

THE CLASSIFICATION OF EGGON: PLATEAU OR BENUE GROUP?

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According to Greenberg (1963) Eggon is a language of subgroup 5 of the Plateau-Group within Benue-Congo. Shimizu (1975), challenging this classification, has joined Eggon and Tarok (Plateau 7) with the Jukunoid languages to form a new unit within Benue-Congo, i.e., the Benue-Group, which is based on lexicostatistical counts and 5 lexical innovations.

The present study places Eggon (and probably the other Plateau 5 languages as well) back in the Plateau Group adducing phonological and morphological evidence in addition to lexicostatistical counts. Shimizu's lexical innovations are refuted because they are not restricted to the Benue-Group.

A spectacular feature of some Eggon dialects - a canonical root-shape CCV - is studied to find out, whether this is an archaism, but apparently it is the result of a late rule of metathesis, changing CVC to CCV.

Selon Greenberg (1963) la langue eggon appartient au sous-groupe 5 des langues du groupe Plateau, lui même inclus dans le groupe Bénoué-Congo. Shimizu (1975), contestant cette classification, joint la langue eggon et la langue tarok (Plateau 7) aux langues jukunoïdes pour former un nouvel ensemble, le groupe Bénoué, à l'intérieur du groupe Bénoué-Congo. Il développe son étude sur des calculs lexico-statistiques et sur l'introduction de 5 nouveaux éléments lexicaux.

La présente étude replacera l'eggon (et sans doute les autres langues Plateau 5 avec elle) dans le groupe Plateau, en ajoutant aux calculs lexico-statistiques une démonstration morphologique et phonologique. L'introduction des 5 nouveaux éléments lexicaux que Shimizu utilise y seront réfutés, car ils ne sont pas le fait du seul groupe Bénoué.

Une caractéristique étonnante de certains parlers eggon - un radical de schéma syllabique fondamental CCV - est étudiée afin de déterminer s'il s'agit d'un archaïsme. Apparemment, il s'agirait d'une métathèse tardive qui aurait transformé le schéma CVC en CCV.

The purpose of this paper¹ is to discuss questions relating to the classification of one of the many small languages of the Nigerian Middle Belt, and, at the same time, to direct the attention of Africanists to some of the problems to be solved in this area. In this paper the language chosen to illustrate these problems is Eggon spoken by some 52,000 people in the south-west of Plateau State.

The Nigerian Middle Belt is known for its extreme linguistic complexity on the one hand, and for the dearth of linguistic data on the other. Consequently, because every bit of fresh information about the languages of this area has brought to light new phenomena, the classification of the languages has been in constant flux. The criteria according to which classifications have been established have also changed considerably. In 1924, in the monumental volume *'Les langues du monde'* Delafosse had to write: "Faute de pouvoir, dans l'état actuel de la science, adopter un ordre généalogique solide, je me suis arrêté à un ordre approximativement géographique" (p.477).

Other classifications were of a typological nature: e.g. the classification adopted in part II of the *'Handbook of African Languages'*, where Eggon is placed among the "Class Languages" which is clearly a typological feature (Westermann and Bryan 1952 p.107).

The first genetic classification of the languages of the Middle Belt (and of Africa as a whole) was worked out by J.H. Greenberg (1963). In his *"Languages of Africa"* it was made clear that the languages spoken on and around the Jos Plateau belong to two of Africa's major language phyla, i.e. Afro-Asiatic and Niger-Congo. The members of the latter phylum were arranged in three groups within Benue-Congo which constitutes one of the six families of Niger-Congo. The groups within Benue-Congo are Plateau (with seven subgroups), Jukunoid and Bantoid. Eggon appeared together with Nungu and Yeskwa in subgroup 5 of Plateau. The subdivision of Plateau is roughly geographical, proceeding from North-West (Plateau 1) to South-East (Plateau 7). The epoch-making work of Greenberg served as a model for classifications in the years to follow as well as an incentive for intense research on Benue-Congo languages. Mainly through the work of the Benue-Congo Working Group centered in Ibadan (with subcenters in Leiden and Tervuren), our knowledge of Benue-Congo languages has grown enormously between 1966, when the BCWG was formed, and 1973, when the second volume of the Benue-Congo Comparative Wordlist (BCCWL) was published. To give just one example: the Plateau group in Greenberg (1963) numbered 45 languages; the number of Plateau languages in volume II of the BCCWL amounts to 80; a classification distributed by Ian Maddieson (1972) lists 104 languages. Basically, however, in all these classifications (Williamson 1971 and 1973; Williamson and Shimizu 1968; de Wolf 1971; Maddieson 1972) Greenberg's classification is taken as a frame that has been enlarged and modified in some details, but not altered in any significant way.

Shimizu's short paper "*A lexicostatistical study of Plateau languages and Jukun*" (1975:413-8) in which the general arrangement of the subgroups within Benue-Congo was challenged appeared only in 1975: Shimizu separated some of the southern Plateau languages (including Eggon) from the rest of Plateau and joined them with the Jukun languages on which he had published an excellent comparative study (Shimizu 1971). The new linguistic unit was called "Benue Group". The evidence put forward by Shimizu consists, besides the cognate counts, of five isoglosses which were supposed to be diagnostic for the "Benue Group", in contradistinction to "Plateau".

In 1981, the present author with Heinz Jockers produced another lexicostatistic classification of Plateau languages which, besides lexical data also took morphological data into account. The languages compared were selected exclusively from Plateau. Our results, again, differed from Greenberg as well as Shimizu, in as far as the languages called Plateau 1a (Kambari, Kamuku, Lela etc., which are spoken quite far away from the rest of Plateau) together with Plateau 1b (Ibunu, Gure etc.) proved to be lexically very distinct from "Central" Plateau, i.e. Greenberg's Plateau 2 - 5). Moreover these languages can be distinguished from the rest by at least two important grammatical isoglosses. For these reasons it seemed justifiable to establish a "Niger" group out of Greenberg's Plateau 1a + b. On the other hand, Eggon has such strong ties with some of the "Central" Plateau languages that its separation from Plateau and its unification with Jukun was not convincing, at least according to our lexicostatistic counts.

To sum up: there are two lexicostatistic counts which have arrived at rather different results as regards Eggon: in Shimizu (1975) it is put into the "Benue" group, together with Jukunoid; in Gerhardt/Jockers (1981) it remains within Plateau; it would be interesting to know where Eggon fits in Bennett and Sterk's classification, because Jukunoid and Plateau are classified quite far apart in their study.

The data on which the present study is based stem from different sources and present a variegated picture as regards quantity and quality. Basically, the data fall into two different dialect groups. Evidence for dialectal differences comes from the field of phonology and morphology. The two groups can be labelled as CVCV dialects versus CCV dialects. The CVCV dialect group is represented by the following sources:

1. Gospel of St. John (1935)
2. Wordlist Nr. 185 (vol.1)/198(vol.II) of the BCCWL: "Hill Mada"
3. Wordlist Nr. 187/200 of the BCCWL: "Eggon (Bryan)"

CCV-dialects are the following:

1. Johannes Lukas: unpublished field notes with tape recordings made in 1958.

2. Wordlist Nr. 186/199 of the BCCWL: "Eggon (Mierau)"
3. Different papers of I. Maddieson, made with the same language helper as the sources mentioned under 2.
4. Notes by Kay Williamson
5. B.A. Essay by Tabitha Ludzi "The syntax of Eggon" (Dept. of Languages and Linguistics, University of Jos), 1981
6. A short wordlist in Shimizu (1975) comprising 20 items.

List Nr. 187/198 was included in the BCCWL "because it shows CVCV structures corresponding to Dr. Mierau's CCV, and therefore perhaps represents a more conservative dialect in this respect." (BCCWL, vol.I p.xxxi).

If Eggon were a language that had preserved a more archaic shape this would cast serious doubts on every bit of linguistic reconstruction in the field of Benue-Kwa comparative linguistics that has been established in the last few years. For the most common word structure of languages of the Nigerian Middle Belt and further south-east tends to be CVC.

For the development of CCV structures in Eggon two possibilities can be assumed:

1. The original form was CVCV and V_1 has been dropped over the course of time. The following intermediate stages could then be imagined: CVCV > CvCV > CCV. First the vowels in position V_1 have become reduced (see below), the limitation of present-day vowels in this position in some dialects of Eggon could be explained by the fact that they became reduced (in quality or quantity). In a more archaic stage a fuller range of vowels would have occurred. The vowels of Eggon in this case would represent a more primitive stage than the surrounding Plateau languages. It should be possible to test this hypothesis by checking the related non-Plateau languages for the development of V_2 : possible candidates are languages which show CVCV structures (with $V_2 \neq V_1$) and languages in which V_2 has survived in one form or another.²²

2. The canonical Middle Belt shape CVC has undergone a language-specific rule of metathesis in Eggon generating CCV structures. In this case the vowels of Eggon morphemes should be comparable to those in neighbouring languages. In any case, it would seem useful to look into the relation of V_1 and V_2 in the CVCV dialects.

The result is as follows: in most cases V_2 is a copy of V_1 . The only examples displaying a difference between V_1 and V_2 are (the CCV form of other dialects is added in brackets)

o-bugo	'arm'	(ò-byō)	buga	'kill'	(bga)
e-guba	'body'	(ē-gbā)	e-ṇema	'horse'	(è-nmà)
a-kəla	'bush'	(à-klà)	lumu	'lie down'	(nmu?)
e-vugo	'finger'	ē-vgó	à-pélá	'mat'	à-plá.

The set of vowels that can occur in position V_1 is severely limited: only u and ə are found. Moreover the distribution of these two vowels is phonologically conditioned: u stands in front of [+grave] consonants, ə in front of [-grave] consonants. The only exception to this rule is e-nema which can be explained by the competing influence of the preceding palatal sound. Similar phenomena are found in many West African languages.

From the foregoing observations we can conclude that the CVCV structures of some Eggon dialects are the result of a late rule, which inserts a vowel between C_1 and C_2 . In other words it is not an archaism but an innovation.

Comparison with languages outside Plateau seems to confirm these results, for most of the Eggon words which can be traced back to Proto-Benue-Congo (PBC) reconstructed forms (c.f. de Wolf 1971) show a reflex of V_1 rather than of V_2 . The relevant examples where PBC $*V_1$ and V_2 differ are the following:

	PBC	Eggon			
bee	*i-swaki	è-só	guest	*u-kena	ā-zēŋ
bone	*ki-kupe	ā-k'pū	mouth	*u-nuŋa	ā-ŋū
crocodile	*i-kute	è-k'ó	man	*u-lume	à-nmō
ear	*ku-tuŋi	ō-tú	medicine	*ka-kuma	á-gúm
earth	*ku-bina	ō-bé	night	*bu-tuko	ò-tykú
firewood	*bu-kwoni	ō-kō-kōn	path	*u-zena	ō-ŋen/ō-zýě

Only two reflexes seem to have preserved the second vowel of the PBC-form:

goat	*i-bwoni	è-bé	guinea-fowl	*i-zaku	è-zgú
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But similar forms meaning 'goat' are found also in other languages of the Plateau, such as vyèl (i.e. v-y-el with -y- as class-marker) in Birom or bì-bíyá in Ibunu. It seems, however, that the great majority of examples confirms the hypothesis that Eggon CCV structures are the result of a recent rule added to the grammar of the language converting a CVC input into a CCV output.

The comparisons which follow adduce further evidence for this hypothesis by providing more examples from Plateau languages where CVC structures in other languages show up as CCV in Eggon. For ease of presentation I shall quote reconstructions from several subgroups of Plateau and Jukunoid. It should be noted that in many cases the daughter-languages have, as a rule, lost the second consonant (i.e. CVC > CV). Now, if Eggon has preserved C_2 , although in a different position within the word, this fact excludes recent borrowing as an explanation for similarities.

Examples for $*-p_2$

	borrow	bone	divide	fat	navel	ten
PP2a	kop	kup	kap	pyap	kwap	-
PP2b	kop	gu-kup	gap	-	u-kwap	kop
PP4	kop	ku-kup	gap	ma-pep	i-kom	-
Eggon	kvɔ	a-k'pu	g'ba	à-vbó	è-k'pó	ò-kvó
PJ	-	ku-kup	gàb	-	u-kom	-

Examples for $*-t_2$

	bear	three	crocodile	fire	throw
PP2a	-	tat	-	-	ta/taŋ
PP2b	maɪ	tat	-	-	tat/taŋ
PP4	-	tat	i-kut	-	tar/tak
Eggon	mb ^r à	t ^r a	è-k ^r ó	ó-v ^r ò	t ^r a
PJ	mbàt	tat	i-kwuT	piT	tat

Examples for $*-k_2$

	arm	cow	foot	guinea-fowl	name	night	twelve
PP2a	bwak	niak	tak	-	-	tuk	suak
PP2b	u-bok	i-nak	gu-dak	i-zok	rù-sok	tuk	u-sok
PP4	ku-ŋok	i-nyak	ku-za	-	ki-sak	tyk	u-cok
Eggon	ò-byó	è-ndyā	ò-dyā	è-zgú	è-ŋkó	ò-t ^y kú	ò-tsýó

Examples for $*-m_2$

	corpse	song	tongue
PP2a	kom	bwom	dyam
PP2b	u-kom	bwom	ga-lem
PP4	ki-kom	-	i-rem
Eggon	ó-kmó	à-bmó	ó-nmó
PJ	ri-kom	ku-bom	ri-dema

Examples for $*-n_2$

	goat	heart
PP2a	buon	-
PP2b	i-bú	-
PP4	i-yo[n]	i-sun
Eggon	è-bé	è-só
PJ	bín	-

Examples for $*-ŋ_2$

	ashes	back	ear	five	hear	mountain	scorpion
PP2a	toŋ	-	two	twon	-	-	niŋ
PP2b	ba-toŋ	-	gu-tón	to[ŋ]	go[ŋ]	i-go[ŋ]	i-dan
PP4	ù-ntón	ku-gón	ku-tón	tón	ywo	igwó	i-nan

Examples for $*-\eta_2$ (continued)

	ashes'	back	ear	five	hear	mountain	scorpion
Eggon	ū-títú	ū-kú	o-tú	ò-tĩ	gĩ	è-gĩ/	ā-kú è-nnĩ
PJ	u-ton	-	-	i-ton	-	- /	a-kun n-na-i

Examples for $*-s_2$

	cat	vomit
PP2a	mus	kwas
PP2b	-	[gúsá (Koro)]
PP4	[mus]	-
Eggon	à-mzĩ	gzò
PJ	-	kwà

It follows from the foregoing examples that CCV structures in Eggon are the result of a language specific rule which has been added to the language at a relatively late stage in the history of the language. The only other groups which have structures reminiscent of Eggon are found in some Jukunoid languages. There, however, such structures derive from a totally different historical source: forms such as fka or pša are reflexes of proto-forms such as $*fwa$ and $*pya$ respectively through a process which was labelled "glide-hardening" by Shimizu. The consonant clusters in both Eggon and Benue languages can therefore not be compared, and the typological similarity cannot be maintained as an isogloss in setting up the Benue group.

Other differences between the two groups of dialects of Eggon refer to their system of nominal classification. They cover a broad spectrum ranging from almost nil to a fully fledged nominal class system which, to some extent, resembles PBC.

Even in 1952 Westermann and Bryan noted that one dialect of Eggon lacks nominal classes. It is possible that this dialect is represented by wordlist 187/198 ("Eggon Bryan") in my sample where, at least in some cases, there are no class prefixes. At the other end of the continuum Maddieson reports dialects that have CV-prefixes. In the majority of dialects we find nominal class prefixes of the shape V- with the exception of the plural of the human class where a prefix mwa- is found. The speaker of Lukas' tape recordings uses a plural marker b- in cases where the other dialects use only a tonal change to distinguish sg. from pl. forms. As an example I shall give forms from different dialects meaning 'arm, hand':

Maddieson and Williamson:	ò-bgō, à-
(Maddieson has archaic forms:	kò-bgò, à)
Ludzi:	ó-bgó, á-
Lukas:	ò-byó, ā-

St. John:
BCCWL 185/198 (Mada)
BCCWL 187/200 (Bryan)

o-bugo, a-
a-bugo
bogo.

The difference between the taped and written form of Lukas' notes can be seen from the following forms:

stone	è-zím, ē-zīm (notes)	é-zīm, bī-zīm (tape)
hole	ē-nzē, á-nzó-nzé	ē-nzè, bā-nzè
leaf	à-yí-yà, ā-yí-yā	à-yí-yà, bà-yí-yà

Maddieson: àyàà, áyéyà

In Mada, there is a plural formation which involves placing a syllable (consisting of the stem-initial consonant plus a high vowel) in front of the noun stem. The exact quality of the vowel is determined by the phonological properties of the respective environments. Some examples of plural formation by reduplication (taken from Ludzi) are:

tree	ā-kí, ā-kí-kí	book	ā-kpá, ā-kpé-kpá
bone	á-k'pu, a-kú-k'pú	leaf	á-yá, á-yé-yá
mountain	a-kú, á-kú-kú	calabash	á-t'ku, á-tú-t'kú

The status and origin of this kind of plural formation is not clear at present. Ludzi gives one highly interesting example of a semantic difference between a reduplicated and a "normal" plural: ō-dgá 'foot'; ā-dgá 'feet' and ā-dé-dgá 'a pair of legs'.

Perhaps this collective meaning is the original function of this kind of formation, a formation which is also found in the languages genetically most closely related to Eggon (according to the classification of Gerhardt/Jockers). The languages in question are Koro and Gõṅ (Kagoma), both members of Greenberg's Plateau 2.

Koro:	ì-gay	'place'	í-gáy	'pl'	ì-gé-gáy	'many different places'
	ì-sép	'language'	í-sép	'pl'	ì-sé-sép	'different languages'
Gõṅ:	xóm	'village'	òm	'pl'	ó.óm	'all villages'
	nát	'house'	nát	'pl'	nánát	'all houses'
	ʃaʃa	'morning'			ʃaʃaʃa	'every morning'

Reduplicated syllables (as one of several means of plural formation) are found in Kagoro, Kaje, Atakar, Katab (Plateau 2), Birom, Aten (Plateau 3), Ninzam and 'Plain Mada' (Plateau 4)).

No such formation is known from the Jukunoid languages. Applying this morphological criterion, one would like to leave Eggon within the Plateau group.

The other features of the nominal class system of Eggon do not set it apart from other Benue-Kwa languages: the data indicate that there is class concord between the governing noun and demonstratives, numerals and subject markers in front of the verb. This, again, seems to point in the direction of Plateau rather than to Jukunoid, where there is a prevalence of reduced noun class systems.

After this investigation of some morphological features of Eggon, I shall now proceed to an examination of the lexical evidence brought forward by Shimizu to defend the establishment of his Benue group.

Besides the cognate counts (which are, of course the most decisive factor in a lexicostatistic study) Shimizu adduces five diagnostic words characteristic for the Benue and Plateau groups, respectively. I shall make some comments on them, because, if they are studied in a larger context, they lose some of the appeal which they doubtlessly have at first sight.

Table 1: Diagnostic Words (from Shimizu 1975: 415)

English	<i>Drink</i>	<i>Tail</i>	<i>Meat</i>	<i>Fire</i>	<i>Four</i>
Ibunu	shí	ùù-run	bì-nama	ù-ra	nààze
Katab	swɔ	lɛm	naam	lɔŋ	naaí
Irigwe	shwe	u-rû	rí-ne	i-ro	ní
Izarek	so	ku-rûm	rí-nam	kù-roŋ	nààs
Birom	sɔ	rum	nama	[kya]	naas
Chara	sol	u-rûm	kì-nam	[à-ŋwu]	nyaazel
Fyem	so	dùm	[dè-bût]	la	naas
Rukuba	so	'un-dún	kí-nán	[u-ghú]	naas
Ninzam	so	[ìì-bè]	ì-na	ùù-ru	nəe
Rindre	wàá	u-shí	u-be	[u-la]	-ne
Eggon	wǎ	ɔ-shá	ì-bí	o-vo	-nyì
Tarok	waa	a-swal	ì-zhè	a-pər	nèdɪŋ
Jukun	wa	a-shě	a-wí	a-pyù	nyena

1. *Drink*: Wolff/Gerhardt (1977) have argued that forms with an initial s- are loans from neighbouring Chadic languages. There is a Proto-Chadic reconstruction *sa with many reflexes in the Plateau area. Although the distribution of s- coincides fairly well with Plateau against Benue, in principle a loan does not seem to be the best evidence for a genetic classification.

A feature which deserves mention in this context is the numerical system of the languages in question. Eggon, like many other Plateau languages possesses a duodecimal numerical system. This fact alone would be important, but what gives it a special momentum is the fact that the words for 'ten' and 'twelve' in Eggon are etymologically related to the respective forms in Plateau 2 a+b, Plateau 4 and even to some forms in the Niger group (Amap). Even the nominal class to which the word for 'twelve' belongs is identical in all Plateau subgroups (*ku- [sg], *i- [pl]). The examples given above show that the items in question have undergone the characteristic sound developments of Eggon, therefore it can be assumed that they form part of the inherited vocabulary and have not come into the language through a process of borrowing, as Shimizu maintains. The mentioned comparative list given earlier in this paper contains some examples for Eggon sharing related word with other Plateau languages but not with Jukun. They may be taken as evidence for classifying Eggon with Plateau, together with the results of the lexicostatistic counts and the morpho-typological arguments presented in this paper.

Within Plateau the closest ties exist between Eggon and the Koro/Lungu subgroup of Greenberg's Plateau 2 and, somewhat looser, between Eggon and Plateau 4. While Plateau 4 languages are the geographical neighbours of Eggon, there is a distance of more than 150 kilometers separating Eggon from Koro/Lungu, populated mainly by Gwandara and Gbari speaking populations. It would be very interesting to get information about the migrations of these ethnic groups.

A final word is necessary about lexicostatistic classifications in general. Several Plateau languages are contained both in Shimizu's as well as in our corpus. There is a remarkable difference in the cognate counts. On the following page is a sub-matrix of common vocabulary from both classifications:

If anything can be said about the differences in assigning cognacy, then it appears that Shimizu has higher numbers in the more distantly related languages while Gerhardt/Jockers have higher numbers in the closely related groups. This shows clearly that there is a personal factor involved in lexicostatistic counts, the rôle of which has rarely been realized, but which seems to be of considerable weight.

This paper deals only with the classification of Eggon. There are, however, many other languages in that area south of the Jos Plateau, whose relationship to Plateau on the one hand and to Jukunoid on the other awaits further research. Nor, in this paper, have I considered the question of the relations on a higher level which exist between the Niger group, the Plateau group, and Jukunoid. Even if the classification of Eggon with Jukunoid is not accepted, there are definitely common traits between them.

Ribina

Katab	38	Katab						
Zarek	37	72	Zarek					
Rigwe	35	66	68	Rigwe				
Birom	35	49	51	53	Birom			
Ninzam	33	41	41	39	43	Ninzam		
Eggon	25	39	39	40	32	32	Eggon	
Tarok	27	42	41	41	37	38	44	Tarok

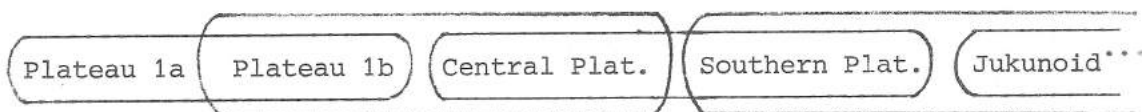
Shimizu

Ribina

Katab	25	Katab						
Zarek	29	69	Zarek					
Rigwe	31	72	78	Rigwe				
Birom	32	42	50	48	Birom			
Ninzam	32	34	38	36	33	Ninzam		
Eggon	25	34	40	37	32	42	Eggon	
Tarok	30	28	32	30	28	29	34	Tarok

Gerhardt/Jockers

Such ties are even stronger between Tarok and Jukunoid (Tarok is according to Greenberg a member of Plateau 7 and of the Benue group according to Shimizu). Such a chain of relationships can also be found at the northern fringe of the Plateau group. The Niger group of Gerhardt and Jockers has been established mainly because of morphological isoglosses plus some striking lexical root. Lexicostatistic counts, on the other hand, show a high percentage of common vocabulary between the southern section of the Niger group (i.e. Greenberg's Plateau 1b) and Central Plateau. This paper has shown that the southern languages of the Plateau group have special ties with Jukunoid. As Kay Williamson has indicated (1980: 5), this chain of relationships is apparently characteristic for the whole of the Nigerian Middle Belt. For the groups treated in this paper the chain seems to look like the following:



To get a more complete picture, especially of the Southern Plateau languages, much more basic data are necessary which include not only lexical, but also grammatical information.

FOOTNOTES

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² As an illustration, K. Williamson gave the reconstruction -tɔŋi 'ear', which in Igbo is -tĩ (-tɔni < tɔŋi).

³ Word final consonants are lost in Iregwe, but they change preceding vowels. Lost *-s results in all preceding vowels becoming i, e.g.

*kwas	'rainy season'	Iregwe:	rə-kwĩ
*pyas	'twin'	"	rə-ʃĩ
*siwas	'bee'	"	ʃĩ
*syas	'shin-bone'	"	i-ʃĩ

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