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On the linguistic situation in Àkókó

Abstract. It is a general belief among the non-Àkókó people and linguists who are not conversant with Àkókó land to assume that Àkókó land is linguistically homogeneous. That is why they erroneously refer to speech forms in the land as ‘Yorùbá Àkókó’ and or Àkókó dialect’. However, this paper shows that Àkókó land is not linguistically homogeneous, as speech forms in the area belong to the Yoruboid, Edoid, and Akokoid branches of the YEAI subgroup of West Benue-Congo language family.

Introduction

The Àkókó people of Òndó State are fully conscious of the fact that there is linguistic diversity in Àkókó land. This perhaps explains why many people there regard the area as a “land of different languages.” However, some Yorùbá linguists and non-linguists alike who are not conversant with the linguistic situation in Àkókó land have made the ill-founded assumption that the ‘languages’ or speech forms in Akoko are sub-dialects of Yorùbá. The aim of this paper therefore, is to give a brief linguistic survey of Àkókó land of Òndó State so that scholars will be familiar with the linguistic situation in the area.

The Àkókó land of Òndó State

Àkókó people occupy Àkókó land in Òndó State, Nigeria. These people claim descent from immigrants of diverse origin. Okajare (2004:41) posits the migrants were of two groups. First, those who migrated directly from their original homes to Àkókó, this group carried with them the cultural traits of their original places. The second group comprises those who did not migrate directly but who settled for a while among some other group en route to their places

of settlements in Àkókó. In spite of their diverse backgrounds and places of origin, however, these migrants recognized themselves as one political family and adopted the name Àkókó, which literally denotes ‘a unit’. This community came into being as early as the 14th Century, (Okajare 2004:43).

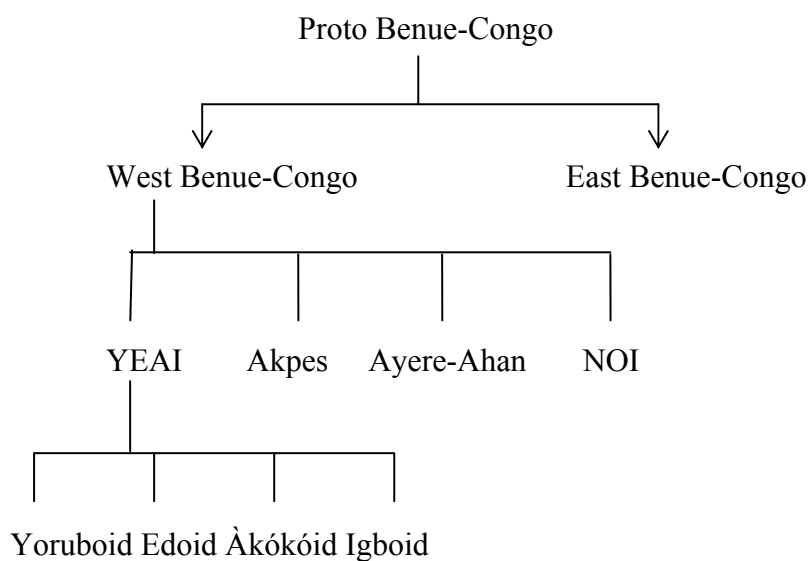
Àkókó land of Òndó State is presently divided into four local government areas. These are Àkókó North-East, Àkókó North-West, Àkókó-South East and Àkókó South-West Local Government Areas. Àkókó land of Òndó State is bounded in the North by Kogi State, in the East by Èdó State, in the West by Èkìtì State and in the South by Òwò Local Government Area of Òndó State.

Àkókó land is largely an open savannah in the northern part while the southern part is thickly populated. Fertile plains are however, found in Ìbòròpa, Súpàrè, Ìkùn, Ìsùà, Òbà, Ìfira and Ùgbè. The land, which is largely rugged with massive rock and hills, is considered an ideal place for human habitation by the immigrants. This results in language variation in the area. Yoruba language, however, remains the ‘lingua-franca’ in the area.

Beeley (1934), a non-linguist, classifies Àkókó people of Òndó State on three bases of their ‘languages’ into the following divisions: (a) the Òwò Àkókós; (b) the Benin Àkókós; (c) the Àkókó Bángéírí/Kùkùrúkù. Today, the following are the major towns/ villages in Àkókó land, Òndó State: Ìkàré, Ùgbè, Akùnnù, Ìkákùmò, Ìbòròpa, Iṣè, Àúga in Àkókó North-East; Àjowá, Oyín, Gèdègède, Ìbáram, Ìkáram, Ìgásí, Esé, Òkè-Àgbè, Arigidi, Ìrùn, Ògbàgì in Àkókó North-West; Ìpèsì, Ìfira, Ṣòsan, Ìsùà, Èpìnmi in Àkókó South-East and Ìkùn, Àkùngbá, Òbà, Súpàrè and Òkà in Àkókó South-West. Each of these towns is linguistically and politically independent. As such, they do not have kingdoms or clans as claimed in Fábùnmi (2009:259).

Àkókó Speech Forms: A Brief Linguistic Survey by Families

Due to the complexity in Àkókó speech forms, no one can lay claim to correct language classification of Àkókó land of Oṅdó State. The speech forms in Àkókó land belong to the YEAI sub group of West Benue-Congo language family, Williamson & Blench (2001:31). The name 'Benue-Congo' was introduced by Greenberg (1963). Bennet (1977) expanded the list of members of the Benue-Congo language family by adding the Eastern branches of Greenberg's Kwa. These branches were grouped together by Blench (1989.). He renamed Greenberg's original Benue-Congo as 'East Benue Congo'. West Benue-Congo, corresponding to the former 'Eastern Kwa', is spoken over the greater part of southern Nigeria (Williamson & Blench (2000:32). The largest languages in West Benue-Congo are Yorùbá and Ìgbò, Crimes (1996). Other language subgroup in the West Benue-Congo are NOI (Nupoid, Ọkọ Idomoid), Akpes and Ayere-Ahan. YEAI can be expanded into the following branches: Yoruboid, Edoid, Àkókóid and Igboid; of which Àkókó speech forms belong to three, namely, Yoruboid, Edoid, and Àkokoid. Table 1, below, shows the occurrence of YEAI on the language family tree of Proto-Benue-Congo as contained in Williamson & Blench (2000:31).



Yoruboid

The languages in this group are Yorùbá, Isekiri and Igala (Akínkugbé 1976:1). Our interest here is Yorùbá. Linguists that have worked on Yorùbá language have identified and classified some of its dialects into subgroups. These scholars include Koelle (1854), Delano (1958), Adetugbo (1967), Akínkugbé (1976), Oyèláràn (1976) and Awóbùlúyì (1998). Olúmuyìwá (2006) and Fábùnmi (2009:260) noted that these scholars did not mention ‘Akókó dialect’ in their works. The reason for this, we assume, is that there is nothing like ‘Akókó dialect’ of Yorùbá. However, Awóbùlúyì (1998:2-9), actually included speech forms spoken in Ọ̀bà – Ìkàré in his South-East Yorùbá (SEY) dialect subgroup. Ọ̀bà-Ìkàré comprises all the Yorùbá dialects spoken in Àkókó towns like Ọ̀bà, Ọ̀sé, Súpàré, Àkùngbá, Ìwàró, Ọ̀kà, Ùgbè, and Ìkàré.

Likewise, Táíwo (2005:6) enlarged the SEY of Awóbùlúyì (1998) by adding Ào to the list of dialects spoken in the subgroup. The following Àkókó towns speak Ào Yorùbá: Ìfira, Ikún and Ìpèsi. Other Ào speakers are found in the following towns: Imerì, Ìdógún, Ìdòàní and Àfò, all in Ọ̀sé Local Government area of Òndó State. Táíwò (2005:6) justifies his inclusion of Ào to the SEY group based on the fact that Ào have linguistic features of SEY as contained in Awóbùlúyì (1998). These features include (a) the preponderance of **ɛn**; (b) occurrence of **u** at word initial; (c) the occurrence of **n** before oral and nasal vowels; (d) the occurrence of two noun phrases side by side without any item occurring between them, and (e) the use of **fò** and **fi** as complementizers. Táíwò’s work shows that the fricatives /z/ and /ʃ/ occur in the dialect. He did not, however, explain why these sounds (which are not found in other SEY dialects) occur in Ào. We will posit here that the occurrence of voiced alveolar fricative /z/ and voiceless post alveolar fricative /ʃ/ in Ào may be due to its linguistic proximity to Edoid languages in the area.

In a similar vein, Olúmúyìwá (2006:5) classifies Yorùbá dialects spoken in the following Àkókó towns: Ìrùn, Ògbàgì, and Àfin to belong to the Central Yorùbá (CY) dialects subgroup. He based his classification on the linguistic features the dialects in these towns share with other CY dialects. These include (a) the occurrence of /u/ word initial; (b) non-occurrence of /ɛn/ front lower nasal vowel, and (c) uniform display of a nine oral vowel system (**i, u, ɪ, ʊ, o, e, ɔ, ɛ, a**).

As the foregoing has shown, only speech forms in Àkókó towns, such as, Òbà, Òsé, Súparè, Etíòro, Àkùngbá, Ìwárò, Òkà, Ìkàré, Ùgbè, Ìfira, Ìpèsì, Ikún, Àfin, Ìrùn and Ògbàgì belong to the Yoruboid group. They are therefore, regarded as Yorùbá dialects spoken in Àkókó, Òndó State, Nigeria.

Edoid

The Edoid languages fall into four primary subgroups, Elugbe (1986:3). These subgroups are Delta Edoid, South-Western Edoid, North-Central Edoid and North-Western Edoid. Edoid languages are spoken in at least five of the present thirty-six States of Nigeria. These states are Edo, Delta, Òndó, Kogi and Rivers. Out of these, the Edoid speaking people of Òndó State interest us.

The Edoid languages spoken in some areas of Àkókó, Òndó State belong to the North-Western Edoid. The speech forms of the following Àkókó communities belong to this subgroup: Sósan, Ìpè, Èpìnmi, Ìsùà, and Àbèsàbèsì. According to Àgóyì (2008:1-7) Àbèsàbèsì language family is known in the linguistic literature as Akpes. Williamson (1989) had earlier classified Akpes as a separate branch of Benue-Congo. However, Àgóyì (1997, 2008) suggests that Akpes should be reclassified and subsumed under the Edoid language family. Àbèsàbèsì is spoken in nine Àkókó Communities of Òndó State. These communities are Àkùnnù, Àkùnnù Ajowa (Ìlòdùn), Ìkàrànmù, Àsè, Ìbàrànmù, Ìyàni, Gèdègédé, Èṣùkú and

Dája. These towns, except Àkùnnù, are located in Àkókó North West Local Government Area of Òndo State. Àkùnnù is in Àkókó North East Local Government Area.

Àkókóid

Àkókóid is a coinage used to cover other speech forms in Àkókó, Òndó State, that are neither Yoruboid nor Edoid. The speech forms of Arigidi, Erúsú, Oyín, Ìgásí, Ùrò and Ọjọ in Àjowá and Òkè-Àgbè (where we have the following speech forms. Àjè, Àfá, Ùdò and Ògè) belong to this language group. In fact, these speech forms are dialects of the same language whose name has not yet been determined by linguists. However, in some linguistic literature, the speech forms are known as Amgbé ('òrò'-speech). Based on Capo's (1989) classification, Crozier and Blench (1992:16-17) suggest that the speech forms be known as the Arigidi Cluster.

Conclusion

What the immediately preceding section has now shown is that there is no known speech form(s) called 'Akoko language'; as such, we cannot have 'Àkókó dialect'. Thus, linguist(s) who may want to study any speech form(s) in the area should bear it in mind that linguistic diversity is found in Àkókó land of Òndó State and approach their study with caution to avoid improper generalization.

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