

THE EGA LANGUAGE

of

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

**ETYMOLOGIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
CLASSIFICATION**

Roger Blench

8, Guest Road
Cambridge CB1 2AL
United Kingdom
Voice/Answerphone/Fax. 0044-(0)1223-560687
E-mail R.Blench@odi.org.uk
http://homepage.ntlworld.com/roger_blench/RBOP.htm

25 December, 2004

1. Introduction

The Ega language is spoken in western Côte d'Ivoire, as an enclave language among Kru speakers. It has been investigated by Rémy Bole-Richard (1983, ms.) and more recently by a project led by Dafydd Gibbon (). Ega has been considered a threatened language, although it now seems likely that there are more speakers than previously thought.

Bole-Richard & Lafage (1983) argue that Ega is a Kwa language on the basis of lexicostatistics and they include it in a set with other Kwa languages in Côte d'Ivoire. Although the maximum lexicostatistic percentage with any individual language is only 13%, they give Ega 35% with the group as a whole. Ega frequently shares a common root with only one other Kwa language.

The text notes that Ega is in other ways exceptional. It has a very complete set of alternating V-prefixes on nominal stems, more closely resembling Bantoid languages than its immediate neighbours, as well as a complete set of fortis/lenis oppositions in voiced consonants. The nominal prefixes do suggest that Ega is a Niger-Congo or even an East Volta-Congo language, but the evidence is less than compelling that it is closely related to the Kwa languages.

In this analysis¹, most of the original transcriptions are preserved as presented in the texts. Bole-Richard's transcriptions have undergone minor modifications, however.

Bole-Richard	This paper
ɸ	ʃ
ɬ	ɬ
ɔ	u

Ega examples in the Comparative Kwa wordlist have the additional symbols ñ and ʃ which are reproduced here, but their example interpretation is unclear.

Abidji		Kwa	Eotile	Kwa
Abron		Kwa	Erusu	Edoid
Abure	Abouré	Kwa	Godié	Kru
Adyukru	Adiokrou	Kwa	Guro	Mande
Agni		Kwa	Igala	Yoruboid
Aizi		Kru	ɟrewe	Kru
Alladian		Kwa	Koyo	Kru
Attié		Kwa	Mambila	Mambiloid
Avikam		Kwa	Mbatto	Kwa
Batu		Tivoid	Neyo	Kru
Baule	Baoule	Kwa	Nnakenyare	Dakoid
Bete		Kru	Nyabwa	Kru
Bete of Guiberoa		Kru	Nzema	Kwa
Buru		Tivoid	Tepo	Kru
Dan		Mande	Yangkam	Tarokoid
Dida		Kru		

Table 1 is a wordlist of Ega sorted by English gloss and divided into a number of fairly large categories. It will be clear from this that there is a substantial section of the 'core' vocabulary that has no evident source. Parallels with other phyla are noted in the comments column². It is also clear that, contrary to the claim in Bole-Richard (1983), there are clear Kru cognates in areas of 'core' vocabulary.

¹ Thanks to Kay Williamson for comments on a preliminary version

² The list was also compared with Gur from Mensah & Tchagbale (1983) but without uncovering a single evident common form.

Table 1. Analysis of Ega data

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
Body Parts		
arm	òwlà	? cf. Proto-Ijò ḡárà ,
back	ìṅwǎè	
beard	ìva /a-	cf. Dida and other Kru vá
belly	onagù	# la- 'intestine' + ḡgù 'stomach'
blood	àsò	
body	isřukpá /a-	
bone	ikù	cf. common Kru kpa/kwa/kla but also Niger-Congo # -ku .
brain	àvèli	
breast	ìṅà	cf. Alladian ḡṅà , Eotile ḡṅè , and Kru: e.g. jrewè ṅṅè but also in Dakoid, e.g. Nnakenyare ṅṅa
buttocks, anus	até	cf. Abron tú , Eotile èyitè ,
cheek	àgbùgbù	cf. Godié, Bete (Kru) gbugbu
chest	èdègbè /a-	cf. Neyo (Kru) digblè also Kwa, Abure èdá ,
chin	ìmàvú /a-	cf. Alladian emwá bù ('mouth-stone')
ear	elowá a-	cf. Nyabwa lòku ,
eye	efí /e-	
faeces	imní	cf. Dida ṅni , Neyo ṅlí , Abure àmíí , Eotile mí but an Atlantic-Congo root of the form (m)-bin (W.). Also cf. Proto-Ijò ḡíé , ? cf. Abure mííí ,
fart	umǎise	
finger	etá /i-	
flesh	ena	cf. Avikam ḡṅá , but this is Niger-Congo # -na for 'meat'.
foot	ibébé	
forehead	ìgbédè	cf. Attié gbá , Abbey gbèṅí ,
hair	ulòlò /e-	cf. Tepo lú púpú ,
hair of head	unulóló	head+ hair
hand	ikósá	cf. Dan (Mande) kò , also Baule sá ,
intestines	inamní	cf. Nzema ḡṅalè reflecting Niger-Congo root # -na , # -la
head	inú /a-	cf. Adyukru núnṅ , Tepo lú , but also Niger-Congo roots # -lu-
heart	ekpóyró	cf. Aizi pro ,
jaw	ḡgbàṅḡ	
knee	onó /i-	widespread forms in EBC e.g. Mambila nò² Buru e-nú /a-nu , Batu ø-nún /á- cf. Attie wè ,
leg	ówè	
liver	ico	
mouth	ḡmà	cf. Mbatto ómé , Alladian emwá , but also Aizi mu ,
mucus	ikó	? cf. ḡḡó ,
nail	itónu	cf. Alladian átáwrò ,
nose	ìṅésí	cf. Alladian nnýè but also Kru: Tepo néé 'nostril' and Mande e.g. Guro ṅṅè 'nose-hole'
nostril	ḡnúvo	
neck	ùḡwè	cf. Ebrìe áḡwà , Avikam áwḡḡà , if C ₁ was originally a labial-velar
penis	ewli	cf. Eotile èwrá , Nzema tùwálè ,
pus	ifèni	cf. Abidji rífí ,
saliva	amadú	'mouth-water'
scabies	epí	
scarification	ànì	
shoulder	òdagblà	
skin	ḡyrò	cf. Alladian ewrú , Avikam èfrú ,
stomach	ḡḡò /i-	cf. Dan (Mande) gú , Mbatto ókò , Abbey òpu ,
sweat	owówà	? cf. Abidji lówò ,
tears	amé	
thigh	opú /i-	Widespread in Benue-Congo, e.g. Igala ḡ-pá , Erusu í-kpa
tongue	eno /i-	? cf. Eotile áné , Abure nàné , and similar forms.

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
tooth	enumà /a-	nominalisation of 'to bite', widespread Niger-Congo #-lum-
urine	ilokpá /a-	
vagina	ènròfi	cf. Alladian esè nevrī,
voice	ùmàrà /ε-	
wound, sore	ìbó /a-	? cf. Abidji lúbúmò,

People

baby	ofi weléèkpà	
chief	ùglòndòtò	
child, son	òfi /e-	
co-wife	òdòdá	
family	ìtòpù /a-	
father	òtò /-mà	cf. Dida to,
female	onájò /ɪ-	
friend	ògwayi	cf. Neyo ðeyi perhaps ? Nzema ègówó,
girl	esuwókpè	
grandparent	òjò	cf. Ebrie èji,
husband	ògbì	see 'man'
honky	otrukpofi	
in-law	òbò /ε-	
landlord (<i>hôte</i>)	olúgbofi	
leper	okú gbùgbù	= 'sickness-red'
man	ògbì	
mother	oná	cf. Neyo né, Attie nē, Abbey nò, Igbo òné etc. Niger-Congo root #-na
nephew	ògwe /e-	
old person	òglégléjàà	
older brother	ògbìtòyi	
person	òjàà	cf. Aizi jò but Niger-Congo root #-ni-, -nu- (W.)
rich man	ònígbì /ε-	
sister	onáyufi	
slave	òbà /ε-	
stranger	elúgbè	
twins	elóflè /a-	
uncle (maternal)	òdàbò	
wife	òsi /ε-	see 'woman'
witch	ògòzìbù	
woman	òsi /ε-	cf. Avikam, Krobu si
young girl	eswekpè /a-	
young man	onimá /ε-	
younger brother	òbétòyi	

Animals & parts

agama lizard	ewlégbì	
animal, meat	ena /ɪ-	cf. Ebrie éná but a Niger-Congo root #-na(ma)
animal sp.	ɪbè	
animal track	ùdú /e-	
ant	esísìàkpà	cf. Ebrie ésisré,
ant of corpse	ugofé	
antelope sp.	èdɪ /a-	
anthill I	igóle	
anthill II	idúlu /a-	
bat	òlà /ɪ-	
bee, honey	élòvle /i-	probably a compound. ? cf. Neyo (Kru) lovue, Aizi lu
bird	enakpíèkpà	'animal + x' but see Nyabwa nekpèè,
bird sp.	eté	
buffalo	ègò	cf. Ebrie gò, Krobu gbró,

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
bushbaby	ìvála /a-	
bushpig	ðvɔgbð /ɪ-	
butterfly	offi /i-	
'carp'	ìdókpa	cf. Ebrie kpékpè ,
cat	ɲáɲoná	cf. ɲrewe (Kru) ɲáŋ ,
catfish		
chameleon	glímyó	cf. Dida glimiò , and similar forms in other Kru
chicken	ɔwlá	
civet cat	ùblo /e-	
claw	itónu	
cock	ɔwlá 'gbi	chicken + male
cockroach	ðvɪvɪ	
cow	èdo /i-	cf. Ebrie èdwà byè , Adyukuru id ,
crab	ɔxá	cf. common west Kru # ka but similar roots widespread in Niger-Congo
crocodile I	ðwà	? cf. Alladian evá ,
crocodile II	ekpaké	cf. Dida kpàké , Koyo kaké ,
crow	dábðlò	
dog	ùve /e-	cf. Aizi (Kru) ve though both could be related to Mande-Congo #- bu
donkey	àflùmú	common regional term, e.g. Baule aflùmú , Aizi afrumu ,
duck		
earthworm	ufró	cf. Attie hrò , Abbey ru ,
egg	ìfò	
electric catfish	ùdðgbú	cf. Abidji, Adyukru didibò ,
elephant	ètè /a-	cf. Avikam étrí , Eotile èsù , but also Kru, Aizi dye , Tepo due ,
feather	ùtò /e-	cf. Avikam ètú , Abbey èté ,
fish	edúne /i-	'water-creature'
fly	enó	
flying squirrel	idó /a-	
francolin	èbúlèkpè	
goat	ewi	cf. Tepo wli , Aizi wri ,
goat, male	ibówà	Niger-Congo root #- bori .
grasscutter	gligbó	cf. Dida (Kru) grigbó but also Avikam (Kwa) grigbé , and forms with
		#- gbe in EBC, e.g. Yangkam gbə ^(k)
grasshopper	cɔgli	cf. Tepo kólu ,
green pigeon	ilòwlè	
guinea-fowl	kðyé	cf. Ebrie kðyé , but all regional Kwa languages have a similar form.
		Also Kru, cf. Aizi kɔɲje , Koyo kpògò ,
guinea-worm	ègúsrì	cf. Avikam égonì ,
hare	sésékpè	
hedgehog	iqó /a-	
hippo	eníggbèle	cf. Koyo ɲízðblé , Bete of Guiberoa (Kru) nígbùlí . It probably means
		'water-elephant' in another language
horn	ùgú /e-	cf. common eastern Kru forms such as Koyo gó
horse	kpàɲgó	cf. Aizi kpàɲgɔ , Krobu kpàɲgò but a regional culture-term
hump	ibúkù /a-	cf. Neyo buó , also ? Eotile àkùbó by metathesis
leopard	enó	
louse	ɔɲáàgɪ	cf. Abbey àɲù , also Kru e.g. Tepo nwó ,
manatee	dídɛ	
mason wasp	étuekpà	
monitor lizard	ɔflu /ɪ-	cf. Abure ðhólóvò ,
monkey	ìlɔ /a-	cf. Adyukru lów ,
mosquito	enómí	cf. Dida ɲwomiè , Koyo ɲómíye ,
mouse I	ðùcré	cf. Koyo (Kru) ðicrà although this is isolated
mouse II	ùgbò	cf. Abbey òkwó , Baulé kpó , but also Kru: Guere boè , Aizi bo ,
pangolin	eyí	
parrot I	ìsè /a-	
parrot II		
pigeon	igu /a-	

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
porcupine	dògòblí	
python	dyé	cf. Krobu àyrô, but also Kru, e.g. jrewe jrè,
rat	bwri	
scorpion	itatanìgla	cf. Tepo gàyà,
sheep	iwówlá	cf. Abure ðwâlî, but also Kru e.g. jrewe bawlé,
snail I	ìfi /a-	
snail II	èlè /I-	cf. Mbatto àlɔ,
snake generic	élò	cf. Agni èó, Abidji ólô, also Kru: Koyo mlebòlú
snake sp. I	èlòlú /i-	
spider I	gðjì	
spider II	újonu	
squirrel	etyákpà	
tail	ùlú /e-	cf. Adyukru lúwì, Baule lwá, Abure òlúè,
termite	ɔɲno	cf. Koyo ɲonó,
toad	ɔxlɔ	cf. Abure klðpókó but words with a kVrV formula are widespread in Africa
tortoise	òge /i-	? cf. Nzema èwòyà,
turtle	odúge	water + tortoise
warthog	ibukpè	
worm	ufló	Kru, e.g. jrewe hũlò,
wing	upewú /e-	
Plants		
atieke	àvèjá	
banana	elaba /a-	? cf. Hausa ayaba
baobab	ðvè	cf. Koyo vada,
bark	iyrukpá	#-kpa element is a Niger-Congo root
bean	àðì	? cf. Krobu àbòlú
branch	ulú /e-	
bunch I	ìgdlà /a-	
bunch II	ìdà /a-	
cassava	èvèjá /a-	
coconut	ɲwá	
cocoyam	èkoko	cf. Nzema èkùkò, Agni kòókò, Nyabwa koókò but similar forms occur throughout the region
cola sp. I	ðgá	cf. Nzema èyèsélè, but also Kru: Aizi ge, Koyo gole,
cola sp. II	èdà /I-	
cotton	jèsé fóxó	cf. Krobu jèse, but a regional culture-word
fruit	ìdò /a-	
gourd	ewá	< Baule àw à. Likely to be a culture-term in this region
grass	uxlú	
guava	gòyávò	<French
indigo	gàlì	
leaf	ðlòkú /I-	cf. Neyo joku,
leaf sp. I	ɪbá /a-	
leaf sp. II	ðvðvð /I-	
lime	idogógbledò	
maize	ðìdì	cf. Dida ðìdì, Avikam, Alladian dùdu, Abidji dodo, but a recent culture-word.
millet	ɲɔ	cf. Abbey ɲɔ, Nzema ɲòú, but also Kru: Bete ɲɔ,
mushroom	ðlata /I-	
okra	ègbátr	cf. Baule gbðlu, Ebrie ègbòk ^{hwê} , also Kru: gbòé. Koyo gbàgbáa
palm sp. I	ðdà /a-	
palm sp. II	ilofó /a-	
palm-nut	àwà	
palm-wine	alolú	cf. Alladian àvá, Abure èvê, also Kru: jrewe wê,
parasolier	òkðdú	

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
pepper	bàyè	cf. Attie byéko ,
plantain	elabá	see banana. ? metathesis of forms such as Krobu bǎndá
raffia palm	òli /a-	
reed	òlí /i-	
rice	isáxá	cf. Ebrie ěsáká , Neyo saka but #- saka forms widespread in region. A culture-word.
root	ùsùgblù /e-	
rubber	àpáá	cf. Avikam, Ebrie àpǎ also Kru: Bete pà , Did àpa but a culture-term in the region
seed	epí	Niger-Congo root #- pi .
shea-butter	gwû	< Krobu etc. îgwê ,
silk-cotton	òvè /a-	
'sponge'	mínà	cf. Dida mína , also Kwa: Abure mǎnè , Ebrie ěmrà , but a regional culture-word
(loofah?)		
tobacco	àsrà	cf. Aizi, Abidji, Ebrie àsrà , but a regional culture-word
tree -generic	ote /a-	Niger-Congo root #- ti . cf. e.g. Abbey tí , also Kru: Wobe tu ,
tree sp. I	oló /a-	
wood	ize /a-	
yam	eyá	
Natural World		
ashes	alólò	? cf. Yoruba érú ,
bush	ukólò	cf. ? Krobu kó , Tepo kwlá but also Benue-Congo roots, e.g. Eggon a-kala , Horom kǎrò , Akpes àhàlà ,
charcoal	axówli	
claw	itónu	
clay, mud	ìvla	cf. East Benue-Congo roots, e.g. Cara mvil , Berom vwel , Rukul amwel
cloud	ùyřélú	cf. Alladian nyù , Abidji jrú ,
day	ìjì	cf. Bete yří , Krobu ce , Abure ěcì
dry season I	yřóbà	cf. Krobu wǎbrê , Abidji yěgbê ,
dry season II	kòkwè	
dust	ùgbówu	cf. Koyo òàòùu
evening	ágwétisù	
field I	ítò	
field II	ègàgblè	? cf. Neyo lágba , Attie gbá ,
fire	ìkà	cf. Kru: Kuwaa kā and Bakwe kapu . These are, however, exceptional within Kru.
firewood	uje	cf. Baule jè , Ebrie ěcè ,
God	inagà /a-	cf. Koyo lagò , Ebrie pǎkǎ . #- na elements are common in words for 'God' in this region.
gold	àsìké	< originally Hausa aziki 'wealth' though via other languages. cf. Koyo sikà , Twi siká 'gold'
grave	adí	cf. Niger-Congo #- li 'to bury', Proto-Ijò đíđi ,
ground I	àti	
ground II	òlòlò	cf. Koyo òdòu , Mbatto òdò ,
hailstone	ilálá /a-	
hearth	igúyrú /a-	
hill	ìyròkpò	the #- kpo element is widespread in Kwa, e.g. Baule kpòle , Alladian nkpò and related forms appear in East Benue-Congo, e.g. PEG *- kòŋ
honey	ògò	cf. Mbatto ókòò ,
house	eleteyí	cf. Neyo lété
iron	àdǎblá	cf. Avikam àdǎbrá , but a culture-word.
market	awáži	cf. Bete of Guiberoa (Kru) gwǎ'zi and related forms
medicine I	upó /e-	
medicine II	ididè /a-	
meeting-place	ùyrélú	cf. Tepo jrú ,
mist		

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
month	ùfè	see 'moon'
moon	ùfè /ε-	Niger-Congo root #-fe. cf. Eotile éfè, Avikam éfé etc.
morning I	óflɪ	? cf. Koyo zəplí,
morning II	ḡóḡí	
morning III	ḡḡòmóḡ	
mound	idúké /a-	
night	ùdodó	cf. Bete dudo , Krobu dɔné
pond	ḡvḡḡḡ /ɪ-	
potash	àglú	
puddle	ɪtɔkpá	
rain	edú	Volta-Congo, e.g. Proto-Gurunsi *du, CB *-dùmbí continuous rain
rainbow	ulélé /e-	cf. Abbey lélé (also exceptional within Kwa)
rainy season I	odúḡó	
rainy season II	igúdè	
river	udúḡbí	cf. Mbatto óduḡe but also Nupe èdù 'large river'
road	ḡvḡḡḡ /ε-	
salt	àḡḡ	cf. Koyo ḡùlù , Abbey ḡḡv , Alladian ngḡḡè ,
sand	ḡḡóḡ	cf. Abbey ḡḡḡḡḡ ,
sea	ḡḡḡè	< Dida ḡḡè
seed	epí /i-	old Niger-Congo root #-bi, meaning 'child, seed'
shame	ḡḡḡḡ	< Nzema nḡḡí ,
shelter	obí	
sickness	okú	
smoke	ugósi	cf. Guro (Mande) cé-goi (cé = fire). This may be exceptional within Mande
star	etáfune	
stone	igófi	Perhaps from Mande, as #ḡ ^w V- is a common first element in CVCV structures, e.g. Dan ḡwḡ
sun	eyéfi	#eyi forms are found in Central Nigeria, especially Nupoid languages. Semé, the enclave Kru language among Gur speakers, has ye .
thorn	èḡú /ɪ-	
today I	ḡḡḡḡ	? check
today II	íye	
tomorrow	ḡḡḡḡ	
village	ḡḡḡḡ	cf. Bete (Kru) ḡḡḡḡ and related languages, but also Baule klḡ , Abron kùró ,
wall	ubúḡḡḡḡ	
water	adú	cf. Ebrie édù , and perhaps Eotile ḡzú
week	ḡḡḡḡḡ	< Dida ḡḡḡḡḡ but cf. also Krobu krí ,
well	idúḡḡ	
wind	upupolú /e-	cf. Dida pupulú , Eotile èfùḡḡ , Mbatto ópùḡè
world	ḡḡḡḡ	
year	oḡ ^w ḡi	? < French
yesterday	ḡḡḡḡ	

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
Propensities		
debt	ùdú /e-	cf. Avikam èdḽ,
darkness	isúkpò /a-	
death	ekú	cf. Bete kú, but a Niger-Congo root #-ku.
dirt	uplɔ	
enema	ece	
extremity	umé /ε-	
fever	òyì	cf. Igboid óyí 'cold',
fight	ùgḽlú /ε	
forgetting	ilú	
friendship	ùlḽ	
funeral	ɔwlé	
half	imekpí /a-	
heap	ùdé /e-	
hole	ìgbḽ	cf. Eotile àbḽ, Dida ḽúku, but #-bo roots are also found in Gur, e.g. Dagbane boyli and EBC, e.g. Aten boḽ
hunger	ìgḽ	cf. Dida ḽwɔmɔ, Koyo gbìgbe, Mbatto óḽḽ, Abbey ayò, Ebrìe ákò, but perhaps much more widespread e.g. Mada (Plateau) gyḽḽ
hunting I	ìvi	
hunting II	olí	
inheritance	àja	throughout Kwa in this region but also cf. Aizi aja, Godie ja, suggesting a regional culture-word
interest	ègḽkḽ	
itch	epí /a-	
left	ɔmɔsí	
lie	eḽwé	
madness	uyɾu	
matter	ìmàyì /a-	
medicine	awázì	
middle	ágodè	
moment	ìpù	
name	ìní	cf. Kru: Koyo ḽíní also Kwa: Adyukru nín, Abidji ínè, Avikam èní. Niger-Congo root ?
namesake	atékpà	< Dida àtíkpa
naughtiness	afya	
news	ìgwe /a-	
opening	ùmà /ε-	
place	áḽú	
price	eḽé	
proverb	ìḽúḽwḽé	cf. Abbey ànáyá,
quarrel	èzḽ	
riddle	ifuneyúḽwḽé	see under 'story'
right	ḽmḽgbì	
shame	ḽḽḽḽ	? < Nzema nḽnḽ,
sickness	okú	
sleep	àlà	cf. Niger-Congo root #-la 'lie down, sleep',
slice	ɔnḽḽ /i-	
smallpox	eýífi	
smell I	èvɩ	
smell II	upḽ	cf. Tepo nú and other Kru also widespread nVn- roots for 'to smell' in EBC
step, row	ùlḽgbì /ε-	
story	ifuneyúḽwḽé	x + 'back' cf. Neyo núnúo,
thing	èjè	cf. Ebrìe áyí, Krobu yí, but then also East Benue-Congo parallels, e.g. Tarok iyám

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
thirst	idúnógò	water + ?
tracks	ìbé /a-	
truth	nàwélé	cf. Abidji nàwrê, but probably a culture-word in this region
tuberculosis	odegbe kú	stomach + sickness
unhappiness	isesù	
war	òtá	cf. Ebrie áthà, Alladian aà, Mbatto óta, also Kru throughout #tu
weight	òlólú	Niger-Congo #-lu 'to be heavy'
work	òòbòli	cf. Dida loòbòli,
whistling	òfèndè /e-	
yaws	dògò	cf. Nzema èdò, Abbey do, Agni dòbè,
Objects + food products		
arrow	ulú	cf. Koyo lí,
axe I	égbò	cf. Eotile égbò, Wobe (Kru) gbo'pa, Nyabwa gbékpà and related languages but also Nupe egbà and Proto-Nupoid #-gbã
axe II	èdù /a-	
bag (hunting)	utú /e-	
bag	bàgì	? cf. English 'bag'. A culture –word found in the region
basket	itòkwè	? cf. Abure èké,
bow	òplí /i-	
bracelet	isùgbò /a-	
broom (house)	ìpòpò /a-	cf. Krobu pòpò, Abbey púsà,
broom (yard)	ivòvó /a-	
canoe	ògòyíró /i-	< Dida gólú though also cf. Krobu kró,
chair	ìkpò	cf. Abidji líkpè,
charm	iwisi	cf. Alladian áwá,
chewstick	ègà	cf. Avikam éjá, but a culture-word
cloth, clothing	òdá /i-	cf. Mbatto ódádíé, Abbey tàlé, Tepo danu,
comb	uflá /e-	< Kru e.g. Koyo flá but cf. Avikam lófwá with metathesis
cookpot	ègú	
cowry	èḡwè	cf. jrewe nūwó, ? Avikam nigbè,
cutlass	dwànì	< Dida dḡànì, Mbatto ódḡ, but this might be a culture-word related to widespread #ada forms in Nigeria.
dayroom	òpàlá	cf. Baule àla,
deck-chair	dájà	
door	igbe	cf. cf. jrewe gbo, Bete gbàlé, also Kwa: Ebrie àgbò, Mbatto ógbó,
doorway	ugò-mà	
drum	égbí	cf. Ebrie ábì, Mbatto óbìi although these are probably culture-words. They also resemble the EBC root #-bì.
fan	òpòpò	cf. Abidji pòpò, Attie pèpè, but a regional culture-word
fat	ìḡì	
flour	ubú /e-	cf. Avikam èpú, Abidji ípú,
food	òlí /i-	cf. Bete lìlì, Baule alyè, but relates to VC #-dì 'to eat'
fork	àgàgbà	
granary	ìpàpà /a-	
gun	ìkókà	
gunpowder	òkalí	
hat	ìkpó	cf. Dida kpoókpo, Ebrie ákpró, but a local culture-word. Also Igbo òkpú.
hoe	ùvèkù /e-	
hook	èḡwè	cf. Eotile èkùè, but also throughout Kru: e.g. Wobe kwé
horn (ivory)	umónú /e-	cf. Mbatto mḡmù, Ebrie ámámrù,
knife	olúwó /i-	
loincloth male	àblàkú	
loincloth female	ivòvù	cf. Ebrie àbràkú, but a widespread culture-term in the region
manila	òdàgbú /e-	

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
mat	ḍgbé	cf. Koyo gbàtá , Adyukru ògò ,
meal	ɔlí	cf. Nzema àfiè ,
millstone	ɔḡasé	cf. Alladian ebwasê ,
money I	ìpì	
money II	díráà	
mortar	ìlògò /a-	cf. Abbey àlo , Krobu wró , Aizi lo , Guere dòò ,
nail	ulú /e-	
needle	uméselú /e-	< Baule ámēsřē
net for fishing	ìdàdà /a-	cf. Krobu, Agni dada also Kru: Aizi dada , Neyo dàda . A culture-word in this region
net for hunting	eségbli /a-	
net III	zḍ	? cf. Benue-Congo e.g. Nupe esa , Kulu isàk .
oil	àpì	see 'fat'. cf. Tepo pná ,
paddle	ùbìlò /e-	
palmwine	aḡlalolú	
pestle, large	ḍgbí	
pestle, small	igḍúḡḍó	? cf. Abbey orúgbò
pipe	èmagú	
porridge	afufú	cf. Agni, Baule m̀vùfú . A regional culture-word
pot	èḡú	
pounded yam	pá	cf. Ebrie èpá , Krobu, Abidji mpá
room	upalá /e-	
rope	upá /e-	cf. Tepo (Kru) pátà though this form is isolated within Kru, also Abidji bá ? cf. Proto-Ijò fólou ,
sauce I	uplu	
sauce II	ḍnḍgbá /i-	
sauce III	àsru	
shed	ḍvlu	
shoe	gbàbusá	cf. Ebrie égbàwà but a regional culture-word
shrine	imasá /a-	
spear	elú /i-	cf. Gban (Mande) dú , but ? Kru: Neyo lí ,
staff	kpámá	cf. Avikam kpàma but widespread in the region as a culture-term
stick	ete /a-	see tree
suck	ḡà	cf. Mbatto ḡē ,
threshing tray	èḡòbé	cf. Abure òbú , Krobu gbàlè ,
trap (animal) I	èdàlè /a-	
trap (animal) II	emáyì	cf. Ebrie émé ,
tool	òvè	
vehicle	ḍḡóló	= 'canoe'
whistle	vlévlécó	
winnowing tray	èḡòbè	
youth	ɔnimá	

Numerals

one	ilogbó	cf. Mbatto lóbo , Koyo bo ,
two	ḡḡ	cf. Eotile àpá , Abure ápù , and widespread in this region.
three	ìtá	cf. Koyo ta , Niger-Congo #- ta
four	ìlè	cf. Abbey alé ,
five	ìḡwè	cf. Dida ḡḡbi , Niger-Congo #- na
six	ìḡwḍḍ	? 5 + 1
seven	ìḡwalḡḡ	5 + 2
eight	ìḡwalítà	5 + 3
nine	ìḡwalìlè	5 + 4
ten	izù	? cf. Abron dú? ,
twenty	úḡlu	cf. Godié (Kru) ḡḍlò and related forms in other W. Kru languages
hundred	èḡluèḡwè	20 x 5. Most Kwa languages have a distinct lexeme, but three others use the 20 x 5 formulation, although with different basic terms. This pattern

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
---------------	--------------	----------------------------

is also common in Kru

Adjectives

all	fí	
big	-gàgà	
black	kɪkɪ	
good	kɔfɔ	
many	gàgàsa	
new	wólòwa	
plenty	ɔ̀tùkpà	cf. Ebie ɔ̀dudú ,
red	-gbògbò	
rough	àgbókí	
round	ìkpòklòdò	cf. Baulé kùklú but similar words are found across the region and indeed the world.
small	-ɲékpà	
smooth	ɔ̀yéɔ̀yé	cf. Abidji trɛ̀trɛ̀ , and similar forms in many languages of the region
wet	wólò	? cf. Baule flólò ,
wide	pà àtí	
white	-fòfò	cf. Eotile fúfú but Niger-Congo root #- fu .
yellow	-púpú	

Conjunctions etc.

and	áyí	
close to	ìsò	
if	áyí...-xa	cf. Avikam èyi ,
inside	-ɲò	? Baule nú ,
this one	-má	
that one	-ɲó	
with	áyí	
yonder	asúwoɲú	

Interrogatives

what?	ìyà
when?	
who?	òná

Verbs

to answer	tánà	cf. 'to speak'
to arrive	ɲé	cf. Tepo ɲné ,
to ask pardon	yúywè	
to attach	ɲwà	cf. Neyo gwa ,
to be able	kwlá	
to be afraid	bà okú	
to be alive	yró	
to be big	gà	
to be cooked	kù	
to be difficult	fí ìsò	
to be dry	yíyo	
to be far	wlá àtí	
to be full	yé	#yí is widespread in Kwa
to be good	kòfò	
to be hard	fí ìsò	
to be heavy	lú	A Niger-Congo root. cf. Abure lò , Mbatto loà , etc.

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
to be hot	fló	cf. Proto-Ijò ófirí ,
to be in flower	flérì	< French?
to be liquid	crífi	
to be narrow	ménà ìsù	
to be old	ɲné	
to be pregnant	gɔ̀ ògù	x + stomach
to be raw	ɲwǎ̀è	
to be ripe	gbɔ̀	cf. Baule blò ,
to be standing	pú èti	
to be strong	fi ìɲɔ̀	
to be thick	ɔ̀nè isù	
to be tired	syé	? cf. widespread fé roots (e.g. Agni, Attie, Baule)
to beat (drum)	ɔ̀è	cf. ɲrewe be , Dida ɔ̀lá , also Kwa: Krobu bré , Baule bó ,
to bite	gɔ̀	
to blow	fó	cf. Eotile fù , but Niger-Congo #fu
to boil, cook	wélè	
to break	kótɔ̀	
to breathe	sú àɲɔ̀	verb + 'air'.
to burn	fyá	cf. Abure fè ,
to build	kɔ̀	cf. Alladian kù ,
to buy	pè	cf. Dida pià , Mbatto pe , Abidji pà , Abbey ve , Proto-Ijò fé ,
to call	gló	
to carry	gɔ̀	
to catch	ɔ̀	
to change	kéci	
to chew	tà	Niger-Congo root #ta
to choose	gbazfàɲɲɔ̀	cf. Dida gbazrifi ,
to close	ci	
to come	wà	cf. Abbey wa , Krobu wǎ , but widespread in Niger-Congo
to come back	kpàná ìbé	
to cook	gà	
to cough	kpóssɔ̀	cf. Eotile kónzɔ̀ , Mbatto krɔ̀ , but similar forms widespread in Africa. cf. PWS #kual- , kuan- (W.:245) cf. ɲrewe gè , Mbatto gɔ̀
to count	gà	
to cut	vyá	
to dance	iwlí	cf. 'to sing'
to defecate	ɔ̀	
to die	kù	Niger-Congo root
to dig	gwe	cf. Benue-Congo, e.g. Igala gwà , Ayere gbo , CB #gúɲgù
to dig up	sú àtí	
to dive	pá	
to do	kɔ̀	cf. Adyukru kok ,
to dream	ɲólò	cf. PWS #la 'to lie down or sleep' but #na- for 'to dream' is common in Benue-Congo cf. Tepo ná , Baule nɔ̀ , Volta-Congo root. cf. Baule dí , Abure li ,
to drink	nò	
to eat	li	
to fall	ɔ̀ àtí	
to feel	mó	
to finish	ɔ̀	? cf. Mande
to fish	pá	
to float	sépo	
to flow	bú	cf. Godie púlá , Abure bólò ,
to fly	fé	cf. Ebrie fè , Abure fè , Nzema fi ,
to follow	gɔ̀ ìtò	cf. Ebrie gè tʰá ,
to get s.t. I	wli	
to get s.t. II	xé	cf. Ebrie gè , Mbatto ge , Abidji hè ,
to give	pù	
to give birth	bi	cf. Alladian bi , Attié ho bi , but Niger-Congo connected with #-bi for

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
		'child'
to go	m̀̀	cf. common Kru, Proto-Ijò mu, m̩ , also Adyukru (Kwa) im , though this is exceptional
to go down	dé èti	cf. Ebrie dyà thé , ɟrewe ti ,
to go in	wiénè	? cf. Agni, Baule wùlò
to go up	ɓ̀̀	
to go up to	pé	
to greet	kò mókà	'make salutation'
to grow	lò	cf. Ebrie lé ,
to hang	gɓé	
to have sex with I	dó	cf. Mbatto di ,
to have sex with II	m̩̀̀	
to hear	g̀̀	
to hide	dá	
to hold	ɓ̀̀	cf. Ebrie ɓ̀̀ p̩hè ,
to insult	vlá	cf. Alladian wrà , Avikam wra , Abbey ra ,
to jump	kpátà	
to kick	ɓ̀̀	cf. Ebrie ɓ̀̀
to kill	wá	cf. Abidji wò , Mbatto we , Alladian wri but found throughout Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan, e.g. Oubi (Kru) wòlò , Debri Nubian wur- . Westermann (1927:225)
to kneel down	g̀̀ inó àti	
to know	ɟ̀̀	cf. Eotile ɟ̀̀ni , Avikam ɟ̀̀i , but an Atlantic-Congo root #-niN- cf. Westermann (1927:x)
to laugh	ci	
to lay egg	d̀̀	cf. Nzema tú , Abidji r̀̀d̀̀ ,
to learn	dídà	
to lend	ɓ̀̀ ànà	cf. Nzema, Agni ɓ̀̀ ,
to lie	tútù ugwé	
to lie down	dé èti	cf. Agni dá , Mbatto lé but these are probably local variants of Niger-Congo #-la, #-ra.
to light (fire)	ɓ̀̀	
to look at	véfi	
to look for	yíyè	
to love, like	ɟámà	
to make, do	kò	
to make fun of	ci	
to marry	ỳ̀	? Avikam zye ,
to measure	kéli	
to mix	cíkàná ɟ̀̀	
to pierce	flu	? Kru e.g. Guéré flé
to plant I	lè àti	
to plant II	ɓ̀̀ àti	
to play	pá	
to pluck	kpé	cf. Ebrie kpà , Abbey kpa ,
to pound	lò	? PMC #tu- cf. Westermann (1927:x)
to pour	cé èti	? cf. Abidji kù éi ,
to pull	ɟ̀̀ri	
to punch	d̀̀	
to rain	nà	cf. Mbatto nrā , Alladian nā ,
to remember	gwá	cf. Abbey yáya ,
to rot	ɓ̀̀	cf. Ebrie ɓ̀̀ , Ibibio bù 'be rotten', PB #-bund-. but Niger-Congo (Westermann, 1927:213)
to run	bà	
to say	wa	
to scratch	ɟwí	
to search for	yíyè	cf. Bete y̩y̩é , also 'to want'

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
to see	wlì	cf. Mbatto, Abbey wu,
to sell	lè fè	#-la is widespread in Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan
to send back s.o.	bá	cf. Abidji bè,
to sew	kplá	cf. Krobu, Baule kpá
to shake	dókò	cf. Avikam jòkò, Alladian jòkò, Abbey kò,
to sharpen	yó	cf. Aizi sò, Wobe sōā, Eotile sò, Mbatto se, and other Kwa with s + front vowel
to shave	cú	
to shoot	ḡè	
to shout	kéli ṅò	
to show	dá	
to sing	wlé	cf. Kru: Nyabwa ḡle, also Proto-Bantu *-bin- and Degema ḡene 'dance'
to sit down	gálè	? cf. Bete guli...se
to sleep	lá àlà	'to sleep a sleep'. Niger-Congo root
to slide	drígbà	
to smoke	gbò	cf. Ebrie gbò
to snore	klú	
to speak	tá	cf. Abure tîā but this root can be reconstructed at least to PAC (Westermann, 1927).
to spit	pé	
to spurt	pé	
to steal	là	
to suffer	kwíḡra	
to swallow	ḡè	? Mbatto pyè
to swear oath	jè	
to sweat	cócò	
to sweep	ṅó	Perhaps cf. Dida ṅupù
to swim	yró	
to take	yù	? cf. Abidji cò,
to taste	fúfò àṅì	
to think	ḡúḡú	cf. Avikam gugu,
to throw	wálà	
to tighten	ménà ìsù	cf. Mbatto mlō, Attie mâ,
to turn	bítì	cf. Baule bli,
to understand	cá	cf. Eotile sà, Avikam se,
to undress	só ṅò	? cf. Attie sò ṅé
to urinate	lò ilòkpá	x + urine
to vomit	wówà	Perhaps related to widespread Kru forms such as Konobo wòlà
to wait for	ṅàṅà	
to wake up	pé	cf. Abbey púlè, Ebrie frè,
to walk	nà	cf. Krobu ná, Mbatto nà,
to go for a walk	bí	From common Kru bi
to want	yíyè	also 'to search for'
to wash	fóṅḡò	? cf. Adyukru ès efn, Nupe fu
to watch over	kwlé	
to weave	ḡù	Niger-Congo root. cf. Nupe lu+, Vute lùù and Westermann (1927:252)
to weep	tù	cf. Nzema sú, Mbatto tō,
to yell	kéli ṅò	

French to translate concession, campement, butter, cousin de tete, enfler, enfler, fourmi-magnan, fourmi-cadavre, gendre,

Conclusions

Ega illustrates very well the problem of classifying languages with large amounts of aberrant vocabulary. It has clearly taken into its lexicon substantial vocabulary from distinct branches of Niger-Congo. It has a

system of noun-prefixes far more complete and regular than any nearby Kwa relatives. In principle, Ega could be;

- a) A Kwa language long-separated from other Kwa languages
- b) An independent branch of Niger-Congo or Volta-Congo that has come under the influence of Kwa, Kru and Mande
- c) A non-Niger-Congo language that has come under these influences

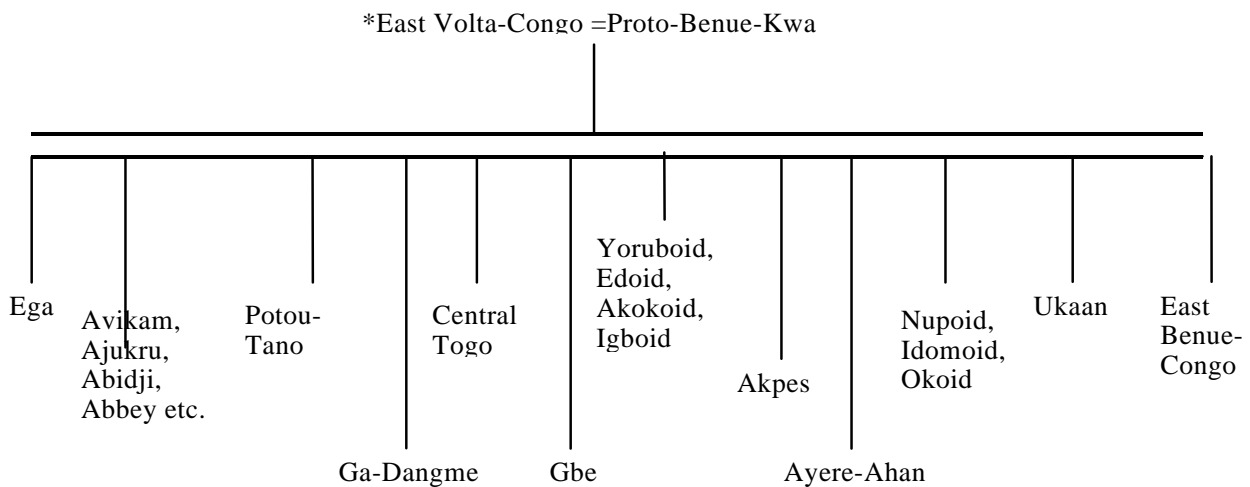
Considerable further work will be required to develop a more sophisticated means of deciding between these hypotheses. However, Ega provides a good illustration of problems of simply encompassing all West African languages in well-defined groupings on the basis of a limited number of cognates/lookalikes.

On the basis of this list the uniqueness of Ega is confirmed with a surprising number of basic lexical items showing no cognates in nearby languages. An intriguing feature is the way cognates are found with languages scattered across Kwa, Kru and to a lesser extent, Mande. Even the now-dominant Dida language apparently shows no special relationship with Ega. This suggests that Ega has had a long period of isolation, moving around and interacting with different languages in different branches of Niger-Congo.

The nominal prefix system, though distinctive for the area, does not align it with any particular branch of East Volta-Congo. It does suggest that we should be looking east rather than west and there is no trace of either functioning or fossil systems of noun-suffixes suggesting Kru or Gur. The occasional cognates with East Benue-Congo are very suggestive, and it seems possible that Ega would be best treated as a single branch of East Volta-Congo, part of the diversifying dialect chain that came later to be regarded as the Kwa languages.

If so, then the reformulation of East Volta-Congo would look something like this;

Figure 1. East Volta-Congo



This paper is not intended to justify this overall fragmentation of Kwa and West Benue-Congo, only to illustrate the hypothesis that the whole group needs to be regarded as a dialect chain that has diversified and that Ega is best regarded as a single branch with no underlying special relationship to its nearest geographical neighbours.

References

Bole-Richard, R. 1983. Ega. pp. 359-401 in *Atlas des langues Kwa de Côte d'Ivoire, Vol 1*. ed. G. Herault. ILA, Abidjan.

Bole-Richard, R. n.d. *Lexique Ega*. ms, ILA, Abidjan.

