEY innovation. Also, Iṣṣkiri and SEY both have the form dede for 'all' while most of the other Yoruba dialects have the form gbogbo (cf. Akinkugbe 1978, p.s. 101). Igala also has a form dede which we consider cognate with Iṣṣkiri/SEY dede. Therefore, we regard dede and dede as reflecting FY, and gbogbo as a YOR innovation which neither Iṣṣkiri nor SEY shares.

The only plausible explanation we can offer for these common innovations between Iṣṣkiri and SEY is that the YIS branch split into two: an Iṣṣkiri/

SEY branch and a YOR branch. However, part of the evidence before us suggests that at a later point in time, because of the geographical contiguity of SEY with the rest of Yoruba, SEY converged with YOR, while Iṣẹkiri became relatively isolated and, partly due to Ẹdoid influence, developed in a more divergent manner than SEY.¹⁰

Part of the evidence which points to this manner of divergence for the YIS group is the fact that in spite of the common innovations already noted above between Iṣẹkiri and SEY, SEY now shares certain features with the rest of YOR which Iṣẹkiri does not, while Iṣẹkiri has developed certain other features to the exclusion of SEY. For example, we note that for the item 'moon', SEY shares compounding with a suffix -kpá with the rest of YOR while Iṣẹkiri does not: FYOR *ḡ-cḡkpá and Iṣẹkiri (ḡra)fḡ. Since Igala does not share this -kpá innovation, (it has the form ḡ-cḡ (Akinkugbe 1978:C.S.237a)), we are assuming that the compounding is not a PY feature but a YOR/SEY innovation. In other words, we are assuming that this innovation occurred only after the split of the Iṣẹkiri/SEY branch into Iṣẹkiri and SEY branches.

Also, SEY shares the stem bí 'vomit' with the rest of YOR while Iṣẹkiri does not, having preserved what in view of the Igala evidence, seems to be the original PY stem; Iṣẹkiri and Igala share the forms sḡ and rḡ respectively. (Akinkugbe 1978:C.S. 4). We are therefore assuming that bí is a YOR/SEY innovation.

On the other hand, Iṣẹkiri has developed a tonal pattern which is different from the YOR/SEY pattern, and different also from what we consider to be the original PY pattern (cf. Akinkugbe 1978:314ff.). While SEY and the rest of YOR have preserved PY LM (low/mid) and ML (mid/low) patterns on disyllabic VCV nouns, they have been merged with MM (mid/mid) and LL (low/low) patterns respectively in Iṣẹkiri. This tonal divergence in Iṣẹkiri suggests that Iṣẹkiri became relatively isolated from SEY and the rest of YOR at some point

10 Osumor (1976:17-18) notes that there have been intermarriages between the Iṣẹkiri and their Ẹdoid neighbours. Such contacts presumably further enhanced the influence of the Ẹdoid-speaking communities on Iṣẹkiri.

in time during which the divergence presumably occurred.

We also note that apart from Igala, Iṣṣekiri is the only other Yoruboid dialect that has preserved relics of singular/plural forms which presumably existed in PY, PYIS and PYOR. For example, Iṣṣekiri has the following singular/plural forms:

o-birē	'woman'	-	e-birē	'women'
o-kērē	'man'	-	e-kērē	'men'

None of the present-day Yoruba dialects we have investigated has such singular/plural forms. We can attribute the continued existence of these singular/plural forms in Iṣṣekiri to the influence of the Ḃoid languages in which singular/plural alternation in noun prefixes is still a productive process (cf. Elugbe 1973).

4. Summary

The following is a diagram summarising the evidence and inferences in the preceding paragraphs.

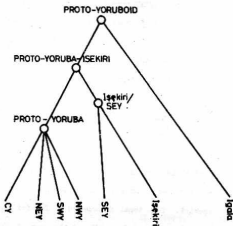


Fig.2. YORUBOID FAMILY TREE. The lines of divergence are intended to reflect relative time depth but are not drawn to any time depth scale.

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APPENDIX

This appendix contains the Swadesh 100 wordlist and the revised list used for the lexicostatistic counting discussed in the study. The Swadesh list is given on the left and corresponding items on the revised list are given on the right. In this way, the Swadesh items which were eliminated and the substituted items are very clearly identified.

<u>The Swadesh wordlist</u>	<u>The revised wordlist*</u>
1. I	I
2. thou	you sg.
3. we	we
4. this	you pl.
5. that	three
6. who	four
7. what	five
8. not	child
9. all	navel
10. many	roast
11. one	one
12. two	two
13. big	big
14. long	long
15. small	small
16. woman	woman
17. man	man
18. person	person
19. fish	fish
20. bird	bird
21. dog	dog
22. louse	goat
23. tree	tree
24. seed	seed
25. leaf	leaf
26. root	root
27. bark	housefly
28. skin	skin
29. flesh	meat
30. blood	blood
31. bone	bone
32. grease	fat
33. egg	egg
34. horn	horn
35. tail	tail
36. feather	feather
37. hair	hair
38. head	head
39. ear	ear
40. eye	eye
41. nose	nose
42. mouth	mouth
43. tooth	tooth
44. tongue	tongue
45. nail	nail (finger, toe)

46.	foot	leg
47.	knee	knee
48.	hand	hand
49.	belly	belly
50.	neck	neck
51.	breast(a)	breast(s)
52.	heart	heart
53.	liver	swallow
54.	drink	drink
55.	eat	eat
56.	bite	bite
57.	see	see
58.	hear	hear
59.	know	know
60.	sleep	sleep
61.	die	die
62.	kill	kill
63.	swim	bathe
64.	fly	jump
65.	walk	walk
66.	come	come
67.	lie	lie down
68.	sit	sit down
69.	stand	blow
70.	give	give
71.	say	say (something)
72.	sun	sun
73.	moon	moon
74.	star	star
75.	water	water
76.	rain	steal
77.	stone	stone
78.	sand	sand
79.	earth	ground
80.	cloud	rope
81.	smoke	smoke
82.	fire	fire
83.	ash	ashes
84.	burn	saliva
85.	path	road
86.	mountain	mountain
87.	red	red
88.	green	give birth
89.	yellow	bury
90.	white	white
91.	black	black
92.	night	night
93.	hot	hot
94.	cold	cold
95.	full	full
96.	new	new
97.	good	good
98.	round	rovl (chicken)
99.	dry	dry
100.	name	name.

Igala languages,² and among the Aku dialects he lists Eḡba, Idḡesa or Iḡeḡa (i.e. Iḡesa), Yoruba (Oyo, Oghomḡḡḡ, Yaḡba, Dḡumu or Idḡumu (i.e. Iḡumu), Dḡeḡbu or Idḡeḡbu (i.e. Iḡeḡbu), Ife, Ondo, and Dḡeḡkiri or Dḡeḡakiri (i.e. Iḡeḡkiri).

Westermann and Bryan (1952) and Lloyd (1957) have also referred to Iḡeḡkiri as a dialect of Yoruba. Lloyd particularly notes that "in a list of over 100 common words, over 90 are almost identical with Yoruba words especially those of the southern and eastern dialects" - presumably the dialects classified in this study as South-eastern Yoruba.

Although Greenberg (1955) lists a Yoruba group without specifying its members, and makes no mention of Igala, in 1963 he lists Yoruba and Igala as his sub-group c within Kwa, an indication that he considered the two languages to be very closely related. Apparently the reason Greenberg did not list Iḡeḡkiri is that he assumed it was a dialect of Yoruba.

Following these earlier sub-groupings, Williamson (1973) carried out a lexicostatistical comparison of Iḡeḡkiri, Standard Yoruba (SY) and Igala in order to determine the degree of genetic closeness between each pair of languages, using the Swadesh 100 wordlist. The results show the Iḡeḡkiri/SY score of 72.1 to be relatively higher than either the SY/Igala score of 66 or the Iḡeḡkiri/Igala score of 56.7. The differences between these scores if taken to be statistically significant, would suggest a closer relationship between Yoruba and Iḡeḡkiri than between Yoruba and Igala or Iḡeḡkiri and Igala. Williamson even suggests the possibility of establishing a dialect chain linking Iḡeḡkiri to Yoruba via the southern dialects like Ikaḡe, Iḡeḡbu, Ondo, etc., which are believed to be even closer to Iḡeḡkiri than SY is (cf. Lloyd's observation quoted earlier on in this paper).

Onasor (1976), in an attempt to determine the place of Iḡeḡkiri relative to Yoruba and the Eḡoid (earlier Eḡo) languages, carried out a lexicostatistical test on Iḡeḡkiri, some Yoruba dialects, some Eḡoid languages and Igala, using the Swadesh 100 wordlist. The Yoruba dialects she used for the test are Iḡeḡbu, Iḡumu, Ifaki, Oba, Ondo, Ikaḡe, Ilaḡe and Standard Yoruba. The Eḡoid languages

2 Aku is a nickname for the Yoruba. Koelle notes that "'Aku' or rather 'Oku' is a mode of salutation among all the tribes of the Aku dialects."

she used are Bini, Okpè and Uvwie (Uvbie). Omasor also compared Yoruba, Iṣṣkiri and the Èdoid languages at the grammatical level. Furthermore, she notes that there is a certain degree of mutual intelligibility between the Iṣṣkiri and the Ikalè of South-eastern Yoruba, both communicating in what she terms "a mixture of Iṣṣkiri and Ikalè." Omasor then concludes from her lexicostatistic and grammatical comparisons that Iṣṣkiri is not an Èdoid language, and that there is a very close relationship between Iṣṣkiri and Ikalè. Finally, Omasor (1976:47) states that

From a purely linguistic point of view, Iṣṣkiri does not seem to be a different language (from Yoruba) but it is less closely related to the Yoruba cluster as a whole than are to each other the recognised dialects within the cluster.

The above statistical findings by both Williamson and Omasor and the conclusions they have drawn from them thus lend some credence to earlier, though impressionistic, classification of Yoruba, Iṣṣkiri and Igala; and, as we intend to show later on in this study, their conclusions can be further justified by evidence of common linguistic innovations.

3. Method and Inferences

Of the three languages-being studied here - Yoruba, Iṣṣkiri and Igala - Yoruba shows the greatest diversification among its dialects. It was therefore necessary to carry out a sub-grouping of the Yoruba dialects before attempting any sub-grouping of the Yoruboid group as a whole.

To some extent, the phonological and ethnohistorical criteria used by Adetugbò (1967) for delimiting the major dialect areas of the Yoruba language in the former Western State of Nigeria (now made up of Oyo, Ogun and Ondo states) have provided a convenient starting point for the sub-grouping of the Yoruba dialects done in this study. Adetugbò sub-divides the Yoruba language area in question into three major dialect areas, namely: North-western Yoruba (NWY), South-eastern Yoruba (SEY), and Central Yoruba (CY).³ However, we

3 The ethnohistorical criteria (e.g. methods of lineage and descent and traditional government) which Adetugbò uses to supplement the linguistic criteria will not be discussed here, as the linguistic criteria alone are sufficient for the purpose of the present study. However, the fact that there is a considerable degree of correspondence between group boundaries marked out by the linguistic criteria on the one hand, and those marked out by the ethnohistorical criteria on the other, enhances the validity of the sub-groups. (See Adetugbò (1967), Chapter 6.)

would like to point out that although most of the phonological criteria we use in this study for recognising SEY, NWY and CY of necessity agree with Adetugbo's, we have been able to provide more evidence - phonological as well as lexical - for justifying the existence of these three dialect groups within the Yoruba language, namely south-western Yoruba (SWY) and North-eastern Yoruba (NEY). Each of the dialect groups is discussed below.

NWY is made up of Oyo, Egbá (i.e. Abeokuta, Ilaro, etc.), and Ogun (i.e. Osoogbo, Ogbomoso, Ede, etc.) areas. SEY comprises Ondo, Owu, Ijebu, and dialects spoken in and around Okitipupa (i.e. Ikalẹ, Ilaje, Ijo-Appi, etc.). CY consists of the Ife, Ijesa and Ekiti dialects. (Cf. fig. 1.)

Some of the linguistic innovations which characterise NWY are the merger of Proto-Yoruba (PYOR) *gw and *g with w, and the development of PYOR *c to f, although in the Oyo, Ibadan and Ogun dialects f and s are sometimes used interchangeably. Also, PYOR *ĩ and *ē have been raised and merged with ī and ū respectively. Standard Yoruba could, in a sense, be taken as representative of NWY since it shares most of the linguistic innovations found in NWY. The items listed below illustrate some of the sound shifts from PYOR to NWY represented by SY.

<u>PYOR</u>	<u>SY (NWY)</u>		<u>PYOR</u>	<u>SY (NWY)</u>	
gwè	wè	'wash (body), bathe'	o-cé	i-fé	'work' n.
l-gwa	l-wa	'ten'	u-cū	i-fu	'yam'
gwó	wó	'demolish'	V-cfɛf	e-fɛfɛ	'housefly'
gwi	wi	'say'	dī	dī	'fry (in oil)'
gò	wò	'look at'	l-rī	l-rī	'four'
ò-ó	l-wó	'umbilical cord'	ò-nī	o-nī	'crocodile'
e-gó	o-wó	'money'	sō	sū	'weep, cry'
cf	fi	'open'	kò	kù	'grumble, murmur'
cá	fá	'fade (of material, colour)'	o-dé	o-dū	'year, festival'

In SEY, PYOR *gw and *g have been retained but PYOR ī and ē have been lowered and merged with ē and ē respectively. Also, PYOR lenis *m has gone

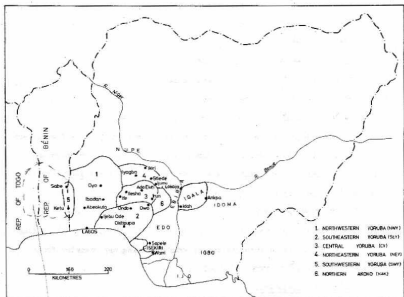


Fig.1. YORUBA, IṢẸKIRI AND IGALA SPEAKING AREAS OF NIGERIA.

to 9. Ikalẹ, Ilaḡẹ and Iḡọ-Appi appear to constitute a sub-group within SEY, in which FYOR *s has become h. No other SEY dialect shares this innovation. Below are examples from Ikalẹ illustrating the SEY sound shifts.

<u>FYOR</u>	<u>Ikalẹ (SEY)</u>	
dí	dé	'fry (in oil)'
o-rí	u-ré	'iron (metal)'
yó	yé	'become pregnant'
i-mó	i-mé	'nose'
m'í	wí	'swallow'
sè	hè	'cook boil'
ò-sí	ò-hí	'left (hand, side)'
sá	há	'weep, cry'
o-sé	e-hé	'foot, leg'

Another linguistic characteristic of SEY is that except in a few dialects like Iḡebu, there is no distinction made between the 2nd and 3rd persons plural pronouns. In the Ikalẹ dialect for example, the forms à-ḡá (subject pronoun) and ḡá (object pronoun) are used for both persons.

In CY, FYOR *gw has become w while FYOR *w and *y have become ǵ. FYOR *í and *é have been retained while evidence of FYOR *i and *e is still found in prefix and non-final stem positions. The following are examples from Iḡẹḡa illustrating the FYOR > CY shifts.

<u>FYOR</u>	<u>Iḡẹḡa (CY)</u>	
gwà	wà	'dig'
è-gwá	è-wá	'ten'
yó	ǵ	'look at'
e-yó	o-ǵ	'money'
o-wó	o-ǵ	'hand'
à-wa	è-a	'we'

Linguists in the field of Yoruba have tended to concentrate a lot of attention on those Yoruba dialects spoken in the central parts of the Yoruba-

speaking area as a whole; in other words on the dominant dialects of the language, neglecting the less dominant ones geographically distant from the centre. In addition to Adetugbo's sub-grouping therefore, another factor which has guided the choice of Yoruba dialects used for this study is the need to draw attention to some hitherto obscure and neglected dialects of the language in the hope that they will offer additional information about the proto-language. To this end, we undertook a study of some of the Yoruba dialects spoken in the northeastern parts of the Yoruba-speaking area of Nigeria, and some spoken around the borders of Nigeria and the Republic of Bénin (formerly Dahomey). Indeed, findings from such a study have turned out to be very interesting and significant for FYOR and FY, and for a better understanding of Kwa as a whole. Our hope, therefore, has not been misplaced. The linguistic innovations found within the dialects justify the recognition of two more dialect sub-groups of Yoruba.

The Yoruba dialects spoken in the northeastern parts of the Yoruba speaking area of Nigeria - specifically in Kwara state - constitute a sub-group and are labelled accordingly as North-eastern Yoruba (NEY). NEY comprises the dialects of Yagba, Gbede, Ijumu, Ikiri, etc. Although NEY, like NWY, merges FYOR *gw and *ɣ with w, it has, unlike any of the other sub-groups, shifted FYOR *w to ɣ in some vocalic environments: before -e and -a. NEY is also characterised by the development of FYOR *s to h. We have to assume that this shift - FYOR *s > h - which also characterises the Ikale, Ilaje, and Ije-Apofi dialects of SEY has taken place independently in the two sub-groups considering the fact that not all SEY dialects share this shift, and the fact that NEY does share some innovations with NWY to the exclusion of SEY. Also, in NEY, FYOR lenis *n' has gone to ŋ.

Below are examples from Gbede to illustrate the FYOR to NEY sound shifts.

<u>FYOR</u>	<u>Gbede (NEY)</u>	
è-gwá	è-wá	'ten'
gwa	wa	'greet, salute'
ɣò	wò	'look at'

<u>PYOR</u>	<u>Gbeḡe (NEY)</u>	
e-ḡó	e-wó	'money'
wé	wé	'wrap'
wá	ḡá	'come'
á-wa	á-ḡa	'we'
sá	há	'run (a race)'
so	ho	'throw'
o-sḡ	e-hḡ	'leg, foot'
m'í	ḡí	'swallow'

Tsabe, spoken on either side of the Nigeria/Bénin border does seem to constitute another sub-group within Yoruba, together with Ketu and Ife (Togo)⁴. These dialects are labelled as South-western Yoruba (SWY) in this study. Some justification for recognising a SWY sub-group is found in the fact that it is the only sub-group in which PYOR lenis *k' has merged with its fortis counterpart. In all the other sub-groups, PYOR *k' has merged with g. Also, SWY does not share the shift PYOR *c > f or s which has occurred in all the other sub-groups but has consistently preserved PYOR *c. Another innovation which distinguishes SWY from all the other sub-groups is the consistent loss of vowel nasalisation on PYOR *gũ sequences in the dialects within that sub-group, and the absence of such loss in the other sub-groups. In a few cases, SWY has also lost vowel nasalisation on PYOR *kũ sequences. The following are examples from Tsabe illustrating the PYOR > SWY sound shifts.

<u>PYOR</u>	<u>Tsabe (SWY)</u>	
ḡú	gú	'pierce, prick, stab'
ḡũ	gũ	'climb, mount'
o-ḡú	o-gú	'twenty'
o-ḡũ	o-gu	'war'
o-kũ	o-kũ	'rope (general)'

⁴ This dialect is really called Ife, but it is labelled as Ife (Togo) (since it is spoken in the Republic of Togo) to avoid confusion with some other Ife dialects, e.g. the Ife spoken in Ile-Ife in the Oyo State of Nigeria.

As a preliminary step towards the genetic sub-grouping done in this study, we did a lexicostatistical comparison of Iṣṣṣkiri, Igala, and thirteen Yoruba dialects, choosing at least one dialect from each of the five sub-groups identified above. We used a revised version of the Swadesh 100 word-list for the lexicostatistical comparison.⁵ The results of our lexicostatistical comparison are displayed in table 1. All the results taken together indicate a closer tie between Yoruba and Iṣṣṣkiri than between either of them and Igala. Although we have not made judgements as to whether certain speech forms belong to the same or different languages on the basis of our results, as there would be problems in doing this especially with regard to the Yoruba dialects, the method of lexicostatistics can be taken as a fair measure of relative linguistic relationship among speech forms.⁶ This is demonstrated, for example, by the consistency of the results across the three independent counts - Williamson's, Orazor's and the present one. The results of the three counts show Yoruba and Iṣṣṣkiri to be closer linguistically than either of them and

5 A revision of the Swadesh 100 wordlist was done in June, 1975, at the annual Round Table Meeting organised by the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ibadan. At that time it was felt that since some items on the Swadesh list had no equivalents in most West African languages, and since certain items on the list were likely to be difficult to elicit because of possible semantic ambiguities, there was a need to revise the list in order to make it applicable to West African languages. Both the Swadesh and the revised wordlists are contained in the Appendix.

6 There is no doubt, however, that the method of lexicostatistics must be applied with caution. Even exponents of the method like Swadesh and Hymes are aware of problems militating against the total efficacy of the method. Hymes (1964), particularly, has drawn attention to the semantic difficulties one encounters in using the same test list across cultures. (Note also the need for a revision of the Swadesh list in 1975.) Such difficulties, and modifications resulting from the need to surmount them impede standardisation of studies in lexical relationships. Among other problems that the method of lexicostatistics still needs to solve are the lack of uniform cut-off points. In this respect, Swadesh has suggested 86 as the cut off-point, i.e. speech forms scoring below 86 should be regarded as belonging to different languages, and those scoring above 86 as belonging to the same language. If we were to apply this cut-off point to our table of scores, some of the accepted dialects of Yoruba would cease to be dialects of the same language. Williamson (1973) on the other hand, takes scores below 80 to mean that the speech forms "clearly belong to different languages," and between 81 and 85 to mean that "they arguably belong to different languages."