

THE BENDI LANGUAGES: MORE LOST BANTU LANGUAGES?

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N.B. a shortened version of this paper was submitted to the proceedings of the above workshop but it has never appeared.

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1. Introduction

The Bendi languages are located in the northern part of Cross River State in southeastern Nigeria and adjacent parts of Cameroon (Crozier and Blench 1992; Dieu & Renaud 1983). The name Bendi (Bê-ndi) was originally proposed by David Crabb (1967) from the word for ‘person’. Winston (1964, 1965) referred to them as ‘Boki-Èbekwara’ on the basis of their most well-known members, but this name has not been adopted. Greenberg (1966) classified them as part of Cross River, and this has been accepted by subsequent authors (e.g. in the influential Williamson 1971) which also reviews previous scholarship. The absence of published data may well explain why their classification has generally been repeated without comment.

Very little research has been conducted on Bendi languages and modern work that does exist, mostly on Bekwara and Bokyi, remains unpublished or inaccessible. Early materials can be found in Koelle (1854), Mansfield (1908), Thomas (1914)¹ and Johnston (1919-22) (see Table 2 for a synopsis of sources). Modern, linguistically-informed material begins with the Benue-Congo Comparative Wordlist (Williamson and Shimizu 1968; Williamson 1973), which lists only three or four languages. Apart from these, the only major publications are the Bokyi Dictionary (Bruns 1975) and an introduction to the language (Täwo-Ásu 1977) both of which are far from accessible. The Bendi group is notable for having one language (Ubang) that has male and female speech-forms, although documentation for this comes from a newspaper feature (Umoh 1989), which does, however, include a wordlist. Kay Williamson also has some mss. giving student orthographic wordlists for otherwise completely unrecorded languages such as Bumaji and Afrike.

The major sources are thus unpublished; these consist of wordlists collected by Paul Bruns, Del Springer and David Crabb in the 1960s. They are handwritten and much-photocopied, and have no explanation of the symbols used, although these can be reconstructed from Crabb's Ekoid lists. Nonetheless, the words collected correspond largely to the lexical items in the Benue-Congo Comparative Wordlist making it relatively easy to compile fairly complete datasets. The other major unpublished source is a Bekwara dictionary compiled by Ron Stanford to whom I am grateful for a copy. Chumbow (1986) discusses Ogberia, a dialect of Obe, in an unpublished conference paper. Rumours abound of other lists but I have yet to see them. Faraclas (1989:378) mentions manuscript sources but omits to describe their whereabouts, as well as Ibadan University long essays on Bete by Briggs and Oni.

Following Greenberg's assignation to Cross River I, various hypotheses have been put forward. Crabb (1967) considered the Bendi languages ‘close’ to Bantu, but excluded them on the basis of the absence of nasal prefixes. Williamson (1971:361) follows Greenberg, making Bennett & Sterk (1977) the first to break away from this consensus, arguing for a Bantoid link. They proposed a ‘WeI’ grouping which placed Bendi with Bantoid after the splitting-off of Mambiloid. Williamson (1989:264-265) demonstrated that the basis for their argument was false and reinstated Bendi within Cross River putting forward some evidence (op. cit. Figure 11.5). In the same publication, Faraclas (1989) lists the Bendi languages with Cross River without further comment and Watters (1989) excludes them from South Bantoid. Connell (1998) provides a useful history of these debates and also shows that Williamson's evidence is of doubtful validity. Connell (op. cit.) sets out contrastive tables of lexical innovations grouping Bendi with Bantoid and with Cross River. Although he concludes that the evidence marginally supports Cross River it is with the rider that it is inconclusive.

A major reason why the debate is so little advanced is that hardly any data has been published on the Bendi languages. This paper^{2,3} therefore provides a synthesis of lexical data on Bendi languages based on this largely unpublished material, drawn from a variety of sources. The sources are largely reproduced as in the

¹ The three Bendi vocabularies given in Thomas (Dama, Gayi and Yakoro) were ‘forwarded from the Provincial Office’ rather than collected directly by him.

² I would like to thank the late Tom Cook, who originally collected the manuscripts on which this paper is largely based and the authors of those manuscripts who are anonymous. Thanks to Bruce Connell and Kay Williamson who have seen and commented on versions of parts of this paper and made available relevant documents.

³ This shortened omits most of the comparative wordlists and focuses on the evidence for classification.

original in the light of uncertainties as to the symbols. The intention is to make possible a larger-scale comparison with non-Bendi languages to provide richer evidence for a convincing classification.

2. Background information

2.1 Bendi populations

Table 1 lists the presently known Bendi languages with population figures and dialects (largely from Grimes 2000).

Table 1. The Bendi languages

			Comment
Afrike		3500	
Alege	Ugbe	1200	
Bekwara	Yakoro	100,000	
Bete-Bendi	Dama	36,800	
Bokyi	Ŋki	144,000	also in Cameroun
Bumaji		?	twelve villages
Obanliku		65000	includes Basang, Bebi, Bishiri, Bisu (=Gayi), Busi
Ubang (m./ f.)		?	
Ukpe-Bayobiri		12000	
Utugwong		?	includes Obe, Oboso, Okorogung, Okorotung

It should be clear, however, that many of these figures are very old and have been repeated from one reference book to another.

2.2 Data sources on Bendi languages

Table 2 lists the sources for data used in this paper;

Table 2. Sources for Bendi languages

Name	Sources	Name	Sources
Afrike	Williamson ms.	Bokyi (Osokom = Okundi)	Bokyi mss.; Koelle (1854); Thomas (1914)
Alege	BCCW; Koelle (1854)	Bokyi (Wula)	Bokyi mss.
Basang	Bendi mss.	Bumaji	Williamson ms.
Bayobiri	Bendi mss.	Busi	Bendi mss.
Bekwara	Stanford ms; Thomas (1914)	Okorogung	Bendi mss.
Bendi	Bendi mss; Williamson ms.	Okorotung	Bendi mss.
Bete	Bendi mss; Thomas (1914); Williamson ms; Williamson (1972)	Ubang (m.)	Bendi mss., Umoh (1989)
Bisu	Bendi mss. & Thomas (1914) [under Gayi]	Ubang (f.)	Bendi mss., Umoh (1989)
Bokyi (Dictionary)	Bruns (1975) & Täwo-Ásu (1977)	Ukpe	Bendi mss.
Bokyi (Abu=Baswo)	Bokyi mss.	Obe	Bendi mss; Williamson ms.
Bokyi (Kocwe)	Bokyi mss.	Ogberia	Chumbow (1986)
		Utugwong	Bendi mss.

I have adopted orthographic representations of Ubang male and female speech found in Umoh (1989) where the Bendi mss. are lacking, notably in the numerals.

2.3 Transcriptions

Given the diverse sources of the data, it has been transcribed directly from the sources without alteration. However, some of the symbols in the Bruns lists are best described as idiosyncratic and so the table gives notes on their likely values;

·	mid, central rounded vowel
æ	low, front, unrounded vowel

3. Datasheets and analyses

The following sample datasheets represent a composite of data from the sources given above, selected from a larger set of comparisons covering some 100 items. The choice of lexical items is entirely driven by the sources. The plural prefixes follow a forward slash, except in the rare cases where a stem-change occurs, when the complete plural is given. Bekwara seems to have deleted all morphological affixes marking singular/plural except in the case of a few nouns for persons, which is exceptional for the group as a whole.

	1. person	2. man	3. woman	4. child
Alege		a-néce /a-nése	ò-ŋɪŋɪɲè / è-	ò-ŋwǎ / è-bùan
Basang	ù-nnɪ / bɪ-		ù-ɲiɛ / bɪ-	ù-ŋwa / bɪ-bwɪn
Bayobiri			ò-ɲiɲě / bà-	ò-ŋwan / bà-bũŋ
Bekwara	ù-nì / è-	ù-ɲice / è-	ù-ɲiɲe / è-	ùŋwan / èbwan
Bendi	ù-ndi / bè-		ù-ŋgɪŋgiè / bɪ-	ù-ŋwe / bɪ-bwě
Bete	ù-ndi / bè-	ù-ŋgikíé /bè-, u-kíéɓ /bè-	ù-ɔgɪŋgiɛ / bè-	ù-ŋwa / bè-bwǎ
Bisu	ù-nɪ / bà-		ù-ɲiɛ / bà-ɲi	ù-ŋwǎí / bɪ-bwɛn
Bokyi (Dic)	-net / ba-	-ɲincéŋ /ba-	-ɲiɲi /ba-	/bwǎn
Bokyi (Abu)	o-net	o-ɲincyéŋ	o-ɲiɲi /ba-	wán
Bokyi (Irruan)				o-wé
Bokyi (Kocwe)	o-ni	o-ɲincyéŋ	o-ɲiɲi /bo-	
Bokyi (Osokom)	o-net	o-ɲincyá	o-ɲiɲi /ba-	wán
Bokyi (Wula)				
Busi	ù-nì / bà-		ù-ɲiɛ / bà-ɲi	ù-ŋwǎí / bèvɛí
Obe	ò-nì / bə-	ò-ntiè / bə-	ò-ɲiɲè / bə-	
Ogberia			òɲiɲe□	
Okorogung			ò-ɲiɲè / è-	ò-ŋwân / èbiàn
Okorotung			ù-ɲiɲè / è	u-ŋwân / è-biàn
Ubang (m.)	ò-nè / bèa-	onice	ò-ɲiɲiɛ / βè-	ò-ŋwa / βà-buǎ
Ubang (f.)	ò-nì / bèa-	oniŋe	ò-ɲiɲiɛ / βiè-	ò-ŋwan / βà-buǎŋ
Ukpe			ò-ɲiɲě / bà-	ò-ŋwǎ / bà-buǎ
Utugwong	ù-nì / è-		ù-ɲiɲè / è-	ù-nwân / è-biàn

Person/man/woman

It seems as if the terms for both 'man' and 'woman' in Bendi are related to the general term for 'person' with compounded second syllables designating 'male and 'female'. The #-ni root for person is found widely in Niger-Congo, notably in Atlantic and so is not diagnostic. The compounding to indicate gender appears to be a Bendi innovation. The #-net- forms in Bokyi are puzzling since they are otherwise found scattered in Plateau.

Child

This apparent suppletion in words for ‘child’ is very common throughout East Benue-Congo. In the plural forms, it looks as if the stem is the widespread #-bi root for ‘child’ with some nasal compounding. The bV- prefixes would then represent the old Niger-Congo plural marker for persons. Aten (ɲwɔn) and Ganang (i-ɲwɔn) (both Plateau) resemble the Bendi closely.

	5. head	6. eye	7. tooth	8. tongue	9. arm, hand
Alege	rì-fī / è-	rì-si / è-	ò-ǰǫŋ / i-	ri-bɛ	u-bue / ɛ-
Basang	rì-fī / à-		kù-faŋ / à-	kà-bérì / rì-	kù-bvwû / à-
Bayobiri	rì-fī / à-	rì-si / à-	ò-faŋ / i-	rì-bê / à-	kò-bue / à-
Bekwara	ìrìfī	ìrici	ìfaŋ	àbéré	àbó
Bendi	lì-fī / a-		ù-faŋ / i		hwù-buó / à
Bete	lì-fī / à	lìfī	ù-faŋ / i-	kà-bêl / li-	kù-buó / à-
Bisu	lì-fī / è-	lìfē	ù-faŋ / i-	kè-béélè / li-	kù-buô / ò-
Bokyi (Dic)	-fī / a-	dyi-ci / a-	-fǎŋ / a-	bu-byíbabaf / -	bu-bwô / a-
Bokyi (Abu)	le-syí				
Bokyi (Kocwe)	rə-syí				
Bokyi (Osokom)	dyi-syí				
Bokyi (Wula)	rì-fī / è-	rì-tsì / è-	ò-fǎŋ / i-	à-bórò / rì-	
Busi	rì-fé / è-		gù-faŋ / à-	gá-nàrê / rí-	gù-vô / è-
Okorogung	rì-fī / è-fī	rì-si / è-	ò-fǫŋ / i-	à-bírɔ	è-biě
Okorotung	ì-fī / è-	i-si / è-	ù-fǫŋ / i-	à-bírɔ / i-	ù-bie / è-
Ubang (m.)	ri-si / à-		ò-fǎ / i-	rì-bê / à-	kò-bê / à-
Ubang (f.)	rì-si / à-		ò-fǎ / i-	rì-bê / à-	kò-buè / à-
Ukpe	rì-fī-	rì-si / à-	ì-fǫŋ	rì-bê / à-	kò-bue / à-
Obe	rì-fī / è-	rì-tsì / è-	ò-fǎŋ / i-	à-bórò / rì-	ù-bíé / è-
Utugwong	rì-fī	rì-fī	ì-fǫŋ	à-bórò	è-biě

head

A weakening of the Niger-Congo root #-ti, with common reflexes ts/tʃ in East Benue-Congo, weakening to s/f. Present in Ekoid and Cross River and scattered elsewhere suggesting independent weakening and thus not diagnostic.

eye

A common root for eye throughout East Benue-Congo, found scattered through Kainji, Plateau, Jukunoid, perhaps CR, Grassfields though not in Ekoid. The similarity to ‘face’ is not coincidental; in many Plateau languages ‘face’ and ‘head’ are the same word, in others ‘face’ and ‘eye’. Not diagnostic.

tooth

A common root for tooth in A group Bantu and Grassfields, supplanting the widespread #-ni roots found in Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan. Perhaps originally a word for ‘molar’. The back vowel in Alege resembles Bantu, but otherwise the central vowel dominates. Upper Cross has forms with final -n, but prefixes with l/r/d initials. The V- prefixes of Bendi resemble Bantu, although there is some evidence they are reduced from initial velar + back vowel (Busi, Basang) which has no immediate parallels in other groups.

tongue

This form appears to be a distinctive innovation for Bendi and quite unlike the common Niger-Congo roots. Its only possible link is with some Ekoid which might be a metathesis. Proto-Ijoid **ḡéléú** could possibly be related.

arm, hand

A widespread Niger-Congo root #-bok-, found throughout East Benue-Congo. The original form must have combined front and back vowels, to account for the variety of vowels in the surface forms. As with ‘tooth’ the appearance of gu/ku- prefixes is something of a mystery since these are not usually present in other groups, except in Grassfields (e.g. Modele) where they prefix a different root to mark ‘hand’.

	10. leg	11. foot	12. belly	13. neck	14. hair
Alege	ò-kpə / i-	rɪ-cɛ / è-	ri-fɔ̃ŋ / è-		
Basang	ù-gbɔŋ / i-		ri-fùŋ		
Bayobiri	kò-ba / à-	kò-ba / à-	ri-fɔ̃ŋ / à-		
Bekwara	ù-kùò	àbia	iri-hùŋ / à-, ulukum	omere	iyiri
Bendi	hwù-be / à-		li-fɔ̃ŋ / à		
Bete	kù-be / i-		li-fùŋ / à-	ki-tuŋ	igiri
Bisu	kù-bǎ / à-		lǎ-fɪŋ / è-	si-coŋ	iyile
Bokyi (Dic)	kɛ-ka	dyibe	-fít / a-		
Bokyi (Abu)	ke-ká	le-be	le-fít		
Bokyi (Kocwe)	kə-kxé	rɔ-bə	rə-fæn		
Bokyi (Osokom)	kyi-ká	dyi-be	dyi-fát		
Bokyi (Wula)			dɛ-fɛ / à-		
Busi	gù-bǎ / à-		rǎ-fɪŋ / è-		
Obe		i-câ / ɛ-	ri-fùŋ / è-		
Okorogung		i-cê / è-	i-fùŋ / i-		
Okorotung	ò-kpo / i-	kò-hwè / à-	i-fɔ̃ŋ / è-		
Ubang (m.)	ò-kpo / i-	kò-bǎ / à-	ri-fɔ̃ŋ / à-		
Ubang (f.)	kù-ba / à-	kù-ba / a-	ri-fɔ̃ŋ / à-		
Ukpe	ò-kpô / i-	rì-cê / è-	ri-fɔ̃ŋ / à-		
Utugwong	è-tɛ̃	ècâ	ri-hɔ̃ŋ		
			ri-fɔ̃ŋ		

leg, foot

Two roots occur, approximately #-gbV and #-ka. Root I is attested in Bulu **à-bò**, Kənswei **gvùò**, Mama **gbuu**, Batu **a-ban**, throughout much of Jukunoid and in Kainji, e.g. Boze **ù-gbùnà**. All attestations are isolated and scattered which may reflect the fact the roots apply alternately to ‘leg’ and ‘foot’ and leg is usually elicited. The #-ka root is attested in all branches of East Benue-Congo and cannot thus be considered diagnostic.

belly

The Common Bendi form is something like # **ri-fɔ̃ŋ**, although the sporadic presence of central vowels and other alterations to the stem-vowel suggest that another prefix was incorporated in the stem in a previous version, perhaps u-, which would account for the occasional shift to -u- in the stem. This is a version of the

common Niger-Congo #**bum**, widely attested in Bantoid, but the Bendi version appears to be a distinctive innovation.

neck

#**tuŋ** is a widespread Niger-Congo root for ‘neck’ although the **ki-** prefix seems to be a Bendi innovation. The Bekwara form is unusual and may be a semantic shift from #**mere** ‘throat’ widespread in Niger-Congo.

hair

	15. ear	16. nose	17. skin	18. heart
Alege	ko-coŋ /a-		ò-kě / i-	rì-cě / ε-
Basang			ù-kwèi /i-	
Bayobiri			ò-kwè / i-	rì-tsě / à-
Bekwara	à-cúŋ	irìjún	ákùhó, ùkùò	
Bendi			ù-kwŶe / i-	lì-tiam / à-
Bete	ko-coŋ /a-	li-dzu	ù-kwŶob / i	lì-tyám / à-
Bisu	ko-ton /a-	li-jwen	ù-kò / i-	lì-tiém / è-
Bokyi (Dic)	bo-toŋ /a-			-tyém /a-
Bokyi (Abu)				le-tyém
Bokyi (Kocwe)				
Bokyi (Osokom)				dÿi-tyém
Bokyi (Wula)			ì-kò	dě-tié / à-
Busi				rì-têm / è-
Ogberia				rítém
Okorogung			ò-kwùbò / i-	rì-tiem / è-
Okorotung			ù-kwùbò / i-	ì-tiěŋ / è-
Ubang (m.)			ò-kwè /i-	rì-tsě / à-
Ubang (f.)			ò-kê / ù-	rì-tsê / à-
Ukpe				rì-cε / a-
Utugwong			ù-kwòbò	rì-tyém

ear

Data for ‘ear’ is more exiguous, but suggests a form something like #**toŋ**, reflecting PVC root #**tuN-t**. Proto-Ekoid is #**ù-tôŋ**, and similar forms are found throughout Plateau and Cross River.

skin

The original form of this word may have been something like ò-kwùbò / i-, losing C₂ in some languages and incorporating a front-vowel prefix into the stem. The root is cognate with a widespread Niger-Congo root meaning ‘skin, flesh, hide, bark’ and is found throughout East Benue-Congo. Plateau languages tend to have **kp-** and other Bantoid **ŋ-gw-** initials but some Ekoid languages look very similar to Bendi, for example Ekoid A **ŋ-kòb**. Nonetheless, the absence of nasal prefixes makes Bendi distinctive in this region.

heart

The Bendi root for ‘heart’, something like **ri-t(y)em**, is characteristic of Bantoid and Upper Cross with a possible Kainji cognate, Reshe **hì-tsùmù**. The **ri-** prefix is quite distinctive for Bendi, although perhaps

Ekajuk *él-timòh-* also reflects a lateral prefix, eroded or replaced by nasals. The entries in Thomas (1914) appear to reflect a quite different root and may be a mistake.

	19. meat	20. animal	21. leopard	22. elephant
Alege	ì-nà	ì-nà	ì-kpòŋ	ì-sò
Basang			ù-kpàŋ / ì-	ù-fùà / ì-
Bayobiri	ì-nàŋ	ì-nà	ì-kpòŋ	ò-fùò / ì-
Bekwara			ù-kpàŋ	ùtùò
Bendi			ù-kpàŋ / ì-	ù-tù / ì
Bete	ì-nià	ì-nà	ù-kpàŋ / ì-	ùtò / ì-
Bisu			ù-kpàŋ / ì-	ù-fùà / ì-
Bokyi (Dic)			e-kpaŋ	
Bokyi (Abu)		e-nam	e-kpaŋ	e-swa
Bokyi (Kocwe)			e-kpa	e-swæ
Bokyi (Osokom)		e-nam	e-kpaŋ	e-swa
Bokyi (Wula)				
Busi		ì-nàm / bi-	ù-kpàŋ / ì-	ù-fùà / ì-
Okorogung		ì-nàm		ó-sò / í-
Okorotung	ì-nà	ì-nàŋ		ò-sò / ì-
Ubang (m.)	ì-nà	ì-nà	e-kpoŋ	
Ubang (f.)	è-nà	ì-nà	o-kpoŋ	ì-fùò
Ukpe	ì-nâm	è-nà	ì-kpòŋ	ò-fùò / ì-
Ogberia				ù-sò
Utugwong	ì-nàm	ì-nàm	ù-kpùŋ	ù-sò / ì-

meat/animal

The terms for 'meat' and 'animal' are either the same or closely related. It used to be thought that the palatalisation of the initial nasal was an isogloss for Bantu, although examples occurring outside Bantu are now known to occur, notably in Plateau. However, it is notable that the forms with initial **ɲ-** (root 1a in BCCW) are predominant in Ekoid, Grassfields, Jarawan, Mambiloid and Tivoid, whereas Cross River either has a different root altogether or initial n-.

leopard

Again Bendi shows a quite characteristic implementation of a widespread Niger-Congo root, #-**kpe**, found in Plateau, Cross River. Traces of a final nasal are found in Mbe **ù-dzúkpuòŋ / bèn-** and the isolated Ekoid Balep **ŋ-kòŋ**. Again the Bendi vowel prefixes are quite distinctive.

elephant

This gloss aligns Bendi strongly with Grassfields, Ekoid and Bantu. Benue-Congo typically has #-**ɲi** and likely to be descendants of the more widespread #-**ton**. Bendi has no trace of a velar in C₂ position and no nasalisation. Forms such as **fó** are characteristic of Bamileke languages. Although this word often has nasal prefixes, V- prefixes are typical of Yemba and related languages.

	23. pig	24. dwarf cow	25. snake	26. crab
Alege	ɔ-kàgbu / i-, kééram	à-pi	ò-ǰĩ / ì-	
Basang		ǎ-pî / bĩ-		ku-kamĩ / à-
Bayobiri	ɔkàgbu / i-		ò-ǰĩ / ì-	
Bekwara	úkògbó	á-pi		irikama
Bendi				hwú-ká / á-
Bete	ú-kàngbó /i- ù-kwèlbí	á-pi / i-	ù-ǰĩ /i-	kú-káá / á-
Bisu		ě-pi / bĩ-		ku-kama / à-
Bokyi (Dic)		mpon		
Bokyi (Abu)	à-kûk, è-kòlók	-mpon		
Bokyi (Kocwe)	é-kû, è-kàlǎ	-mpwo		
Bokyi (Osokom)	ì-kòrók /i-	-mɲkpon		
Bokyi (Wula)		-mpon /ba-		
Busi		ě-fi / bĩ-		gu-kabĩ / a-
Ogberia				ri-kāmā
Okorogung				
Okorotung				
Ubang (m.)	á-kû-gbè			
Ubang (f.)	ó-kagbû /i-			
Ukpe	ɔ-kàgbo / i-		ò-ǰĩ / ì-	
Utugwong	u-kàgbo / i-		ù-ǰĩ / ì-	

pig

The gloss in BCCW was 'domestic pig' although it is unclear whether this was always the response returned. The antiquity of the domestic pig in this region is debated (see Blench 2000) and most scholars think it is a Portuguese introduction as widespread #-**porko** roots attest. Roots of the form k + back vowel + velar are widespread in Ekoid and Grassfields. The particular form in Ekoid #-**kog** with Nkem showing **úkògbó** does suggest that the other forms are shortened versions of those similar to Bendi. However, if these are derived from words for wild pig, there may well be a complex pattern of recent borrowing that ignores genetic boundaries.

dwarf cow

Although zebu cattle are recent, dwarf cattle or taurines are of considerable antiquity in this region and it may thus be historically reasonable to treat lexical items for 'cow' as evidence for the historical relationship of languages. Bendi shows two quite distinct roots, #**mpon** and #**á-pi**. The first has clear cognates in Ekoid (Balep **m-pòŋ**), but also Grassfields (Ngwe **è-fòŋ**) and Upper Cross (Olulumo **è-fòm**). The second root looks more isolated unless Oloibiri (Central Delta) **ó-ví** is cognate. Defective datasets make it difficult to be sure whether we are dealing with genuine historical roots or a complex pattern of loanwords.

snake

Bendi here differs markedly from Bantoid and shares a root with Plateau, for example Jari **í-ǰin**, and perhaps also Donga (Jukunoid) **buǰi**.

crab

#-ka is widespread for ‘crab’ across the world, not only in Africa (Blench 1997), and little can be deduced from its presence in Bendi. Although the presence of a bilabial nasal in C₂ position *is* characteristic of Bantoid languages, occurring in Jarawan, Mbe and Grassfields, while Cross River, Plateau etc. tend to have n/ŋ, Ekoid has l/n making this non-diagnostic.

	27. guinea fowl	28. chicken	29. fowl	30. egg	31. wing
Alege		ò-ŋwî~rî-kwè	ò-kwè /i-	a-ci	
Basang	kù-kλŋ /à-				kù-bìbàbì /à-
Bayobiri		ò-ŋwî~u-kwǒ	ò-kwǒ / i-		
Bekwara	àká(ŋ)	ùfāa		à-te	àbìbà
Bendi	hwù-kλŋ / à-				hwù-bìbà / à-
Bete	kù-kap / à-			lì-tì / à-	kù-bàbà / à-
Bisu	kù-kλŋ / à-				kù-bàbà / à-
Bokyi (Dic)	-kâŋ /bîi-			e-ce	bu-byibabaŋ /a-
Bokyi (Abu)	kě-kâŋ				
Bokyi (Koeve)	kě-nkâ	e-kwě			
Bokyi (Osokom)	kě-kâŋ	e-kwa /bě-			
Bokyi (Wula)			ò-kò / i-		
Busi	gù-kλŋ / à-				gù-bàbà / à-
Okorogung		à-ŋwî ~ u-kò	ò-kò / i-		
Okorotung		ù-ŋwî ~ u-kò	ù-kò / i-		
Ubang (m.)		ì-kwě			
Ubang (f.)		ò-kwǒ /i-			
Ukpe		kà-ŋwî ~u-kwǒ	ò-kwǒ / i-		
Obe			ù-kò ~ à-ŋwî		ù-bùbà / è-
Utugwong		á-ŋwú ~ ú-kò			

guinea fowl

This root is widely attested in Niger-Congo and is represented in scattered attestations in East Benue-Congo, e.g. Tiv **ì-kángé**, Ufia **è-kòŋ**, and then become voiced in most of Grassfields, e.g. Yemba Bafou **ŋgáŋà**. Difficult to use as a diagnostic term.

chicken, fowl

These terms are listed separately in the sources, although the nature of the difference is unclear. The Bendi forms are clearly related to more widespread **#kub**, **#ŋgub** forms. As with guinea-fowl, there is a pattern with Grassfields with initial g- and others languages devoicing to k-. However, the loss of C₂ and the switch to a front-vowel in the stem appear to be characteristic of Bendi and may be related, again, to former prefixes.

egg

Although poorly attested, proto-Bendi was presumably something like #-**ci**, with a front-vowel prefix. This is widely attested in Benue-Congo with Nupe **eci**, Eggon **è-zi**, Olulumọ **è-tji** etc.

wing

The Bendi forms look like reduplications, often with a prefix subsequently added. Similar forms are found in Cross River (e.g. Kọrọp **kó-bô:p**, Abua **ɔ-βaaβ**), Ekoid (Ekparabong **è-pàbi** pl. **bè-**) and Grassfields (usually with a voiceless initial stem consonant). These are probably all forms of widespread Niger-Congo #-**gba**, although the C₂ is distinctive for this region.

	32. fat	33. charcoal	34. firewood	35. tree	36. palm tree	37. beans
Alege		de-biire	ɔ-kwē / i-	ò-sí / i-	-n̄bɔ̄tsù / è-	ì-sē
Basang				ù-kwân / i-	hí-wâ / bí-	
Bayobiri			ò-kwē / i-	ò-kwē / i-	bù-tsù / bà-	
Bekwara	áfám	à-bì	ikwén	ùci	itùò	iten
Bendi				ù-kwǎ / i	shi-wuó / bí-	
Bete	ámá	kuké àbìíndè	u-kwán	ù-kwaj / i-	kí-wúnj / bí-	ù-tan / i-
Bisu				ù-kwâi / i-	ʃí-wâ / bí-	
Bokyi (Dic)				byi-ci /	byikwón	-sín / a-,
Bokyi (Abu)				ke-cyí		o-sén
Bokyi (Kocwe)				kə-cyí		o-sén
Bokyi (Osokom)				kyi-cyí		
Bokyi (Wula)					ó-wírâ / í-	
Busi				u-kwên / i-	hí-wá / bí-	ì-sên
Obe				ò-tsí / i-		ì-sen
Ogberia			ikwēn			
Okorogung			ò-kwěn / i-	ò-sí / i-		ì-sên
Okorotung			ù-kwěj / i-	ù-sí / i-		ò-sē / i-
Ubang (m.)			ì-kwē	kì-ci / bí-	ù-tù / βè-	ò-sē / i-
Ubang (f.)			ò-kwē / i-	ò-si / i-	ù-tù / βè-	ì-sē
Ukpe			ò-kwē / i-	ò-kwé / è-	bù-tsò / bà-	
Utugwong			ì-kwěn	ù-tsi / i-	ì-sùò	ì-sen

charcoal

Compare isolated Gokana **bírí**, Nindem **i-gbir**, Ninzo **ì-klámbrì** (which interestingly incorporates the much more widespread #-kal root) but too poorly attested to reach any certain conclusions.

firewood, tree

The older form of this root is #-**kon** and this is widespread in Plateau and Ekoid. Forms with a front vowel in the stem are found in Grassfields (e.g. Bafut **ñ-kwé**), also in Plateau (Irigwe **ñ-kwè**). The nasal prefixes are extremely characteristic of this root from Plateau to Bantu and it seems likely that they were lost in Bendi; their absence is thus non-diagnostic. Markedly different from the remainder of Cross River.

tree

The Bendi forms are either versions of widespread Niger-Congo #-**ti** or of the firewood root #-**kon** discussed above. In the case of #-**ti** cognates showing similar initial consonant variation to Bendi can be traced in every branch of East Benue-Congo. The o- and u- prefixes of Bendi resemble those of the Kainji languages.

palm tree

Exactly what species of palm tree is intended here is unclear. The usual candidate would be the oil-palm, but if so, few cognates can be identified. The datasets in BCCW are similarly confounded and little can be deduced from this data.

beans (=cowpeas?)

The Bendi data most resembles the Kainji languages, e.g. Gure **i-*ɟim***, and Plateau (e.g. Ce **i-*ɟen***). See also perhaps Jibu **sig**.

	38. name	39. road, path	40. arrow	41. water	42. stone
Alege	rì-d̥n / è-	-ŋɲbã / ε-			ù-kǎ / è-
Basang		kù-kwá / á-			kù-jürú / à-
Bayobiri	rì-d̥n / à-	ò-bì~ó-kwe			kò-ka / à-
Bekwara	ir̥jún	ir̥ibia, ùkwo		u-mó	ùkáá, àkáá
Bendi	lì-j̥n / à-	hwù-kwé / à-			hwù-kó / à
Bete	lì-z̥n / à-	kù-kwó / à-	lì-ba / à	ù-mbúó /i-	kù-kó / à-
Bisu	l̥-j̥ / è-	kù-kó / à-kú	lì-baĩ / à-		kù-d̥ló / ò-
Bokyi (Dic)	-z̥n /a-	bu-kwóp /a-		bǎmú	-ká /a-
Bokyi (Abu)	le-z̥n	bo-kóp		o-mu	bò-ká
Bokyi (Kocwe)	rə-z̥n	u-kwé			
Bokyi (Osokom)	dyi-z̥n /a-	bu-kwóp		o-mu	
Bokyi (Wula)	dè-dz̥ / à-		dè-bé / à-		
Busi	rì-j̥n / è-	gù-kwó / à-kú			gù-dùré / è-
Obe	rì-z̥m / è	ù-kô / è-			ù-kà / è-
Ogberia				èmō	
Okorogung	ì-d̥n / è-	rì-bì			ù-kǎ / è-
Okorotung	ì-d̥n / è-	ù-bì			ù-kǎ / è
Ubang (m.)	rè-d̥n /à-	kĩ-fā /bì-		bamwe	kò-kia /à-
Ubang (f.)	rì-d̥n /à-	kè-faŋ /bè-		amu	kò-kā /à-
Ukpe	rì-d̥n / à-	ò-bì			kù-ka / a-
Utugwong	rì-d̥n	rì-bì			ù-kǎà / è-

name

This root is related both to proto-Bantu (C.S. 831 *-**gínà**, C.S. 2608 *-**yínà**) and Niger-Congo (e.g. Westermann's PWS **-ni**). This more specific form (with r/IV- prefix) occurs in Kainji, Jukunoid, Cross River, Mambiloid and Grassfields.

road, path

Bendi appears to have three roots, #-kop, #-faŋ and #-bì. The #-faŋ root is attested in Cross River (e.g. Anang à-fàŋ), and Mbe è-fàŋ. The #-bì root occurs in Jukunoid (e.g. Kona pin-u), Mbe n-pi and Mambiloid (Somyev bi). This strongly suggests that these words are low-frequency, regularly innovated and borrowed and hence of limited value for classification.

arrow

Analyses of 'arrow' are often bedevilled by the fact that most societies have several types of arrow, often with lexically unrelated names. The most common term in Bendi is undoubtedly #li-ban and it may be that this term also exists in the languages for which it is not recorded. This root is identified in BCCW as 4a and is distinctive to Ekoid and Mbe and with probable scattered cognates or lookalikes elsewhere in Tiv (í-váán /á-) and Mambiloid. There may be cognates in Plateau, but none appear in Cross River. The other Bendi root, #-kǒŋ, has cognates in Cross River, e.g. Lokaa ji-kǒŋ, and Mambiloid e.f. Somyev koyo and probably a regional loanword.

water

Roots resembling Bendi are widely scattered across East Benue-Congo, e.g. Ura (Kainji) mò, Icen (Jukunoid) m̀bu, Mvanip (Mambiloid) mboo suggesting that this root has no diagnostic value.

stone

Scattered external cognates only; e.g. Ake ri-kyo, Iten kε□, Bulu à-kók. This may be the result of many languages having two or three words for 'stone'.

	43. hoe	44. calabash	45. ashes	46. war
Alege		à-so / bì-	ε-cuŋ	ù-tse
Basang	sei		à-cûŋ	
Bayobiri		kà-fuo / bì-	à-côŋ	bù-se / bà-
Bekwara	ùfàm	ìkpètè, ùgom	àtyúŋ	ùcè
Bendi				
Bete	tùb	u-gám / i-	à-tyúŋ	kù-kíé / bè-
Bisu	si		à-cûŋ	
Bokyi (Dic)	-jwap/ byi-	le-baŋ /a-	-tôŋ /a-	byi-tí
Bokyi (Abu)	kezwap	ka-bu /ε-		be-tí
Bokyi (Kocwe)	kəzwá	ko-bù / e-		—
Bokyi (Osokom)	kyi-zwap			byi-tí
Bokyi (Wula)	kpà			
Busi	su (v.)		à-cûŋ	
Okorogung		à-kpù / ì-kpù	è-tiũŋ	
Okorotung		-m̀bò / è-	è-tiũŋ	
Ubang (m.)		kà-fuo / bì-	à-côŋ	ù-ciε / βà-
Ubang (f.)		kà-fuo / bì-	à-côŋ	ù-tse / bà-
Ukpe		kà-shuo / bè-	à-côŋ	bù-se
Obe			è-tù/ŋ	ù-tíε□ / bù
Utugwong	tè	-m̀bò	è-tiũŋ	u-ŋà

hoe

The citations are too scattered to draw any conclusions

calabash

Difficult to use because of the multiple lexemes for calabash in any given language. The #-bVN root in Bendi certainly has cognates, in Grassfields (Tumbele à-bò), Ekoid (Abanyom) è-búr. The #-so root occurs in Kainji languages e.g. Ribina è-só, and Plateau i-sonj. Without more comprehensive lists of calabash names in individual languages the exact distribution of individual roots will remain in doubt.

ashes

The forms reflect a Niger-Congo root #-toŋ- that is widespread throughout the phylum and thus cannot illuminate the classification of Bendi.

war

The forms are quite diverse but appear to point a proto-form #-tV where V is high front vowel. t- then becomes palatalised or affricated in different languages. BCCW numbers some forms as root 1, which is shared with the Ekoid languages which generally have the form #bi-ta. The unusual vowel in Utugwong suggest that this may be a loan from Ekoid. Westermann proposes #-ta as a PWS form for 'war' so its retention in Bendi and Ekoid is far from conclusive.

	47. night	48. day	49. bad	50. white
Alege	ù-tu	rɪ-ti /ɛ-	bě	
Basang				
Bayobiri	bù-tu	rɪ-te /à-	bê	
Bekwara	ùcu		bên	
Bendi				shifãũ / bi
Bete	kù-tsú /bè-	lì-tyi		
Bisu				
Bokyi (Dic)	-cú /ba-	dya-ci /a-		
Bokyi (Abu)		le-cí		
Bokyi (Kocwe)		rə-cá		
Bokyi (Osokom)		dya-cí		
Bokyi (Wula)				
Busi				
Obe				ù-pipĩ / ě-
Okorogung	ù-tú	i-tí / è-	bên	
Okorotung	ù-tú	ì-tí / è-	bêŋ	
Ubang (m.)	ù-cui	rì-té /à-	dú	
Ubang (f.)	bù-tù	rì-tí /à-	bê	
Ukpe	bò-to	rè-tê /à-	bě	
Utugwong	ù-tu	rì-ti / è-	bên	ì-hehwuŋ

night

These forms represent a shortened form of the Plateau and WBC #-tuk-. Such shortening can take place independently, e.g. Idoma òtú.

day

No external cognates have yet been identified for this root.

bad

Forms with b + front vowel are common throughout East Benue-Congo and are found elsewhere in Niger-Congo.

white

The forms are too varied to draw any conclusions.

	51. ask for	52. become dry	53. bite	54. build	55. carve
Alege		ɲwo	luóŋ		
Basang	bi	ɲwɔm	lam		sɪn
Bayobiri		ɲɲɪm	luɔ̃		
Bekwara	bii	ɲgwom, nyuŋ		mè	fùò
Bendi	bi	ɲwàm			tan
Bete		ɲwòm	ɲmam		tan
Bisu	bi	ɲwɔm	lu'wɪ̀	te	sen
Bokyi (Dic)	bí	ke cuoŋ		bi	cén
Bokyi (Abu)			zwóm	nɛ	byat
Bokyi (Irruan)			dʒɔ		
Bokyi (Kocwe)				ni	bwe
Bokyi (Osokom)			zwóm	ɲɛ	bwat
Bokyi (Wula)	be	juɔ	dʒɔ	cua	
Busi	ri	ɲwɔm	lɔm	te	tseŋ
Okorogung		ɲwɔm	lòm		
Okorotung		ɲwom	lɪm		
Ubang (m.)			luɔŋ		
Ubang (f.)			luɔŋ		
Ukpe		nɛm	luɔ̃		
Obe	be	ɲwòm	lóm		ce
Ogberia			lòm		
Utugwong	hwû	ɲwóm	lɔm	kpərɔ̀	ten

ask for

This root is typical of Ekoid, e.g. Nkem **bɪb**, also Grassfields, Limbum **bíp'fɔ́**, Mambiloid (Kuma **bie**) and other branches of East Benue-Congo. Busi **ri** reflects widespread **#ribi** roots and it is possible that the **#bi** roots are an erosion of the longer forms.

become dry

This root is typical of Ekoid, e.g. Balep **wóm**, Plateau e.g. Tarok **wom**. Ekoid suggest that forms with initial y- are cognate thus Nde **yôm**, in which case this is widespread throughout Bantoid.

bite

This is a widespread Niger-Congo root, often surfacing as #rom-. Found throughout East Benue-Congo, although Ekoid has **lom/loŋ** forms very similar to those of Bendi.

build

The lexemes for ‘build’ are surprisingly varied, only Bekwara with **mé** reflecting a common Niger-Congo root. The others mostly do have cognates outside Bendi.

carve

	56. count	57. dance	58. desire	59. die	60. divide
Alege		nè		jui, kuue	
Basang	bou	ɲna	ʃa		
Bayobiri		nùì		zùì	
Bekwara	buo	ɲàɲà		fo	cè
Bendi	bu		sho		hwuò
Bete	bo	ŋgìo	ké		
Bisu	bo	ɲnà	ca		
Bokyi (Dic)				gbo	
Bokyi (Abu)		nè			
Bokyi (Kocwe)					
Bokyi (Osokom)		nè			
Bokyi (Wula)	pè		kia		
Busi	bo	ɲnà	ca	hwo	cè
Okorogung		nò		jì	
Okorotung		nò		jì	
Ubang (m.)		nò		kwe	
Ubang (f.)		nò		kwe	
Ukpe		nù		ywè	
Obe				kwê	
Utugwong	hwù	nò	kɔ	kwe	tè

count

The Bendi forms are extremely puzzling, as Bantu and most related Benue-Congo reflect the common Niger-Congo root #bal- and now where else does the root have back vowels. Either this is simply a different root, or else an unusual morphophonemic change has occurred.

dance

This is an exceptional root, hardly attested elsewhere in Benue-Congo, although see Nupe **nya**.

desire

sa/ca roots are common throughout Benue-Congo, thus not diagnostic.

die

Bendi has reflexes of the Niger-Congo root #ku/kpu. The alternation between front and back vowels in the stem suggests an original form with both, such as kuCe, although this is everywhere reduced.

divide, share out

The usual root for ‘divide, share out’ is #kap, attested throughout Benue-Congo and in Bantu. However, the Bendi root also occurs in

	61. eat	62. extinguish	63. fall	64. give	65. go
Alege	ji		mu	kè	ʒe
Basang	ji			kì	ʒwɛ
Bayobiri	ʒi			kè	je
Bekwara	ji	nyim	mù	kè	ye
Bendi	je	nîm			giɛ
Bete	ʒi			kì	giɛ
Bisu	ji			kì	ye
Bokyi (Dic)			mu	ki	ca, da
Bokyi (Abu)					
Bokyi (Kocwe)					
Bokyi (Osokom)					
Bokyi (Wula)	dri			kì	dò
Busi	jə	rɪβð		kì	yiɛ
Okorogung	jî			kè	je
Okorotung	jî			kè	jê
Ubang (m.)	ʒi			kè	kâyêè
Ubang (f.)	ʒi			kè	kiye
Ukpe	jê			kê	ʒe
Obe	jî				
Utugwong	ji	lîm		kè	je

eat

extinguish

fall

The root #mu root seems quite distinctive for Bokyi with no convincing external cognates.

give

The common root for 'give', retained from earlier stages of Niger-Congo is #*ɲa*. However, replacement with #*ke* in Bantoid occurs in Bendi, Ekoid (Ekparabong **ké**), Nyang (Kenyang **céé**) and probably weakened in Grassfields such as Fe'fe' há. Lokaa **kə́** is isolated within Upper Cross suggesting a loanword.

go

	66. grow up	67. kill	68. lie	69. lie down	70. mould (pot)
Alege		cuo	re	risi	
Basang	sanə			riε giεm	mə
Bayobiri			re	rètəŋ	
Bekwara	kán	gù	ìrìhèn	ne	mè
Bendi	kæe			ndε gbà	mbə
Bete	ka			ndε gbàm	mbə
Bisu					mə
Bokyi (Dic)		cue			bii
Bokyi (Abu)					
Bokyi (Kocwe)					
Bokyi (Osokom)					
Bokyi (Wula)				le giε	
Busi	kpɛrɛ			re gɛm	mə
Okorogung			rê		
Okorotung			rê		
Ubang (m.)				rise	
Ubang (f.)				rise	
Ukpe			re	rètâ	
Obe	kiε				mə
Ogberia		dʒi			
Utugwong	kaŋ		re	rəsi	mè

The root #*mV-* for 'mould, build house' is widespread in Niger-Congo so not diagnostic. However, it does occur in Tivoid, Jarawan, Ekoid and Plateau and apparently not in Cross River. Forms with initial *mb-* are also found in Jukunoid and occasional Grassfields languages. Although these are split into two roots in BCCW (1,3) it seems likely they should be united.

	71. mount	72. press between	73. refuse	74. resemble
Alege				
Basang	mbu	ɲniè		bi
Bayobiri				
Bekwara	muo		maŋ, nyim	bii
Bendi	mbu	ŋgi		bi
Bete	míbó	ŋgi		bi
Bisu	muò	ɲið	tēi	bie
Bokyi (Dic)				bí
Bokyi (Abu)	yú			
Bokyi (Kocwe)	lwé			
Bokyi (Osokom)	yú			
Bokyi (Wula)	bi	ñwèe	cue	bè
Busi	muò	ɲnið	tuen	bie
Okorogung				
Okorotung				
Ubang (m.)				
Ubang (f.)				
Ukpe				
Obe				
Utugwong		ɲi	tien	bi

mount

The main root for 'mount' #-mbu, appears to be an innovation, but Bokyi #-yu is shared with Ekoid.

press between

refuse

This word seems one of the most convincing Bendi-Bantoid shared isoglosses, e.g. Ekoid (Nde **têŋ**), Grassfields Lamnso (**téŋ**), Tumbele **té**.

resemble

	75. roast	76. rot	77. set trap	78. sew	79. shine	80. sleep
Alege				kpi		ure
Basang	fue	fùò	kwùò	kpi	bie	riè kùríè
Bayobiri	faa			kpi		re
Bekwara	faa			kpii	tàn	mu une
Bendi	hwua	hwè	kwèl	kpi	bi	mbù-ndé
Bete	hwua	hwè	kwàl	kpi	bi	mbù ndé
Bisu	fuo	fùò	kwìà	kpie	bie	ʃùlù
Bokyi (Dic)	bubi					le
Bokyi (Abu)						
Bokyi (Kocwe)						
Bokyi (Osokom)						
Bokyi (Wula)		fùò	kwù	dʒò	bi	luó~á- / ê
Busi	fuo	fùò	kwùò	kpie	bie	fɪrò ~ ù-rè
Okorogung						ùrě
Okorotung						ùrě
Ubang (m.)				kpi		
Ubang (f.)				kpi		
Ukpe				kpii		bùre
Obe	fua					ù-rè/
Utugwong	hwa	fiè	kwòrò	kpi	ʃɔ	ùrěè

roast

rot

set trap

sew

Bendi #kpi appears to be distinctive for Bendi, although many East Benue-Congo languages have #kim, #kum etc.

shine

sleep

	81. smell	82. speak	83. squeeze
Alege		rɔ̃ŋ	
Basang	nùŋ	rùaŋ	ɲnɔ̀
Bayobiri		ròŋ	
Bekwara	nùŋ	kàŋ	nyùù, kam
Bendi	nàũ	kɔ̃	ŋgiù
Bete	nù	kɔ̃	ŋgiù, kâm
Bisu	nùŋ	kàŋ	ɲnùŋ
Bokyi (Dic)			
Bokyi (Abu)			nwàt
Bokyi (Kocwe)			nwè
Bokyi (Osokom)			nwàt, kpèè
Bokyi (Wula)		là	
Busi	nùŋ	rɔŋ	ɲnù
Okorogung			
Okorotung			
Ubang (m.)		rɔ̃ŋ	
Ubang (f.)		rɔ̃ŋ ~ dùə	
Ukpe		rɔ̃ŋ	
Obe	nùò		nù
Utugwong		ròŋ	ɲù

smell

speak

squeeze

The #kam root is widespread Niger-Congo and occurs throughout the region usually with the more specific meaning 'to milk'. The #nVt- or #n(y)Vn root is found Ekoid (Bendeghe **ɲɔ̃t**) with the dental reduced to a glottal stop across Grassfields.

	84. one	85. two	86. three	87. four	88. five	89. six
Afrike	oboŋ	ife	itye	ine	idaŋ	titye
Alege	úbõ	é-fɛ	ècɛ	éne	écaŋ	écece
Basang						
Bayobiri						
Bekwara	-kɛn	ihà	icùà	inè	idyâŋ	idyaaàkin
Bendi	obuŋ	bife	bitye	bine	bidan	bitibitye
Bete	ì-kɛn	ifè	ì-kíé	indè	idíòŋ	díòŋ kɛn
Bisu						
Bokyi (Dic)	din	afee	acât	anyii	atáŋe	
Bumaji	ibo	ufiye	utiya	unea	uton	utitiya
Busi						
Okorogung						
Okorotung						
Ubang (m.)	keŋ	befe	bica	bini	besaŋ	bicabica
Ubang (f.)	kibaŋ	befe	bicye	bene	besaŋ	bicyebicy e
Ukpe						
Obe		bì-fɛ				
Utugwong		ì-hè				
	90. seven	91. eight	92. nine	93. ten	94. twenty	
Afrike	idaŋ rife	inibine	idaŋ rebene	irikwe		
Alege	éca néfɛ	enéne	éca néne	dé-kue /lé-	lézi	
Basang						
Bayobiri						
Bekwara	ìdièhà	ìdiècia	ìdiènè	lí-hwó	ìricí	
Bendi	daŋibife	binebine	danibine	rikwe		
Bete	díòŋ ifè	díòŋ ikíé	díòŋ indè	irifo	litsí	
Bisu						
Bokyi (Dic)				díikpú	bajam	
Bokyi (Abu)						
Bokyi (Kocwe)						
Bokyi (Osokom)						
Bokyi (Wula)						
Bumaji	utownife	uneune	utowinune	rikwo		
Busi						
Okorogung						
Okorotung						
Ubang (m.)	besaŋ befe	binibini	besaŋ beni	rukwe		
Ubang (f.)	besaŋ befe	benebene	besaŋ bene	rukwe		
Ukpe						
Obe						
Utugwong						

4. Evaluating the competing claims

It is evident that the classification of Bendi is far from obvious. Bendi roots are attested in a wide variety of neighbouring groups and often form very different distributional patterns from one gloss to another. To assess how Bendi should be classified, Table 3 combines previous proposals from Williamson (1989) and Connell (1998) with some new ones arising from this paper.

Table 3. Proposals to link Bendi with other language groupings

Gloss	Language	Bendi	Language	Cross River	Other	Language
to dance	Bekwara Okorogung Bokyi	nyàà nò ne			Nupe	nya
to resemble	Bokyi	bí	*PLC Tee	*nèk *bííd béé	Ekparabong Nama	bédí bye
to divide	Busi, Bekwara	cè	Obolo, Legbo	cè	Irigwe	ke
oil-palm	Bokyi ⁴	bù-yêp	*PLC	*é- jòb	Ikaan	ò-yìd
tooth	Alege	ò-fóŋ / i-	Leyigha	*joo le- san	Kentu	a-sa
elephant	Ukpe Bendi	ò-fùò / i- ù-tù / i	n/a		Bulu Kenyang Mambila Mbe	à-sóŋ ń-sòk tòn bè-tsùo
skin	Utugwong	ù-kwòbò	n/a		Bulu Ekparabong	è-kòb ŋ-kòb
firewood, tree	Utugwong	ì-kwěŋ	n/a		Jaku Irigwe Bafut	ńgúbù n□-kwè ŋ-kwé
dwarf cow	Bokyi	mpon	n/a		Ekajuk Balep Yamba	è-kùn m-pòŋ m-poŋ
go, to	Basang	zwe	Obolo	džê	Nde Kom	džèn džó-lá
refuse, to	Busi Utugwong	tuen tien	n/a		Tiv Nde Lamnsò	dzà(dzé) tên tén
set a trap, to	Bendi Utugwong	kwèl kwòrò	Nkukoli	kwùl	Tumbele Lamnsò Ekajuk	té kó'ór kónò

References: Williamson (1989:268), Connell (1998:21)

Obviously there is a problem in assessing the evidential value of scattered citations. For example, the non-Bendi cognates of ‘to divide’ both within Cross River and outside are isolated and do not represent the common root in any group, which may be *a priori* evidence for its being a loanword. However, what emerges from Table 3 is that there are no Bendi forms shared solely with Cross River whereas there are Bendi forms that have no Cross River cognates but do have convincing Bantu cognates, notably ‘to refuse’.

⁴ This word is mis-cited as Bekwara (which = **à-fáa'**) in Williamson (1989) and then cross-cited in Connell (1998).

The second line of evidence proposed in Connell (1998:21) is sound-correspondences. Such evidence is convincing when highly systematic; but if we have such difficulty in aligning lexical cognates, the chances of finding sufficient sound correspondences would appear to be slight. In a region where the languages anyway show many similarities, it is possible to find some sets of correspondences with almost any group. Broadly speaking, Bendi shows ‘regular’ correspondences with a wide range of languages where C_1 is conservative; thus it is easy to find k/k, t/t or b/b parallels. However, regular sound-changes linking Bendi to any other language group have so far proved elusive.

Bendi nominal prefixes are highly functional except in the case of Bekwara and most closely resemble those of Ekoid. Some are astonishingly conservative; for example, the **ri-** prefix found with **-si** ‘head’ exactly matches the Central Togo language Avatime **di-si**⁵. However, the **ri-** prefix found with ‘heart’ **-tem** has few outside parallels, although it is also found in Ekoid, e.g. Abanyom **li-tém /ñ-**. The rounded back vowel prefixes found with ‘person’ (e.g. Obe **ò-nì / bə-**) match some Cross River languages closely (e.g. Ikom **ò-nì / bə-**) but other Bendi words with similar prefixes, e.g. ‘elephant’ (Okorotung **ò-sò / ì-**) or ‘snake’ (Bete **ù-ŋ / ñ-**) do not match Cross River at all. Without a much larger sample, it seems unlikely that affixes will yield convincing correspondences.

5. Conclusions

Even with incomplete datasets, the results of this preliminary survey of Bendi languages make possible some conclusions;

1. Bendi forms a distinctive, tightly-knit group; indeed the languages are so close to one another that they could be treated as lects of a single language. That they have been treated as distinct languages may be essentially socio-political rather than linguistic.
2. Only Bekwara shows sufficient lexical and morphological innovation to be treated as a separate language.
3. Bendi shows numerous innovations in terms of its prefixes that mark it out from surrounding groups. Some items, such as ‘tongue’ appear to be lexical innovations.
4. No single Bendi gloss shows a link specifically with Cross River that is not also shared with numerous other East Benue-Congo languages.
5. Bendi is otherwise quite conservative in retaining widespread Niger-Congo roots, making its classification difficult.
6. However, to judge by the present sample, its closest relatives are the Bantoid languages, notably Ekoid, with which it shares common word-structure, conserved prefixes and a few lexical items.

Exactly why the Bendi languages have remained so neglected is hard to say. They are not particularly remote or inaccessible. However, the patchy wordlists compiled for this paper suggest that their completion should be a high priority and that better data may be able to provide a more complete answer to the affiliation of Bendi.

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⁵ I would like to thank Ian Maddieson for drawing my attention to this cognate.

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