

COLLECTED LANGUAGE NOTES

The Sounds of Sɛkpɛle A phonological description

**J. A. Ring, Ph.D.
K. Okyerefo
Cyprian Somevi**

**GHANA INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS
LITERACY AND BIBLE TRANSLATION**

December 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>1. Introduction</u>	2
<u>1.1 The Sekpele language and people</u>	3
<u>1.2 Language classification</u>	3
<u>1.3 Previous studies</u>	4
<u>1.4 Scope and purpose of the present work</u>	4
<u>2. Phonemes</u>	5
<u>2.1 Consonant phonemes</u>	5
<u>2.2 Vowel phonemes</u>	9
<u>3. Phonotactics</u>	12
<u>3.1 Syllable structure</u>	12
<u>3.2 Word structure</u>	13
<u>3.3 Restrictions on segment occurrence and co-occurrence</u>	13
<u>3.3.1 Vowel Harmony</u>	15
<u>3.3.2 Vowel Harmony in verb root classes</u>	15
<u>3.3.3 Vowel harmony in the verb word</u>	16
<u>3.3.4 Vowel Harmony in the impersonal prefix</u>	17
<u>4. Phonological processes (morphophonemics)</u>	17
<u>4.1 Processes Affecting Consonants</u>	17
<u>4.1.1 Labialization</u>	17
<u>4.1.2 Palatalization</u>	17
<u>4.1.3 Anticipatory Coarticulation</u>	18
<u>4.1.4 Elision</u>	18
<u>4.2 Processes Affecting Vowels</u>	18
<u>4.2.1 Assimilation</u>	19
<u>4.2.2 Elision</u>	19
<u>5. Tone</u>	20
<u>6. Text in Sekpele</u>	21
<u>7. Word List in Sekpele</u>	24

1. Introduction

This work will present notes from a phonological study of Sekpele, a language of Ghana's Volta Region. An inventory of the sounds of Sekpele will be given along with a

description of the rules and processes which govern the pronunciation of those sounds. Finally, a phonemic representation of the language will be presented, based on how these sounds affect and are affected by other sounds. The work is a result of the study of Sekpele by a team of Bakpele individuals under the guidance of Dr. J. Andrew Ring, working with the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT), affiliated to the University of Ghana, Legon. Field work was conducted between January 1999 and January 2002.

1.1 The Sekpele language and people

Sekpele is spoken by the Likpe people of Ghana's Volta Region. Approximately 16-18,000¹ Likpe people live in the Hohoe District. The nine primary towns can be reached either by a road that leaves Hohoe going to Bakua or the road that leaves Hohoe going north to Ayoma-Buem. All nine towns lie within 7-15 miles northeast of Hohoe.

The boundaries of the Likpe traditional land include the mountain ridge that makes up the Togo border to the east and the Lolobi and Hohoe peoples to the west. They share a common boundary with Buem to the north and the Ewe to the south. The language spoken is known either as Sekpele or Sekua and the people as Bakpele or Bakua. The Central Language Committee has agreed to refer to the language as Sekpele.

The major dialect differences within Sekpele are predictable. Sekua is spoken in the most southerly towns of Bakua and Todome and uses both voiced and voiceless consonants. Sekpele, with only voiceless consonants, is spoken by the seven northern towns. There are also minor but recognisable differences between the northern towns of Mate, Bala and the lowland towns around Agbozome.

The major second language of the area is Ewe, a regional trade language, spoken to some extent by about 75% of the population.² There is also some knowledge of Akan (Akwapem Twi), especially among the older people of the community.

1.2 Language classification

Sekpele belongs to the Kwa subgroup of the Niger-Congo subfamily and specifically to the Proto-Tano division.³ Sekpele is related most closely to Selee, Siwu and Lelemi.

¹ Based on the last ethnic census of 1960 with a conservative growth rate of 2.6%. Andrew Ring, 1981. Ewe as a second language: A sociolinguisticsurvey of Ghana's central Volta Region. Research Review 12&13;IAS, Legon.

² M. E. Kropp Dakubu [ed.], 1988. *The Languages of Ghana*. Kegan Paul International for International African Institute.

³ John M. Stewart, 1989, in John T. Bendor-Samuel [ed.], *The Niger-Congo Languages*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, pp. 214-245.

These form part of an area grouping that has been called the Togo Remnant or Togo Mountain Languages, but which we will refer to as the Central Volta Region languages.

1.3 Previous studies

Many of the early studies done on the Central Volta Region languages were done in German by linguists such as Westermann⁴ and Funke⁵. (Describe the studies)

In the mid-1960s, Hoefnagel led an East German team to study the northern group of languages between Hohoe and Jasikan, producing studies in both German (for Bowiri) and English (for Lelembi, along with some unpublished comparative material). (Describe the studies produced)

In the late 1960s, Bernd Heine traveled throughout the Volta Region gathering data for a comparative phonology of the so-called “Remnant” languages. His study, also in German, included phonological information on Avatime, Logba, Nyangbo and Tafi from south of Hohoe, while Likpe, Akpafu/Lolobi (Siwu), Santrokofi, Bowiri and Buem (Lelembi) were included from the Central Volta Region from Hohoe north to Jasikan. Adele and a brief discussion on Animere (no linguistic material) were included, both in the north of the Volta Region, as well as Akposo, Akebu, and Ahlo of Togo, and Basila of Northern Benin.

Allan

Ford

Ring

1.4 Scope and purpose of the present work

The primary linguistic task of this research has been to establish an orthography for the Likpe people for use in a mother tongue education and cultural preservation programme. It is therefore focused on the application of linguistic principles to real-life problems and will not be an endeavor to broach new theoretical approaches.

⁴ Westermann, Dietrich

⁵ Funke

2. Phonemes

2.1 Consonant phonemes

Sekpele has a total of 17 consonant phonemes at 6 places of articulation, e.g. labial, alveolar, (alveo)palatal, velar, labiovelar, glottal. These phonemes are displayed in (1).

(1) Consonant phonemes:

	labial	alveola r	(alveo) palatal	velar	labio- velar	glottal
vl. plosive	(p)	t	tʃ *	k	kp	(h)
vd. plosive	b	d	/dʒ	/g	/gb	
vl. fricative	f	s			(x)	
vd. fricative		/z				
nasal	m	n	ny			
lateral flap		l				
glide		(r)	y	w		

* The voiceless alveopalatal [tʃ] will be written /tsy/ in the examples to follow. Its voiced counterpart [dʒ] will be written /dz/. The phonemes marked in parenthesis () are primarily found in loan words, while symbols preceded by / are voiced consonants found in the Sekua dialect.

Dialectal voicing in Sekpele is allophonic. The voiced consonants [dʒ, z, g, gb] are used in the Sekua dialect of the Likpe traditional area for some words which speakers of Sekpele use the voiceless counterparts [tsy, s, k, kp]. Sekua speakers, however, also use the voiceless counterparts [tsy, s, k, kp] in certain words. The pattern is not predictable to Sekpele speakers whose dialect, like in neighboring Sɛlɛɛ, has no voiced counterparts other than /b/⁶. This phenomenon may have historic roots, since the two groups are reported to have arrived in the area at different times and from different parts of West Africa⁷. As a result, Sekua speakers have agreed to write the voiceless counterparts in the orthography. It is recognized by those who speak the Sekua dialect (probably

⁶ It should be noted that while Sekpele uses /b/, its words with /p/ are all loan words.

⁷ Tradition among the Bakua elders is that many of them came from the Ada area to meet a group at Likpe-Todome. The Bakpele leaders claim to have come with the Balɛɛ either from Atebubu or Notse.

through their familiarity with other languages such as Ewe and English), but not by speakers of the primary dialect, Sɛkpɛle.

In the Sɛkpɛle dialect the phoneme /l/ has three allophones – the phonetic [d] or [n] appears before /i/ and /u/, while [l] appears before all other vowels. A similar situation can be seen in Sɛlɛɛ regarding the complimentary distribution of [l, d, n]. The phoneme /n/ also occurs with all vowels as a phoneme on its own. Only the Sɛkua dialect of Likpe has [l] occurring consistently before all vowels.

The presence of a phonemic glottal stop has not been noted in Sɛkpɛle, though phonetically (as with its neighboring mountain languages) the negative mode in the Sɛkpɛle verb word ends with the closure of the glottis.

Evidence of contrast among these consonant phonemes is shown in (2):

(2) Consonant Contrasts:

/ p /		/ b /	
pɛ	“just”	bebi	“children”
pɛplɛpɛ	“small”	bo	“we, us”
ɔpunu	“a table”	bisi	“yams”
kampe	“a pair of scissors”	bakplako	“pigs”
mpa	“bed”	bɛbɛ	“palm nuts”
		bə	“come”
		be	“look, see”
		bamba	“another”
		buɛɛ	“softly, slowly”
		beso	“why”
/ f /		/ s /	
fo	“to get”	soni	“hairs”
floma	“to change”	sinkli	“to return”
fə	“you”	seko	“a vegetable herb”
flə	“to wash, to bath”	simuə	“the neck”
flubia	“white”	sinə	“meat”
fefe	“very much”	siə	“to sit”
fə	“to scratch”	situ	“metal”
sɛflə	“laziness”	sikpɛfi	“childhood”
fləsə	“to complete”	sinuə	“twice”

/ t /		/ d /	
tə	“to ask”	diwə	“the hoe”
tə	“to give”	dikpefi	“a chap”
ti	“to close”	dibubu	“the broom”
tə	“to ask”	diyuəsə	“peace”
tutlu	“especially”	disuəyuə	“happiness”
təyi	“to say, tell”	fakidi	“to fall”
tonsə	“to burn”	dufə	“to enter”
ntəbu	“sand”	tidi	“to touch”
te	“to show, to teach”	dunsə	“to pierce”
/ l /		/ r /	
lonsə	“to melt”	apatiprɛ/apatiple	“a type of bird”(T)
lekpomɛ	“the chair”		
lefosi	“ten”		
lɔniyifoyifo	“unity”		
leloba	“pawpaw”		
lekpo	“the ocean”		
labe	“to sleep”		
ɔkle	“pepper”		
lebanta	“swamp”		
/ ts /		(dz - Bakua)	
tsyako	“to meet”	dzako	“to meet”
tsya	“but”	dza	“but”
tsyetsyi	“to run”	dzedzi	“to run”
ditsyitsya	“the basket”	didzidza	“the basket”
disuətsyə	“patience”	disuədza	“patience”
tsyue	“to construct”	dzue	“to construct”
ɔyetsyue	“friend”	ɔyɛdzue	“friend”
tsyontsyo	“far”	dzɛlɛlɛ	“steep, sloppy”
tsyue	“to arrange”	dzue	“to arrange”
/ m /		/ n /	
mɔmɔ	“now”	nɔ	“to hear”
muə	“to catch”	nə	“to drink”
omamanyə	“a soldier”	ni	“to refuse”
mbe	“mother”	beninə	“elders”

menkidi	“to open”	nase	“nine”
mba	“salt”	nnuəbi	“oil”
mə	“they, them”	ɔsɪnɔ	“the mosquito”
mɛ	“me”	mini	“to swallow”
mina	“to roll”	mininko	“to wrestle”

/ ny /

nyə	“to see”	keyifo	“job”
nya	“and”	yifo	“to do”
nyaso	“therefore”	diyo	“house, room”
nyakata	“dirty”	yɛ	“to stop, to walk ”
nye	“or”	yuə	“to be cold”
nyanii	“surprise”	yisə	“to fill”
nnyə	“to stand”	ɔyinkɔ	“to worm”
nyansə	“to lose”	kɔyɛ	“play”
nyimi	“to chew”	uyi	“the stick”

/ y /

/ w /

wɔnɔ	“to breathe”	ohia	“poverty” (Twi)
wɛ	“to deceive,”	hiɛ	“to force”
wi	“to throw away”	oholo	“wild yam”
kewi	“a dance”	hia	“want” (Twi)
owa	“a snake”	hlohlo	“brittle”
wɛlɛwɛlɛ	“bits”	oxe	“umbrella” (Ewe)
wale	“to dislodge”		
wusəko	“to help”		
wi	“to dance”		

(h – x)

/ k /

(g - Bakua)

kɛ	“to find”		
ku	“to dig”	gu	“to dig”
ɔkuɛ	“farm”		
kusu	“mushroom”		
kutu	“soup”		
kle	“to tie		
klɛsə	“to delay”		
oka	“chief”	oga	“a chief”
klua	“long”		

/ kp /		(gb - Bakua)	
kpadi	“to call”	legbo	“the ocean”
kpo	“to pour”	legbomi	“the chair”
kpi	“to peel”		
dikplibi	“the pot”		
kplatsya	“to struggle”		
kukpense	“hunger”		
kpenkpe	“plenty”		
okponkpo	“a judge”		
ekpinsa	“miracle”		

2.2 Vowel phonemes

Sekpele has 8 phonemic oral vowels, as shown in (3):

(3) Vowel phonemes

	Front	Central	Back
High, advanced	i		u
mid, advanced	e	ə	o
mid, retracted	ɛ		ɔ
low		a	

Evidence of contrast among these vowel phonemes is shown in (4):

(4) Vowel Contrasts:

/ i /		(ĩ)	
fĩ	“to take”	kafĩã	“cloth”
si	“to wipe”	lefianku	“a piece of cloth”
mmi	“today”		
diyi	“day”		
bio	“again”		
sikpi	“fear”		
sini	“to open”		
afi	“rules”		
wɔni	“to write”		

/ e /		(ẽ)	
-------	--	-----	--

etiki	“words”
lefe	“time”
ke	“swim”
leba	“stone”
leblambo	“bottle”
betidi	“people”
beso	“why”
sieti	“where”
le	“to bear”

/ ε /

fε	“before”
ɔklɔbε	“the bird”
lɛklɔbɛyɔ	“the nest”
ɛkpε	“really”
lɛkpε	“fish”
kafoɛkpε	“kindness”
tsyɛlɛlɛsɛ	“sloppy, steep”
kafε	“the antelope”
fɛɛ	“but”

/ ə /

tə	“to give”
kə	“to push”
ləkə	“to take out”
nə	“to drink”
ukuə	“rope, thread”
kawunsɪə	“world”
kəsə	“monkey”
olesɪə	“morning”
yɪfə	“to descend”

/ a /

kpa	“gather”
anta	“corn”
la	“to cut, to love”
otata	“ant”
tafa	“to cheat”
yala	“to cross”
okla	“mat”

(ɛ̃)

kukpɛnsɛ	“hunger”
ɔlɛnkɛ	“crocodile”

(ã)

hã	“only” (Ewe)
fã	“shout”
lepã	“bat” (Twi)
kpã	“tightly”
tã	“slander”

akpa	“millet”
kakpa	“the rat”

/ ɔ /

(õ)

ɔlenkɛ	“crocodile”	fõ	“to swell”
ɔlɔkɔlɔkɔ	“monitor lizard”	tɔnko	“to lead”
ɔkɔbe	“pestle”	ɔtɔnkotɔnko	“leader”
ɔfue	“snail”		
kɔtɔ	“blood”		
kasɔ	“land”		
kasiɔ	“squirrel”		
tɔnɔko	“to agree”		
ɔsɔsɔ	“house fly”		

/ o /

(õ)

ɔtɔnkotɔnko	“leader”	lebombo	“bell”
olokotuku	“cotton wool”	ofamfa	“thunder”
koyo	“shadow”		
oto	“elephant”		
okpo	“mouse”		
kolo	“acid”		
oxe	“umbrella”		
koto	“ear”		
kakpoklo	“tortoise”		

/ u /

(ũ)

kukpense	“hunger”	hũ	“_____” (Ewe)
sumu	“to worship”	hũũ	“growl” (ideo)
olokotuku	“cotton wool”		
kubiɔ	“hole”		
kusiɔ	“wife		
ukubi	“spoon”		
nsusu	“mind/brain”		
kudi	“grave”		
du	“go”		

The most productive vowels in Sɛkpele roots are /ə, a, o/, while /k, t, s/ are most common in consonants.

A similarity of pronunciation has been noticed for mid vowels in Sɛkpele. Even trained language assistants find it difficult to concur fully on the representation of /ɛ, ə, e/ word finally in a few instances. Allan noted this in a study he made of Sɛkpele verbs.⁸ A spectrographic analysis would be helpful to clear up the actual formants of each of these vowels. Currently, vowel harmony patterns are the chief indicators when there is doubt as to the phoneme of a verb root. Noun prefix agreement indicates the phoneme of the noun root.

Nasal vowels rarely occur in the word final position. Only a few instances are available for /ĩ, ã, ẽ, ũ/, and these mostly occur in ideophones and borrowed words. However, there are underlying nasal features on nearly all Sɛkpele vowels that do not manifest word finally. They appear when multiple segments, morphemes or reduplicated segments join to form compound words. In such cases, a homorganic nasal appears before the initial consonant of the segment following the underlying nasal vowel. Examples are shown below in (5).

(5) Underlying nasal vowels

kukpense	“hunger”	okponkpo	“a judge”
kpenkpe	“plenty”	lebombo	“bell”

Vowel length is not phonemically contrastive in Sɛkpele. Double vowels other than combinations starting with /u, i/ (the labialized or palatalized semi-vowels) rarely occur except across morpheme boundaries in compound words such as /kafoɛkpe/ “stomach-cool/kindness”. Ideophones and adverbs provide the primary examples of vowel lengthening. Lengthened vowels, as well as labialized or palatalized combinations, will be transcribed as double vowels.

3. *Phonotactics*

3.1 *Syllable structure*

The syllable patterns postulated for Sɛkpele include N, V, CV, CVV, CCV, and CCVV. Of these, prefixes can take the form of N, V, CV or a combination of the three, as noted in (6).

(6) Prefix syllable types

búketi	Past Contin.	“we-were-closing”	CV-CV-CV
--------	--------------	-------------------	----------

⁸ Allan, E. J. 1981. Likpe, in West African Language Data Sheets (Vol. 2), ed. by M.E. Kropp Dakubu. WALS. Also, unpublished ms on Sɛkpele vowel system (GILLBT Library)

búənkəti	(Negative)	“we-were-not-closing”	CV-V-N-CV-CV
búuti	Past Complete	“we-had-closed”	CV-V-CV
bóenti	(Negative)	“we-had-not-closed”	CV-V-N-CV

CVV syllable types are displayed in (7).

(7)

kukpio	“valley”	kalua	“chin”
olesiə	“morning”	lesiabi	“knife”
koboo	“baboon”	kuankua	“green”
kakue	“spider”	duano	“fall”
anyikua	“fat”	diakpe	“pierce”

CCV and CCVV syllable types appear in (8).

(8)

kakpoklo	“tortoise”	CV-CV-CCV	
ləkləbəyo	“the nest”	CV-CCV-CV-CV	
kasiə	“the squirrel”	CV-CCV	[ka-syɔ]
ukuə	“rope, thread”	V-CCV	[u-kwə]

3.2 Word structure

Word structures in Səkpəle consist of mainly CV or CVCV roots. Compound words often reflect reduplication. Examples of these structures are shown in (9).

(9) CV or CVCV roots

nə	“pull”	bobe	“be-old”
kə	“push”	təyi	“say”
to	“throw”	labe	“sleep”
sɔ	“hit”	wəni	“write”
ba	“split”	yifə	“descend”

3.3 Restrictions on segment occurrence and co-occurrence

Certain syllable types, namely CCV and CCVV, occur only in morpheme roots rather than affixes. They can occur in reduplicated and compound root structures.

Examples are shown in (10).

(10)

buɛ	“bad”	CCV
buɛɛ	“calmly”	CCVV
kakpoklo	“tortoise”	CV-CV-CCV
lɛklɔbɛyo	“the nest”	CV-CCV-CV-CV

3.3.1 Vowel Harmony

There is a four-way vowel harmony pattern in the prefix system of the Sɛkpɛle verb word. Vowel harmony seems to divide according to vowel height with the exception of the /i/. Before showing the multiple prefixes of the verb word, a short list of verbs in their vowel harmony categories is given below in (11).

(11) Vowel harmony categories

Type 1: /i – u/	Type 2: /ə/	Type 3: /e – a – o/	Type 4: /i – ε – ɔ/
-yifo “do”	-tsyə “reserve”	-ba “split”	-teyi “say”
-fi “roast”	-bə “come”	-to “build”	-si “clean”
-ku “dig”	-nyə “see”	-te “sell/show”	-tə “ask”
-flu “be confused”	-tə “give”	-labe “sleep”	-ye “stop”
-fi “be sick”	-siə “sit”	-se “agree”	-ni “refuse”
-ti “close/shut”	-kpə “die”	-kloma “remember”	-kə “unite”
-fi “take”	-sə “sing”	-fo “weed”	-se “choose”

3.3.2 Vowel Harmony in verb root classes

Pronoun Prefixes generally occur in three separate forms in any tense for the same person, depending on the first vowel of the verb. The variations among the four verb types change from tense to tense to maintain three different patterns. This can be seen in the table of potential prefix forms below which uses the third person plural form “we”. A high tone mark identifies the past tense while a low tone mark indicates negative habitual in (12).

(12) Prefix Variation according to verb type

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4
	/-ti/ “close”	/-tə/ “give”	/-to/ “plant”	/-tə/ “ask”
Past Contin.	búkəti	búkəte	búkato	búkato
(Negative)	búənkəti	búənkəte	búənkato	búənkato
Past Complete	búuti	búute	bóoto	bóoto
(Negative)	bóenti	bóente	bóanto	bóanto
Simp.Past	búti	búte	bóto	bóto
(Negative)*	bóenti	bóente	bóanto	bóanto
Pres. Contin.	bəle buti	bəle bute	bəle boto	bəle boto
(Negative)**	bənlə buti	bənlə bute	bənlə boto	bənlə boto
Habitual	boeti	boete	boato	boato
(Negative)	bəenti	bəente	bəanto	bəanto
Future	buuti	buute	booto	booto
(Negative)	boəmbuti	boəmbute	boəmboto	boəmboto

*The negative of the Simple Past and the Past Complete is written the same.

**The Present Continuous is formed with /-lə/ “hold” plus a verbal noun.

3.3.3 Vowel harmony in the verb word

Verbal prefix variations for the four types of Sekpele verbs appear in (13).

(13) Vowel harmony according to person markers in the verb word

	1 st Sg.	2 nd Sg.	3 rd Sg.	1 st Plural	2 nd Plural	3 rd Plural
(Indep.Prn.)	mə	fə	wə	bo	mii	mə
Past Contin. (formerly)	ȳketi ȳkətə ȳkato ȳkatɔ	ə'keti ə'kətə ə'kato ə'katɔ	úketi úkətə úkato úkatɔ	búketi búkətə búkato búkatɔ	bíketi bíkətə bíkato bíkatɔ	bə'keti bə'kətə bə'kato bə'katɔ
Past Compl. (had been)	mbuti mbutə mboto mbotɔ	ə'buti ə'butə ə'boto ə'botɔ	úuti úutə óoto óotɔ	búuti búutə bóoto bóotɔ	bíiti bíitə béeto béetɔ	bóoti bóotə bóoto bóotɔ
Simple Past (written with a high tone in all cases)	ȳti ȳtə ȳto ȳtɔ	éti ətə áto átɔ	úti útə óto ótɔ	búti bútə bóto bótɔ	bíti bíte béto béto	béti betə báto bátɔ
Simp. Present (“should” must use the form /elebə/ first)	nti ntə nto ntɔ	eti ətə ato atɔ	uti utə oto otɔ	buti butə boto botɔ	biti bite beto betɔ	beti betə bato batɔ
Pres. Cont. /- lə/	nle buti	ale buti	ɔle buti	bolə buti	bele buti	bale buti
Future	muuti muute mooto mootɔ	əbuti əbute əboto əbotɔ	wuuti wuute wooto wootɔ	buuti buute booto bootɔ	biuti biute bioto bioto	booti boote beboto* beboto*
Habitual	məeti məetə maato maatɔ	eeti eetə aato aatɔ	wəeti wəetə waato waatɔ	boeti boetə boato boatɔ	bieti bietə biato biato	bəeti bəetə baato baatɔ
Future Habitual	muuketi muukətə muukato muukatɔ	əbuketi əbukətə əbukato əbukatɔ	uuketi uukətə uukato uukatɔ	buuketi buukətə buukato buukatɔ	biuketi biukətə biukato biukatɔ	bəuketi bəukətə bəukato bəukatɔ
FutureCont**	muube____	əbube____	wuube____	beebe____	biube____	boobe____

*This form is often contracted to mirror the 1st Person plural /booto/ and /bootɔ/.

**The Future Continuous is formed with /bə/ “come” and the verbal gerund (-ing).

3.3.4 Vowel Harmony in the impersonal prefix

An impersonal prefix occurs with those states that are unmarked for person by other than singular and plural. They can also be negated like other prefixes. Examples include the past continuous *əkətəkə* “formerly planted” and the predicted future *ebutsyiko* “will start to” (negated by *ən-* and *em-* in the plural or *mən-* and *mem-* in the singular).

The impersonal (unmarked) prefix is also used when a subject is mentioned as in *Bomble etsyiko ola boto kəkləkə* “We all started praying hard” or *Məmbɛ atɔnɔ* “They all agreed”. Whether the vowel of the prefix appears as either /e-/ , /ə-/ or /a-/ depends upon the vowel harmony category of the verb.

4. Phonological processes (morphophonemics)

A number of processes affect the variations found in Sekpele phonemes. A few will be mentioned below which involve segmental changes for both consonants and vowels.

4.1 Processes Affecting Consonants

The labialization and palatalization of consonants (mentioned in 2.2 above) are features which occur with most consonants. Anticipatory coarticulation is another process that influences the pronunciation of prefixes and nasalisation.

Palatalization also occurs with most consonants. The consonants /n, t, tsy/ are absent from the list of palatalized consonants. The fricative /s/ can be seen in a palatalized form in /siə, sieti, usio/ “sit, where, woman”.

The palatal /y/ is coarticulated with /w/ in the labialized /yuə/ which might also be interpreted as /wiə/.

4.1.1 Labialization

In our data to date, we have seen that labialization occurs with all consonants except /t/. It is common to find the labial feature following the palatal consonant /tsy/ in sequences such as /tsyue, tsyue, tsyuə/.

Speakers of Sekpele would like to interpret sequences beginning with /w/ followed by the -back vowels /i, e, ɛ, ə, a/ as having the rounded /u/ between them. But there are no contrastive pairs to justify this.

4.1.2 Palatalization

Palatalization also occurs with most consonants. The consonants /n, t, tsy/ are absent from the list of palatalized consonants. The fricative /s/ can be seen in a palatalized form in /siə, sieti, usio/ “sit, where, woman”.

The palatal /y/ is coarticulated with /w/ in the labialized /yuə/ which might also be interpreted as /wiə/.

4.1.3 Anticipatory Coarticulation

Nasal prefixes and vowels with an underlying nasal feature (mentioned in 2.2 above) appear as homorganic consonants in their surface form. As the speaker anticipates the point of articulation of the verb root, the reflexive nasal pronoun {nasal} takes on the feature of the point of articulation to manifest at the same point. In the orthography only the two phonemic nasals /m, n/ are used. With labials /b, m, f/ the /m/ is written. With all others /n/ is written.

4.1.4 Elision

Consonant elision is found in Sɛkpele when the future prefix {BV/ + back/} drops the /b/ but leaves the vowel. Vestiges of the underlying form can be seen with the 2nd person (you) which does not change in the surface form as seen in (14).

(14) Consonant elision

	1 st Sg.	2 nd Sg.	3 rd Sg.	1 st Plural	2 nd Plural	3 rd Plural
Future	muuti	ɛbuti	wuuti	buuti	biuti	booti
	muute	ɛbute	wuute	buute	biute	boote
	mooto	ɛboto	wooto	booto	bioto	bɛboto*
	mooto	ɛboto	wooto	booto	bioto	bɛboto*

The third person plural form is often contracted to mirror the 1st Person plural /booto/ and /bɔoto/. We might infer that the verb /bə/ “come” is probably the basis of the Future prefix, because the Future Continuous is formed with the conjugated form of the verb /bə/ “come” followed by the verbal gerund (-ing) form of a verb, as in /muubə bətə/ “I-will-be giving”. A similar pattern for the Future Continuous is found in Lɛlɛmi.⁹

4.2 Processes Affecting Vowels

The phonological processes affecting vowels include assimilation and elision.

⁹ In Lɛlɛmi the future is made with the future prefix /du-/ as in /ndubute/ or its colloquial counterpart [nuute] “I-will-give”, while the continuous is also made with the verb “come” (/bo/) and the gerund noun (/bute/), as in /ndubo bute/ “I will come-to-be giving.”)

4.2.1 Assimilation

4.2.2 Elision

5. Tone

This study does not focus on tone, but for the purposes of identifying the importance of marking grammatical tone in the verb word, we include data from an ongoing research to indicate the complexity of the subject.

Bosele verb roots have three potential tone levels on the first syllable: high (í), mid (i-unmarked) and low (ì). And the verb word, as has been pointed out in Lèlemi¹⁰, also follows one of three potential tone patterns. However, the tone pattern for each verb word - specified for tense, aspect and mode – leads to a staggering array of potential pattern combinations. Ford says, “the Central-Togo languages present some of the most complex data in this area of grammar.”¹¹

Table (15) illustrates the three potential patterns of the habitual negative (“we do not ...”) and the simple past negative (“we-did-not ...”) using the third person plural “we”. The verbs chosen include the high tone /fí/ “take”, mid tone /fi/ “be sick”, and low tone /fì/ “roast”.

HABITUAL	bòémfí	“we-do-not-take”
NEGATIVE	bòemfi	“we-do-not-get-sick”
	bòémfì	“we-do-not-roast”
SIMP. PAST	boemfí	“we-did-not-take”
NEGATIVE	boemfi	“we-did-not-get sick”
	boemfì	“we-did-not-roast ”

This three-way contrastive tone pattern creates a variation in each of the tense patterns of the verb words as noted in 3.3 above.

¹⁰ Ring, J. Andrew, 1995. Lèlemi Tone. (add bibliographic reference)

¹¹ Ford, K.C., 1988. Structural features of the Central-Togo languages, in *The Languages of Ghana*, M.E. Kropp Dakubu (ed.), Kegan Paul International; London. pp. 128

6. Text in Sekpele

\ref 001

\t Difufu eto diyi læ mo nkpe.

\f A day in my life.

\ref 002

\t Ketu kplɛ nye lekpo ɛmbɛ læ bo kasɔ.

\f There is no large river or sea in Likpe.

\ref 003

\t Nyasoo, oklo nye sitima eto busiɛ ɛmbɛ læ kasɔ mfó.

\f Because of this, canoe or steamboat travel is unknown in Likpeland.

\ref 004

\t Ibɛ bɛɛ, bonko mo bayɛtsyue bɛtsyue esu Klatsyi, diyi kediko læ 1978.

\f It happened in 1978 that I and some friends traveled to Krachi to celebrate an occasion.

\ref 005

\t Kale akpa fɛ bólosɛ eyifosa kenke.

\f The celebration continued far into the day.

\ref 006

\t Nya éhiɛ tsya bɛ businkli ku sitima boɣɛ læ Amu ɛsue bubɛ Kpando Tɔko.

\f And it was necessary for us to return by steamboat on the Volta that day to Kpandu-Torkor.

\ref 007

\t Búdu læ Klatsyi ku abombo ɛtsyɛ eti.

\f We left Krachi around three pm.

\ref 008

\t Kase bóofɛ Ketu Oti eto kɛnyɛ kakpekɔ ko,

\f Soon after passing the estuary of River Oti,

\t ufiebi ko dítsyiko bosɔ kɛklɛkɛ.

\f a strong wind started to blow.

\ref 009

\t Ntu bomɛ étsyiko bonwa bembembe

\f Soon there were strong waves

\t ite be bo sitima siame étsyiko bokpa kabe kato kaso kasa.
\f that made our steamboat rock from side to side, tossing it up and down.

\ref 010

\t Isu eyo lefe ditsyuëë, sikpi emue bo
\f At a point, we were seized by fear

\t nya búnye boë bóke le ukpe ku menkpe eto nti.
\f and we saw we were between life and death.

\ref 011

\t Bomble étsyiko ola boto kekkekë.
\f We all started praying hard.

\ref 012

\t Ibë eyo lefe ditsyuëë, ibë efe be bobëbe kabioko.
\f It came to a point where we found it necessary to find a place of shelter.

\ref 013

\t Nyaso ufuënka emë áka sitima siame
\f Because of this the boatman guided the steamboat

\t úsuko ditukpenkpe ne nkpio Nkawkaw eti.
\f towards the bank of the river nearest Nkawkaw.

\ref 014

\t Kuyi koya ko esue boë le botsyase sitima siame
\f But the dry tree to which we wanted to fasten the boat

\t eto ukue ko dítu kúdufe le ketu kame.
\f its branch even collapsed and fell into the river (just as we reached for it).

\ref 015

\t Onanto lele eni kabua ebë.
\f Except for God's deliverance, we would have been drowned.

\ref 016

\t Búnye mfó ekle fe búdu búbe Kpando Tòko.
\f We waited there for a long time before we continued our journey (came to) Kpandu Torkor.

\ref 017

\t Kale álo bo.

\f Soon darkness fell.

\ref 018

\t Okandíe tsya manké.

\f The boat had no light.

\ref 019

\t Disiale fε búbε búdufε Kpando Tòkò.

\f It was with difficulty before we arrived at Kpandu Torkor.

\ref 020

\t Se búdufée, bomblé kenke áse akonki bóto ola bóso Onanto

\f When we arrived, we all knelt in prayer and thanked God

\t ani ku kase úlóké bo lε ukpe kēmíε.

\f for delivering us from the clutches of death.

7. Word List in Sekpele

#	English	(Pl-) Singular	#	English	(Pl-) Singular
1	I	(bo) mɔ	33	egg	(a-) lɛfɔ
2	you (sg)	(mimi/mii) fə	34	horn	(a-) lɛkpɛ
3	we	bo	35	tail	(kə-) ukə
4	this	(nya-) nəmfo	36	feather	(bi-) usə
5	certain/tha t	(nya-) nəmɔ/(nya-) nəmfo	37	hair	(se-) ɔni
6	who	(ba-) owe	38	head	(e-) disi
7	what	be	39	ear	(a-) koto
8	not	ni nko	40	eye	(ə-) dinəmi
9	all	kenke	41	nose	(a-) lɛwɔ
10	many	(kpenkpe) kpə	42	mouth	(nnyə) kənyə
11	one	kɔni/ɔni/lɔni	43	tooth	(a-) lɛnyi
12	two	ənuə	44	tongue	(ka-) odiakami
13	big	amɔ	45	claw (nail)	(be-) sɛfiɔ
14	long	kulə	46	foot	(a-) kokpa
15	small	kɛkɛ	47	knee	(a-) lekonki
16	woman	(be-) usio	48	hand	(a-) kɔni
17	man	(ba-) osani	49	belly	(m-) kafo
18	person	(be-) utidi	50	neck	(bi-) simuə
19	fish	(a-) lɛkpɛ	51	breast	(a-) lɛmi
20	bird	(ba-) ɔklɔbɛ	52	heart	(kə-) utu
21	dog	(ba-) okpa	53	liver	(a-) lɛkɔ
22	louse	(m-) kebukubi	54	drink	nə
23	tree	(e-) kuyi	55	eat	di
24	seed	(e-) dibibi	56	bite	nə
25	leaf	(a-) lɛfanto	57	see	be
26	root	(ke-) uyudu	58	hear	nɔ
27	bark (tree)	(ə-) dikpə	59	know	te
28	skin	(ə-) kukuə	60	sleep	labe
29	flesh (meat)	(bi-) sinə	61	die	kpə
30	blood	(a-) kɔtɔ	62	kill	lo
31	bone	(e-) dikubi	63	swim	ke
32	oil/grease	nnuəbi			

#	English	(Pl-) Singular	#	English	(Pl-) Singular
64	to fly	funini	96	new	fɔ̃fɔ̃
66	come	bə	97	good, it	ɛlɛkɛ
67	lie down	labe kasɔ	98	round	tsyalama
68	sit	siə	99	dry, be	kue
69	stand	nyə	100	name	(a-) diye
70	give	tə	101	you (plural)	mii/mimi
71	say	teyi	102	he/she	(mə-) wə
72	sun	kofe	103	they	(mba-) məmə
73	moon	kofanle	104	how?	ntsyə?
74	star	(be-) sefanlebi	105	when?	dimamfe?
75	water	ntu	106	where?	sieti?
76	rain	ɔsɔmi	107	here	mfo
77	stone	(a-) leba	108	there	mfó
78	sand	(a-) ləwinimi	109	other	utsyuəbamba
79	earth/ soil	kasɔ/sitə	110	three	ətsyə
80	cloud	asɔmiloku	111	four	ana
81	smoke	kuyuə	112	five	anɔ
82	fire	ute	113	few	asiani
83	ash	ntɔ	114	sky	kato
84	burn	to	115	day	diyi
85	path	(ə-) dikuə	116	fog	difunle
86	mountain	(a-) kɔtini	117	wind	ufiebi
87	red	sia	118	flow	bodi
88	green	kuankua	119	sea	lekpo
89	yellow	(fowl's oil) nkusə nnuəbi	120	lake	lebantekple
90	white	flubia	121	to rain (rain, it fall	(etobɔni) ɔsɔmi
91	black	nanaa	122	wet, be	buyuə
92	night	(n-) kətsyə	123	wash	flə
93	hot, be	fo utə	124	snake	(ba-) owa
94	cold	yuə	125	worm	(e-) dikuklubi
95	full, be	yi	126	back	(m-) kama

#	English	(Pl-) Singular	#	English	(Pl-) Singular
127	leg	(a-) kokpa	157	near	fi
128	arm	(anii) kōni	158	thick	tidi
129	wing	(m-) obamba	159	thin	yēlēlē
130	lip	unyābi	160	short	kliminti
131	fur	bisə	161	heavy	kalenle
132	navel	(bē-) səkɔ	162	dull	yuə
133	gut	kafo	163	sharp, be	kə kobe
134	saliva	ntufə	164	dirty, be	bona
135	milk	mintu	165	bad	bua/biabia
136	fruit	(e-) diyibibi	166	rotten	bubu
137	flower	efu/flawa	167	smooth, be	tsyrəbe
138	grass	(be-) sefa	168	straight	tsyɔ
139	with	ku	169	correct/ truth	ɔnukuale
140	in	kəmiə	170	left	(ə-) kəməni
141	at	lə	171	right	kodiani
142	if	di	172	old (it is)	bobe
143	mother	ambe	173	rub (29)	si/ninsə
144	father	anto	174	pull	nə
145	husband	usə	175	push	kə
146	wife	usiə	176	throw	to
147	salt	mba	177	hit/beat	sɔ
148	ice (hail)	etubankli	178	split	ba
149	snow	etubankli kplə	179	poke/ pierce (hole)	diakpe
150	freeze	klə yuə yudududu	180	dig	ku
151	child	(be-) ubi	181	tie	tsyasə
152	dark, be	na	182	sew	kā
153	cut	la	183	fall	duano
154	wide	sənsə	184	swell	bɔfɔ
155	narrow	fə	185	think	(calculate head) bu disi
156	far, be	tsyontsyo	186	sing	sə

#	English	(Pl-) Singular	#	English	(Pl-) Singular
187	smell (30) (put nose)	bonyi	215	pick up	fi
188	vomit	la	216	learn	kase
189	suck	fiə	217	touch	tidi
190	blow (air)	kpo ufiebi	218	push	kə
191	fear	sikpi	219	share/drive	siə
192	squeeze	kə	220	let/cause	tə lə
194	down	kasə	222	send	kpe/tsyese
195	up	kato	223	fall	fankidi/lo
196	ripe, be (31)	sə	224	enter	dufə
197	dust	ntambu	225	exit	kabəsiə
198	alive, be	kə nkpə	226	climb	be
199	rope	ukuə	227	descend	yifə
200	year	lələ	228	urinate	wənə kesu
201	be big/fat	mə	229	have	kpe
202	walk	yə	230	get	fo
203	burn	tonsə	231	remember	kloma
204	it's red	esə	232	go	su
205	it's black	ena	233	help	wunsə ko
206	it's cold	iyuə	234	it is different	ekpe lete
207	it's full	iyi	235	write	wəni
208	do/make	yifo	236	pray	to ola
209	bring	boko	237	live	kə nkpə
210	take	fi	238	lose	nyankli/nyansə
211	ask	tə	239	be lost	nya kusu
212	show	te	240	finish	losə
213	turn	tsyawunisə	241	hit	sə
214	want	hia	242	beat	sə/ble

#	English	(Pl-) Singular	#	English	(Pl-) Singular
---	---------	----------------	---	---------	----------------

243	hate	kisi	271	growl	kpio huu
244	charm	kpe ditumunu/kle	272	call	kpadi
245	hurry	kɔse	273	shine/ sparkle	nyɔnle
246	follow	təkəko	274	change	floma
247	respect	bu	275	gather/ collect	se
248	spoil	biasə	276	serve	sumu
249	turn(into)	floma	277	choose	ləkə
250	fight	kpɔ	278	meet	tsyako
251	wrestle	mininko	279	play(game)	kpe (kɔyɛ)
252	chew	nyimi	280	play(drum)	sə (dibi)
253	swallow	mini	281	surprise	nyanii
254	put on (shirt)	kpe	282	arrange	tsyue
255	take off (shirt)	ləkə ətsyə	283	send(letter)	tsyese
256	cut (in pieces)	la	284	return	sinkli
257	hurt	fo/təkə lefabe	285	open	sini
258	be tired	bulə	286	weave	di
259	comb	sadi	287	carve	woe
260	bath	flə ntu	288	peel	fə
261	wait	nyə	289	be near	nyi afi
262	hide	biɔ	290	bother	lə
263	frighten	yakasə	291	marry (a wife)	fi kusia
264	weed	fo	292	inform	tə-bote
265	dig	ku	293	break	fəsə
266	chop	siabe	294	get/come together	tsya/bənyibəfi
267	farm	ɔkue	295	cry/weep	wi kaku
268	plant	to	296	shout	fā
268	catch	muə	297	breathe	wɔnɔ
270	bark	kpio	298	read	kla

#	English	(Pl-) Singular	#	English	(Pl-) Singular
299	calculate	bu akonta	327	rock	(a-) leba
300	pierce	dunsə	328	sand	(a-) lewunimi
301	laugh	məsımə	329	clay	səfote
302	agree	tɔnɔ-ko	330	mud	kota
303	be sick	nɔ-bufi	331	cave	dibiaku
304	reject/ refuse	ni	332	island	ntutsyilamakasɔ
305	shake	tinkəsə/tə kɔni	334	river	ketu
306	untie	nyankli	335	water	ntu
307	remain	kɛ-mfo/siə-mfo	336	lake	ditumbu kple
308	take the lead	kato	337	stream	utubi
309	morning	olesiə	338	dam	oba
310	thunder	ofamfa	339	spring	ntu-bo-laayifə
311	lightning	ɔsi-boto	340	well	letlibo
312	rainbow	kɔlesənsə	341	iron	situ
313	cloud	(a-) ɔsɔmiloku	342	copper	ayiwa
314	dew	ɔbɔntsɔyɔ	343	silver	sika-flubia
315	dust devil	lekpankpantlulu	344	gold	sika
316	shade	keyududukoto	345	ivory	(a-) letonyi
317	world	kawunsia	346	wood	(ke-) uyi
318	country	(n-) kasɔ	347	rubber	koma
319	land	(n-) kasɔ	348	leather	kubukikuə
320	hill	lekpenkpe	349	wild animal	ubutu-buki
321	valley	kukpio	350	lion	tsata
322	plain	kafiminsɔ	351	leopard	(ba-) ɔkplɛle
323	bush	dibutu	352	elephant	(ba-) oto
324	clearing	bofo	353	monkey	(n-) kəsə
325	path	kusu	354	antelope	(m-) kafe
326	cliff	kotini disi	355	baboon	(ba-) oko

#	English	(Pl-) Singular	#	English	(Pl-) Singular
356	bush cow	ɔtlomu	385	stick	(ke-) uyibi
357	squirrel	kasio	386	trunk	kuyi-eto-ntinti
358	rabbit	fomisi	387	brunch	kuyi-eto-kale
359	porcupine	(m-) kəfusaka	388	fruit	(e-) diyibibi
360	rat	(n-) kakpa	389	rattan	sialo/tonto
361	skunk	(nni) keni	390	baobab	otsyankubi
362	mouse	(ba-) okpo	391	time	lefe
363	beak	ɔklɔbɛ-eto-kənyə	392	minute	miniti
364	nest	(ba-) lɛklɔbɛyo	393	hour	(a-) lebombo-sɔsɔ
365	vulture	(e-) dibintsyə	394	month	(a-) kofa
366	eagle	(a-) kɔdikpo	395	body	etidi-suə
				(human)	
367	parrot	ako	396	corps	ɔko
368	owl	(ə-) dikuku	397	skull	disi-eto-ekubi
369	bat	disənkə/lepaa	398	brain	esifo
370	poison	keni	399	face	ənəmi
371	lizard	kesii	400	forehead	kato
372	butterfly	utukutuku	401	chin	kalua
373	frog	usuə	402	beard	ukpi
374	toad	(a-) lesasa	403	stomach	kafo
375	chameleo	kakɔnklɔ	404	kidney	akɛbɛ
	n				
376	moth	utukutuku	405	fat	anyinkua
377	spider	kakue	406	tears	(bi-) sinəntu
378	scorpion	okpoe	407	shadow	koyo
379	mosquito	(ba-) ɔsino	408	home	(ka-) oto
380	snail	(ba-) ɔfue	409	(farm)	(m-) kebuto
				village	
381	cricket	(a-) lɛbue	410	room	(a-) diyo
382	crab	(ba-) ɔkɔtɔ	411	floor	diyo-eto-kasɔ
383	ant	otata	412	wall	(ka-) ofati
384	stump	(e-) dikubiku	413	kitchen	utekakpekɔ

#	English	(Pl-) Singular	#	English	(Pl-) Singular
414	roof	dotsya	440	guave	gowa
415	wood	(ke-) uyi	441	pepper	(ka-) ɔkle
416	charcoal	(a-) leka	442	banana	oklotia
417	steam/ sweat	diwi			
418	knife	(a-) lesiabi			
419	mortar	(a-) kɔke			
420	pestle	(ka-) ɔkɔbe			
421	broom	(e-) dibubu			
422	bed	mpa			
423	stool	(a-) lekankpomɛ			
424	bench	(kabentsyi) bentsyi			
425	mat	(ka-) okla			
426	table	(ka-) ɔpunu			
427	blanket	(kə-) kuntu			
428	food	(e-) didisa			
429	porridge	bilə			
430	fufu	(kə-) fufu			
431	gari	gali			
432	stew	(ka-) ɔkle-sənsə			
433	rice	(m-) kamɔ			
434	farm	(ka-) ɔkue			
435	millet	akpa			
436	maize	(a-) onta			
437	guinea- corn	akpa			
438	a plough	diwuə			
439	yam	(bi-) sisi			