A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE GHANA-TOGO MOUNTAIN LANGUAGES

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ACRONYMS

CT	Central Togo (=*Togorestsprachen*)
GTML	Ghana-Togo Mountain Languages
PTR	Proto-Togo-Restsprachen

1. Introduction

The languages named *Togorestsprachen* by Westermann (1932, 1954) after Struck, were previously known by the translated name 'Togo Remnant' languages and currently Ghana-Togo Mountain Languages (GTM) or Central (or Mountain) Togo (CT) languages. They gained early attention from African language scholars because of their functioning noun-affix systems, an unusual feature in the context of the region. The noun-classes seemed to link them to Bantu (e.g. Johnston 1919-1922) and indeed Assirelli (1950) refers to them as *langues Bantouides*. Bertho (1952) seems to have been the first author to set out a comparative wordlist of the these languages (which he calls *sous-groupe Adélé-Avatimé*) and to distinguish them from Guan (*Gondja*) and Gur (*Voltaïque*). Greenberg (1966) placed them in Kwa, a position supported by Stewart across a number of publications. Heine (1968a), in the only study of the group as a whole, treats the GTM languages as a unit, although dividing them into two distinct branches, ka- and na-Togo, based on the word for 'flesh'. These two subgroups have led a somewhat nomadic life within Kwa, being sometimes separated and sometimes kept together. However, since Heine, little evidence has been offered in print to justify these classifications.

GTM languages appeared to be marked out by their nominal morphology when compared to the southern Ga, Ewe and Akan groups. However, functioning noun-affix systems are not actually as rare as earlier scholars supposed, given the close proximity to both Guan and Gur languages, both of which have functioning noun-classes. Indeed, some GTM languages, notably Avatime and Kebu have both prefixes and suffixes, a characteristic they share with non-GTM languages such as Dilo and Akaselem. In the light of this, Jacques Rongier (1997) offered a major challenge to the GTM hypothesis by arguing that those languages with suffixing morphology would be better reclassified as Gur. This is not as surprising as it sounds; one language, Dilo (formerly Ntrubo) has made the jump from Kwa to Gur following the expansion of available information (Jones 1987). A language like Bogoŋ (formerly Challa) is treated as Gurunsi, but has significant prefixing noun morphology, presumably through contact with 'Kwa' languages such as Adele and Guan (Kleinewillinghöfer 2000). Bertho (1952) on purely lexical grounds, classified Akebu as Gur and Logba as Guan. Egblewogbe (1992) in an unpublished conference paper, also questions the criteria for distinguishing Central Togo from neighbouring Guan languages and includes comparative wordlists to illustrate his point. Establishing a convincing classification is made additionally problematic by the extent of loans from both Ewe and the Guan languages, both also Kwa (see Appendix to Heine 1968a).

The decades since Heine have seen a significant expansion of data available on most languages in the group and a re-evaluation of the established classificatory hypotheses is in order. The most important contributor to this process is Jacques Rongier (1989, 1994, 1995) who has produced at least some lexical material on the GTM languages in Togo and Benin and in two cases, Ikpɔsɔ and Igo, substantial dictionaries[1]. In Ghana, the Volta Region M Project (VRMP) has produced more up-to-date studies of the phonology of GTM languages as well as grammar sketches and at least some lexical data (e.g. Ring 2002, 2003). As a consequence, it seems appropriate to attempt a more-up-to-date classification of GTM languages and in particular to address outstanding issues as to the unity and membership of the group and its relation to Kwa as a whole. The paper[2] reviews recent progress and summarises the results to date.

2. Existing hypotheses on the classification of GTM languages

Johnston (1919, 1922:187-194) may have been the first to place the GTM languages (South-West Togoland languages in his terminology) squarely within the noun-class patterns of Niger-Congo (=Semi-Bantu). He quotes data from Lefana, Sɛlɛɛ, Avatime and Nyangbo-Tafi[3]. Diedrich Westermann, who supplied some of the early sketches of these languages, treated them as ensemble in his overviews of West African languages (e.g. Westermann 1927, 1935). However, he only published a short overview specifically focusing on this group late in his career (Westermann 1954) where they were named *Togorestvölker*. The idea that these montane populations were some sort of remnant was reflected in ethnohistorical publications of the period (e.g. Höftmann 1968) and is probably related to an anthropological conception of *Montagnards paléonigritiques* promoted by Froelich (1968) who considered the peoples of the Mandaras in Cameroun, the inhabitants of the Atakora in Benin and the GTM peoples to be relics of an older way of life only found in isolated regions following the expansion of plains peoples. Needless to say, this idea has no validity, either ethnographically or linguistically; mountain peoples evidently have a different way of life from those on the plain as dictated by their environment, but there is nothing notably archaic about it.

Whatever the case, Heine (1968a) was the first author to present evidence for the unity of the group. Heine's argument was based largely on the lexicon, as he personally collected 200-word wordlists for many the languages in question, and proposed phonological sketches. Figure 1 shows Heine's classification, substituting modern language names;

Figure 1. Heine's (1968a) classification
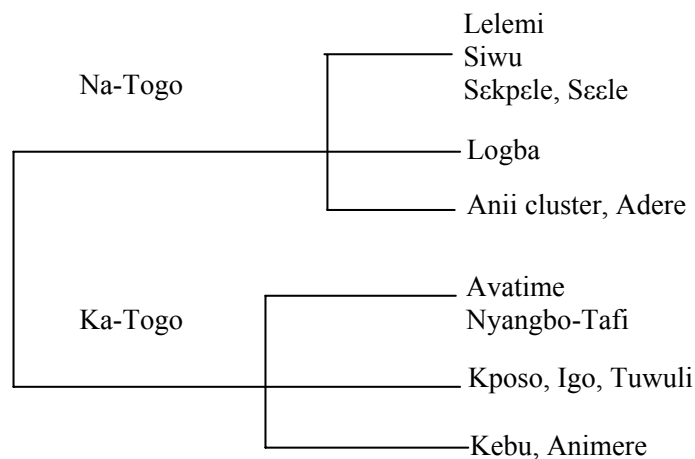
What literature exists has historically assigned the GTM languages to the Kwa branch of Niger-Congo (e.g. Stewart 1989). However, Kwa itself is a somewhat problematic concept, sweeping up a wide swathe of languages between Gun in SW Nigeria and Ega in western Cote d'Ivoire. The concept goes back to Krause (1895) but it probably owes its modern form to Greenberg (1963) although Greenberg also included Kru, Western Benue-Congo and Ijoid, branches of Niger-Congo now known to be very distinct. The modern concept of Kwa probably was first defined by Bennett and Sterk (1977) in their 'Western South Central Niger-Congo' an unwieldy name later collapsed into the Kwa described by Stewart (1989).

In the event the phylogenetic tree proposed by Stewart (reproduced in Williamson & Blench 2000) retains accepted subgroups and treats all the many languages included within Kwa as co-ordinate branches. Figure 2 shows part of this family tree of Kwa indicating the position of the GTM languages.

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[3] Apparently between publishing the wordlists in Volume I (1919) and the preparation of Volume II, Johnston received comprehensive lists from a Captain Mansfield. These lists were never published in their entirety, but the additional data Johnston extracted from them is summarised in Volume II (pp. 187-194). See also his fn. 2.

Figure 2. Classification of the eastern Kwa languages

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                          ┌──────────────── Akan
              ┌─ Central Tano ─┤
              │    Bia         ├─ Nzema-Ahanta
    Tano ─────┤                └─ Anyi, Baule, Anufɔ
              │                 ┌─ Efutu-Awutu
              └─ Guang ─┬─ South ┤
                        │        └─ Larteh-Cherepong-Anum
                        └──────── Northern Guang

              ┌─ Ga
              ├─ Dangme

                          ┌─ Lelemi-Lefana
                          │  Siwu-Lolobi
    Na-Togo ──────────────┤  Likpe, Selee
Proto-Kwa                 ├─ Logba
                          └─ Anii, Adele

                          ┌─ Avatime
                          │  Nyangbo-Tafi
    Ka-Togo ──────────────┼─ Kposo, Igo, Wuli
                          └─ Kebu, Animere

                          ┌─ Ewe
    Gbe ──────────────────┼─ Gen, Aja
                          └─ Fon-Phla-Phera
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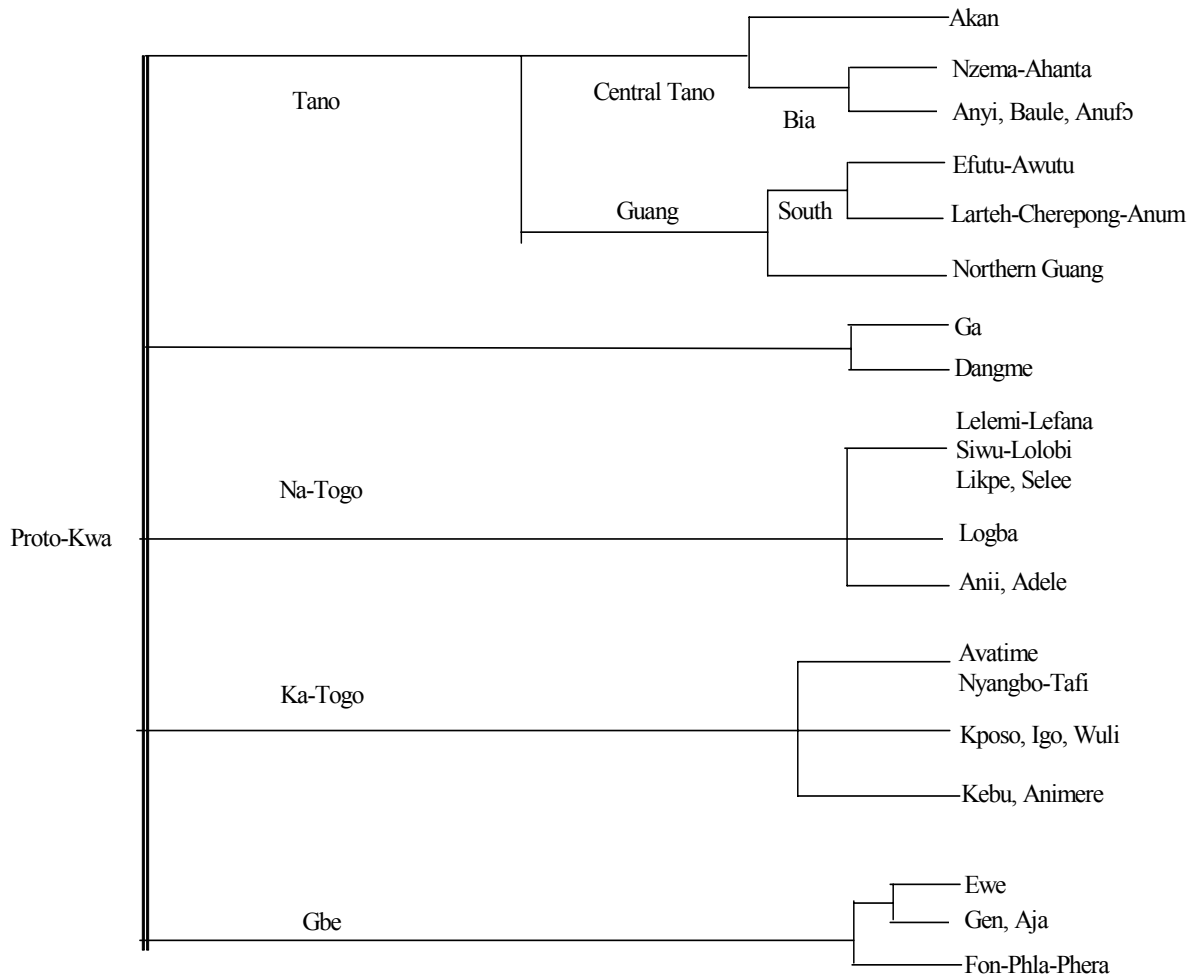
Adapted from Williamson & Blench (2000)

This situation remains highly unsatisfactory and part of the motivation behind this paper is to establish a more satisfactory classification of the GTM languages and provide evidence for their relationship with other 'Kwa' languages.

3. Ethnographic and linguistic background

The most recent background data on these languages is found in the 15th Ethnologue (SIL 2005). The population figures should be treated with some scepticism, since they are mainly data from the early 1990s and are anyway estimates. The number of CT languages is usually given as fourteen, but it now seems that dialect differences are so significant that more should be recognised, especially with the 'Basila' group. Table 1 shows the main ethnic groups and languages:

Table 1.The GTM languages

Reference Name	People	Language	Other name	Classif-ication	Source
Adele	Bidire	Gidire		Na-Togo	
Anii			Basila	Na-Togo	
Giseme			Akpe	Na-Togo	
Logba	Akpanawò	Ikpana		Na-Togo	Dorvlo (2004)
Lelemi		Lɛ-lɛmi	Buem	Na-Togo	
Lefana		Lɛ-fana	Buem	Na-Togo	
Siwu -Lolobi	ɔ-wu pl. ma-wu	Siwu	Akpafu	Na-Togo	
Likpe	ɔ-kpɛlá pl. bakpɛlé	Sɛkpɛlé		Na-Togo	
Sele	Sɛlɛɛ	Sɛlɛɛ	Santrokofi	Na-Togo	
Avatime	Ke-dane-ma	Sì-yà		Ka-Togo	
Nyangbo	Batrugbu	Tùtrùgbù		Ka-Togo	
Tafi	Bàgbɔ̀	Tɛ̀gbɔ̀		Ka-Togo	
Ikpɔsɔ	Akpɔsɔ	Ikpɔsɔ		Ka-Togo	
Wuli	Bawuli	Tuwuli	Bowiri, Tora	Ka-Togo	
Igo		Igo	Ahlon	Ka-Togo	
Akebu		Gəkəgbə		Ka-Togo	
Animere		Animere		Ka-Togo	Ring (p.c.)

Table 2 shows the locations of the GTM languages, listed alphabetically by their best-known names.

Table 2. Location of the GTM languages

Name	Location	Villages	Popul-ation	Dialects	Source
Adele	Ghana/Togo		21,000	Upper Adele, Lower Adele	
Akebu	Togo/Ghana		40,700		
Anii	Benin/Togo		7700	Gikolodjya, Gilempla, Giseda	
Animere	Ghana	2	30[4]		Ring (p.c.)
Avatime	Ghana		11,600		
Giseme	Togo		3400		
Igo	Togo		6300		
Ikpɔsɔ	Togo/ Ghana		100,300	Amou Oblou, Ikponu, Iwi (Uwi), Litime (Badou), Logbo, Uma	
Lelemi/ Lefana	Ghana		42,000	Baglo	
Likpe	Ghana		>30,000	Sekwa, Sekpele (Situnkpa, Sela & Semate)	Ameka (2002)
Logba	Ghana	8	10,000		Dorvlo (2004)
Nyangbo	Ghana		3,900		
Sɛlɛɛ	Ghana		6000		
Siwu -Lolobi	Ghana		16,000		
Tafi	Ghana		3000		
Wuli	Ghana		10,000		

Heine (1968a) reports Animere as spoken in two villages and as dying out, but a 1974 survey showed that it was thriving in an isolated village, Kunda, in the Twi-speaking area (Kropp-Dakubu and Ford 1989:120). Ring (p.c.) on the basis of recent (2005) surveys suggests that only thirty people speak the language, so it is fair to conclude that it is not long for this world. Another CT language may have existed, Boro, first referred

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[4] All speakers are over 35 years old

to in Asante (1886), disappeared in the nineteenth century and for which we only have a fragmentary vocabulary (Westermann 1922a). Heine (1968a:300) considered the material too exiguous to reach any definite conclusion. Debrunner (1962), in some work that has never been followed up, reports on some further traces of moribund speech-forms and special languages in the CT area. Kropp Dakubu synthesises various reports on languages of this region that are no longer extant, although we cannot be sure all were GTM speech-forms. Nonetheless, Heine (1968b fn.2) quotes Plehn as predicting in 1895 that the CT languages would disappear in a generation, absorbed by Ewe and Twi; despite their influence, the CT languages are still widely spoken and show no sign of disappearing.

The earliest literature for most of the CT languages is Funke (1909, 1910a,b), Wolf (1907, 1909) and Westermann (1922a,b; 1954) although Christaller (1887/8, 1889/90, 1894), better known for his work on Twi, published some wordlists in the 1880s and a sketch of Adele in 1894. Bertho's (1952) comparative wordlists were important in drawing together material in one place, but the transcriptions, at best, are very simplified. Some older sources appear to be dangerously inadequate; comparing some of the data on 'Bowili' in Westermann (1922a) with modern data it is hard to recognise the same word being transcribed[5]. The major survey of the former *Togorestsprachen* (now usually 'Central Togo') is Heine (1968a). Kropp-Dakubu and Ford (1989) represents a recent summary in English and Rongier (n.d.) an overview in French.

Heine includes a series of maps of the settlements of Central Togo speakers, including graphics showing their migrations where these have been recorded. However, the linguistic dynamics of the area have been transformed by the creation of the Volta Lake . Prior to the twentieth century, the inaccessibility of the region meant that there were no long-distance trade routes traversing it. The construction of roads, notably the Great Eastern trunk road in 1964, opened up the region to both trade and migration. The creation of the Volta Lake in 1975 compelled many ethnic groups to leave their ancestral lands and move east or north into new territories, causing the interlacing of populations to become still more intense. Kropp-Dakubu (2006) represents the most recent synthesis of historical materials on these populations, but there is still considerable work to be done on individual traditions; for example, there is still no good explanation for the location of the Anii [Basila] in Northern Benin.

3. GTM Phonology

3.1 Vowel systems

Influenced, perhaps, by the needs of literacy programmes, much of the discussion on GTM languages since Heine has focused on the vowel systems. Heine (1968a) analyses all the lects he discusses as having either 7 or 8-vowel systems with the additional vowel being a central vowel. The exception is Anii [Basila], which is ascribed a nine-vowel system (Heine 1968c) although not of the cross-height vowel harmony (CHVH) usually currently preferred. In almost every case, Heine marks a corresponding set of nasal vowels mapped against the oral vowels. Heine (1968a:142) reconstructs a five-vowel system for PTR and suggests that the widespread /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ are due to processes of assimilation and contraction. It seems likely that Heine was heavily influenced by Westermann's (1927) Proto-West Sudanic; many of his reconstructed forms have a similar shape to PWS roots. Economy of explanation might suggest that where /ɔ/ is attested synchronically for particular roots in almost every language in the group (as in the tables on p. 143) and indeed is found in external cognates, it would be appropriate to reconstruct it to the proto-language. Despite the widespread presence of nasals, Heine is unwilling to reconstruct these to PTR, again preferring to appeal to contraction and assimilation, thereby making his PTR resemble PWS.

Shortly after the publication of Heine's book, there was major burst of research energy on the GTM languages in Ghana, connected primarily with SIL Bible translation projects. Preliminary analyses of these languages were influenced by the seven-vowel system used to write Twi which has unhappily been adopted as an orthographic convention for many Ghanaian languages (Casali 1995 has a useful discussion of these

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[5] This is not Westermann's own fieldwork in this case, but a synthesis of other materials.

under-representational analyses). Ford (1973) analyses Avatime as having a seven-vowel system, even though its earliest researcher, Funke (1909) marked nine vowels, a view later re-iterated by Schuh (1995a) and Maddieson (1998). Sɛlɛɛ (Santrokofi) is given seven vowels (Allen 1980) although it is now considered to have nine. Anderson (1999) discusses these analytic changes as a preface to her description of Ikpɔsɔ as a ten-vowel language with CVCH. Storch & Koffi. (2000:82) describe Akebu as having ten oral and ten nasal vowels (although it would be surprising if these were all contrastive). Dorvlo (2004) describes Logba as having nine vowels. Although the phonology of several CT languages is yet to be presented in modern form, it can be assumed that they are likely to be 9- or 10-vowel CVCH systems.

Vowel nasalisation clearly presents an analytic problem; many post-Heine authors either make no reference to it or refer to it in passing. Schuh (1995b:126) in discussing Avatime notes that he 'found no non-borrowed words in the nominal vocabulary with unconditioned nasalisation'. Nonetheless, minimal pairs in Avatime make it necessary to posit phonemic nasal vowels synchronically. It seems likely that nasal vowels recorded in CT languages will generally prove to be conditioned by nasal consonants or to be otherwise foreign to the underlying phonology, although this remains to be demonstrated.

3.2 Tones

Heine (1968a) describes the CT languages as having either two or three tone-heights, usually with a rising and falling tone marked as tonemes. However, it seems likely that the tone-systems may be more complex. Ford (1971) and Schuh (1995a,b) describe Avatime as having a four-height system, which is supported by minimal quadruplets. Anderson (1999:189) describes Ikpɔsɔ as having a three-tone system on nouns and a four-tone system on verbs as well as a variety of glide-tones associated with these levels. Storch & Koffi (2000:83) mark a three-tone system with a phonemic falling tone for Akebu, in contrast to the two-tone system in Heine (1968a: 110). Most of the rising tones proposed by Heine as tonemes appear to be combinations of level tones. As with the vowels, it seems that new analyses are likely to record more tone-heights than have previously been proposed.

4. The impact of Ewe and Twi

The speakers of Central Togo languages in Ghana and Togo have been heavily influenced by dominant regional speech-forms. Throughout the southern part of the GTM region, Ewe is the dominant second language and almost everyone is a fluent speaker (Ring 1981a). Ewe villages are found scattered through the region and Ewe has influenced the phonology, lexicon and grammar of these languages. The exact chronology of Ewe migration into this region is not well documented, but especially in the south, there are actual Ewe villages and many populations speak Ewe fluently as a second language (Ring 1981a; Gavua 2000). Heine (1968a) noted very high percentages of Ewe loanwords in many languages, although to a certain extent this is a function of the informant; in many cases, the 'real' word can be produced after some thought. Further north, towards Nkwanta, Ewe becomes less important although it is still known to traders and some members of the older generation. The expansion of primary education has had the effect of spreading Twi more widely, together with the higher visibility of government. Nonetheless, the absence of significant numbers of first-language speakers of Twi makes it typically a market language with no great depth of vocabulary. Influences on the remote Anii language have yet to be analysed. Of the languages in this region only Animere appears to be threatened and most have well-supported literacy programmes.

The linguistic influence of Ewe on these languages remains to be fully analysed. Ewe is presumably genetically related to the GTM group at some higher level, and some common lexemes reflect this kinship or indeed their common Niger-Congo affiliation. Nonetheless, for example, the phoneme /ɖ/ is only found in languages with some historic contact with Ewe suggesting that it is not basic to the phonology of this group. In morphology, a clear case of influence is the addition or substitution of the suffixed Ewe plural marker –

wo, -wɔ sometimes in combination with other nominal affix changes (as in Avatime) or as a replacement for them (as in Logba).

5. Conclusions

The present paper presents initial findings in a long-term project on revising the reconstruction and classification of GTM languages. The paper is accompanied by lengthy comparative wordlists; considerable amounts of unpublished data are still to be collated. However, at this point a preview of some likely conclusions can be presented.
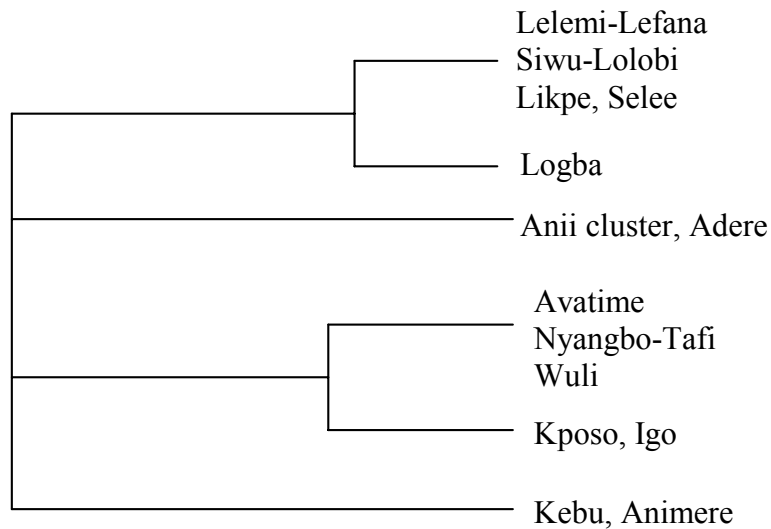
Although apparently a long-established group, the Central Togo (*Togorestsprachen*) languages bear features of a typological classification –i.e. languages with noun-class affixes in a region otherwise dominated by languages with residual morphology. The grouping and its subdivision have been generally accepted by Kwa scholars although there has been no published re-examination of the evidence. The only researchers to question this approach have been Egblewogbe (1992) and Rongier (1997). Rongier only considered languages for which he had personally collected data, and on this basis assigned some Central Togo languages to Gur. Central Togo may well be another example of a phenomenon all too common in African language classification, a typological grouping masquerading as a genetic classification. The double affixing morphology found in some CT also occurs in other regional languages, such as Akaselem, Dilo and Ginaanjobi and Bassari. Had these languages been known at the time the category was established, they might have 'become' *Togorestsprachen*. As it is, they are assigned to Gur and Guan. Central Togo languages are difficult to establish as a group in relation to Kwa as a whole and may be better treated as a mixture of single-branch languages and small clusters.

Heine's work has had the effect of making CT languages seem more related than they really are, because many of his cognate sets reflect established Niger-Congo roots widespread throughout the region. Once tables of comparable semantic items are set up, the internal diversity of the group becomes apparent. No innovations, either in lexicon, morphology or phonology can be advanced that establish the group without question. GTM languages share few common lexemes and even fewer that are distinctive; if it is a single branch of the hypothetical Kwa then it is more diverse than the whole of Chadic, for example, which is somewhat surprising. Indeed, although the name 'Remnant' languages has been dropped for its pejorative implications, it does seem that the diversity of these languages is reflective of a long period of isolation is this montane region.

There is little doubt that the much recycled older sources were heavily influenced by Ewe both phonologically and lexically. The high percentage of Ewe forms in earlier data probably reflect the nature of the informants. Recent data collected in relation to literacy projects seem to have lower incidences of Ewe loanwords.

So far, the data suggest small clusters of closely related languages and individual languages that are part of the same regional grouping. Whether these really form a distinct branch of Kwa is doubtful and they could be treated branchings from the broader Kwa stem. Figure 3 presents a proposed classification based on the data .

Figure 3. Revised classification (tentative)

Lelemi-Lefana
Siwu-Lolobi
Likpe, Selee

Logba

Anii cluster, Adere

Avatime
Nyangbo-Tafi
Wuli

Kposo, Igo

Kebu, Animere

As more data is added, the classification will be refined.

Richer and more accurately transcribed datasets make possible a re-examination of the GTM hypothesis. At the same, more material on neighbouring Guan and Gur languages with major similarities in lexicon and morphology make it possible to explore the web of influences that bind together languages of the region.

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[This synthesises published linguistic material on the GTM languages, as well as including references within the text]

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