

DO THE GHANA-TOGO MOUNTAIN LANGUAGES CONSTITUTE A GENETIC GROUP?

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ABBREVIATIONS

CT	Central Togo
GTML	Ghana-Togo Mountain Languages
I	any high front vowel
S	any voiceless alveolar fricative
U	any high back vowel
V	any vowel
*	regular reconstruction
#	quasi-reconstruction

N.B. Citations of actual words in vernacular languages are in bold face, while reconstructed forms are in italics.

0. Introduction

The languages named *Togorestsprachen* by Westermann (1932, 1954) after Struck, were previously known by the translated name ‘Togo Remnant’ languages and are now usually called the Ghana-Togo Mountain Languages (GTM) or Central (or Mountain) Togo (CT) languages. They gained early attention from African language scholars because of their functioning systems of noun-affixes and associated concord that show a singular/plural morphology apparently cognate across Niger-Congo.. The noun-classes seemed to link them to Bantu (e.g. Johnston 1919-1922) and indeed Assirelli (1950) refers to them as *langues Bantouïdes*. 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 (1963) 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 ‘meat’. 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 their close proximity to the 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 Bogonj (formerly Challa) is treated as Gurunsi, but has significant prefixing noun morphology, perhaps 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 point¹. 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. A major contributor to this process is Jacques Rongier (1989, 1994, 1995a who has produced at least some lexical material on the GTM languages in Togo and Benin and in two cases, Ikpoṣo and Igo, substantial dictionaries². 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). Among the papers of the late John Stewart were some extensive comparative wordlists of Ghanaian GTM languages³. In addition, more comparative materials have become available on neighbouring languages (e.g Stewart 1973 on Potou, Kropp Dakubu 1980 on Ga-Dangme, Capo 1991 on Gbe). 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 paper⁴ reviews recent progress and summarises the results to date.

¹ Although trying to incorporate languages into ‘Guan’ also had political overtones at the period (Mary-Esther Kropp-Dakubu p.c.).

² Regrettably, this material remains unpublished and my access is through the author and Kay Williamson (†) who has arranged for the xeroxing of numerous documents.

³ Scans of these wordlists (whose authorship is unknown) were prepared at the University of Leiden and are available on the author’s website, as a variety of other GTM language materials. URL:

<http://www.rogerblench.info/Language%20data/Niger-Congo/GTML%20Website/GTMLopeningpage.htm>

⁴ A preliminary version of this paper was first presented on the 25th of March, 2001 at the 32nd ACAL, in Berkeley. It was to be published in the proceedings, but these have never appeared. A second version was presented in Ho on the 25th July, 2006, at the GTM Workshop and I am grateful to the organisers for funding to attend this. Thanks to Felix Ameka, Coleen Anderson, Rod Casali, Mary-Esther Kropp Dakubu, Kofi Dorvlo, Matthew Harley, Andy Ring, Jacques Rongier, Russell Schuh, Anne Storch, Kay Williamson (†), and to the archives and library staff at GILLBT, Tamale, Ghana for making unpublished or difficult of access material available. Members of the VRMP present at the GTM

1. 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 paradigms of Niger-Congo (=Semi-Bantu). He quotes data from Lefana, Sɛlɛɛ, Avatime and Nyangbo-Tafi⁵. 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). In Westermann & Bryan (1952:96-101) the GTM languages are treated as one of the ‘Isolated Language Groups’ outside Kwa, but no internal classification is advanced and the authors are agnostic about the affiliations of these languages. Late in his career, Westermann (1954) published a short overview specifically focusing on the group he 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; the different way of life mountain peoples is dictated by their environment, but there is nothing notably archaic about it.

What literature exists has historically assigned the GTM languages to the Kwa branch of Niger-Congo. However, Kwa itself is a somewhat problematic concept, bundling up a wide swathe of languages between Gun in SW Nigeria and Ega in western Côte 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 articulated by Bennett and Sterk (1977) in their ‘Western South Central Niger-Congo’, an unwieldy name later collapsed into the Kwa of Stewart (1989). Stewart (1989:221) decided against Heine’s division, putting together ‘Avatime-Nyangbo’, Kposo and Kebu-Animere in ‘Left Bank’ along with Gbe, while the remainder were treated as independent branches of Potou a very large grouping that includes Twi and numerous other languages. Later, however, Stewart returned to Heine’s Na/Ka division in a Kwa ‘tree’ published in Williamson & Blench (2000:29).

Earlier opinion favoured a Gur affiliation and Heine (1968:295) cites the opinions of Johannes Lukas and Oswin Köhler in support of this idea. Rongier (1997) questioned the very existence of a GTML group, reviewing languages for which he had personally collected data, and on this basis assigned some GTM languages to Gur. Rongier’s argument was more morphological than lexical and it is true that neighbouring ‘Gur’ languages, notably Dilo and Cala, show very similar nominal affix alternations to some GTM languages. This probably says as much about the absence of any really well-founded arguments for the unity of larger Niger-Congo branches such as Kwa and Gur as it does about their affiliation.

2. What is the evidence the GTM languages form a group?

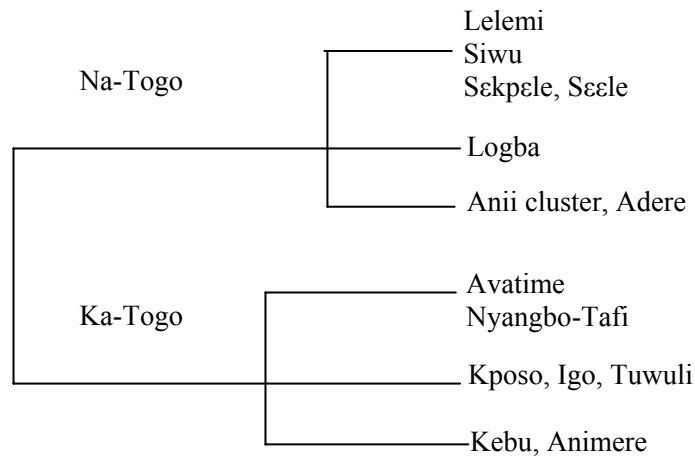
2.1 The unity of GTM languages

The first attempt to demonstrate that the GTM languages form a genetic group is Heine (1968a). Heine’s argument was based largely on the lexicon, as he personally collected 200-word wordlists for many the languages in question, and put forward a phonological sketch for each lect. Figure 1 shows Heine’s (1968a) classification, substituting modern language names;

Workshop were able to fill in wordlists for their languages to expand the dataset on cultural lexicons. Mary-Esther Kropp Dakubu kindly went through the paper and made valuable comments all of which I have incorporated.

⁵ 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 1. Heine's (1968a) classification using modern names



Heine points to a number of common lexical items shared by most languages in the group. The problem is these are usually also shared with many other Kwa or even Niger-Congo languages, hence they do not constitute proof of the distinctiveness of GTM languages. Comparisons with the two principal sources for Niger-Congo are the proto-Western Sudanic of Westermann (1927) and the proto-Western Nigritic of Mukarovsky (1976). Some examples in Heine's datasets that are also well-attested outside are shown in Table 1;

Table 1. Proposed common glosses for GTM languages in Heine

Protoform	Gloss	p. No.	External cognates
*ba	come	212	Westermann (1927: 209), PWS <i>bía</i> , <i>bá</i> . Also Chadic and Nilo-Saharan
*o-bí/ba-	small child	214	Westermann (1927: 209), PWS <i>-bi-</i>
*m-bí	excrement	215	Westermann (1927: 209), PWS <i>(m)-bi(n)-</i>
*kúí	to die	225	Westermann (1927: 237), PWS <i>kú</i> , <i>kúá</i> , <i>kúi</i>
*li-kúpá	bone	225	Westermann (1927: 237), PWS <i>-kú</i> , <i>-kúp-</i> , <i>-kúá</i>
*kúwa	dry	226	Westermann (1927: 240), PWS <i>kùà</i> , <i>kùàl-</i>
*lĩ	to eat	232	Westermann (1927: 250-51), PWS <i>lì</i> , <i>lià</i>
*ka-mâ /ku-	back	234	Westermann (1927: 254), PWS <i>-mà-</i>
*múma	to laugh	236	Westermann (1927: 258), PWS <i>mua-</i> (<i>mu-</i>)
*-inâ	four	236	Westermann (1927: 263, 265), PWS <i>-nan-</i>
*nu	to hear	238	Westermann (1927: 270), PWS <i>nú-</i>
*ku-nyóá	smoke	240	Mukarovsky (1976: 410), PWS <i>-ŋwákì</i>
*-ita	three	245	Mukarovsky (1976: 543), PWS <i>-tháthu</i>
*ku-túe /a-	ear	249	Mukarovsky (1976: 556), PWS <i>-thúì</i> , <i>-thú-</i>
*yíu	be full	224	Westermann (1927: 224), PWS <i>gi</i> , <i>giu</i>

Establishing whether the glosses with fewer attestations listed by Heine might be evidence for the distinctiveness of GTM languages would be a lengthy task. However, an example from my own dataset can be checked against standard sources such as Hérault (1983) and Westermann (1927). Table 2 shows the word for 'six' which may be either an innovation for GTM languages or a distinctive regional survival.

Language	Attestation
Adele Upper	kóórò
Adele Lower	kòòrò
Anii	ìkólàm
Gilembulnya	̀nkúli
Gikolunja	ìkùlùn
Giseme	ìkòlòm
Logba	igló
Lelemi	èkú
Lefana	èkú
Siwu	ìkúɔ̃
Sekpele	̀nkwæ
Selɛɛ	ò-kóó
Avatime	ògòlò
Nyangbo	hōlō
Tafi	fìolo
Ikpɔ̃sɔ̃	èwlu
Ikpɔ̃sɔ̃ Uwi	èwlu
Wuli	kévũ
Igo	gò
Kebu	kuraŋ
Animere	a-kóró
Ewe	àdédé

2.2 The internal classification of GTM languages

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Table 3. Terms for 'meat' in GTM languages

Language	s.	pl.
Adele Upper	gìnà	
Adele Lower	gì-nàn	bì-nàn
Anii	ntàŋkò	atàŋkò
Gilembulnya	gì-námà	ì-námà
Giseme	ntànkpà	àtànkpà
Logba	ìnó	
Lefana	lé-ná	
Siwu	si-na	mi-na
Sekpele	sínò	bínò
Selɛɛ	sinà	
Avatime	kīdzɛ	bīdzāwɛ
Nyangbo	kɛjǎ	bɔjǎ
Tafi	kì-jà	àjà
Ikpɔsɔ	éya	—
Ikpɔsɔ Uwi	íya	
Wuli	sè-kéná?	
Igo	ìkà	àkà
Kebu	gà-kô	ù-kà-kpô
Animere	kíkâ?	

It seems unlikely that Avatime, Nyangbo-Tafi and Ikposo are cognate with the other KA languages, while the Wuli form looks like a composite of the two. Both #-na and #-ka are widespread for ‘meat, animal’ in Niger-Congo. Westermann (1927: 269 & 228) gives -niàm-, -nàm- -ka- *Tier, Fleisch*.

In some ways, the word for ‘water’ is more interesting (Table 4). The *-tu root in the –NA group is attested in every language, and apparently not attested in the KA languages. Nor is it a common Niger-Congo root, but it does, however, occur in some of the western Kwa languages such as Ebie, Mbatto and even the remote Ega (Hérault 1983:64).

Table 4. 'water' in GTM languages

Language	s.	pl.
Adele Upper	bùtù	—
Adele Lower	bùtù	
Anii	bu-tó	a-tó
Gilembulnya	bù-tírà	à-tírà
Gikolunja	bù-túwó	à-túwó
Giseme	bùtó	àtó
Logba	ndú	
Lelemi	ntu	
Lefana	nùtù	
Siwu	ñ-dù	
Sekpele	ntù	
Selɛɛ	ntù	
Avatime	kùnīo	bēnīwà
Nyangbo	bulí	
Tafi	bùni	bèni
Ikpɔsɔ	ìwí	
Ikpɔsɔ Uwi	ivi	
Wuli	muí	
Igo	òsì	bòsì
Kebu	měwə	
Animere	api?	

The NA- languages have a wide range of forms that do not easily suggest any lexical unity.

The word for ‘to give’ (Table 5) may represent the closest ‘fit’ with the NA/KA distinction. All the NA languages have tV- which only appears once in the KA group.

Table 5. 'to give' in GTM languages

Language	
Adele Upper	tè, tà
Adele Lower	tà, tè
Anii	fé
Logba	tà
Lefana	te
Siwu	tá, fɔ
Sekpele	tó
Selɛɛ	tà
Avatime	kī
Nyangbo	kó
Tafi	kɔ
Ikpɔsɔ	ká, kú (imperative)
Ikpɔsɔ Uwi	kă
Wuli	kpà, té (gift), mà (give to)
Igo	kɔ
Kebu	kɔ
Animere	fá ke

Neither *tV-* nor *kV-* are innovations in the GTM languages. Westermann (1927: 244, 283) identified widespread cognates of *#k(u)a* and *#ta* and included them as Western Sudanic roots. Interestingly, the most common ‘Kwa’ root for ‘to give’ appears to be *p/fV-* which occurs sporadically in GTM languages, but is widespread in Cote d’Ivoire Kwa (Hérault 1983:62).

Table 6 shows the word for ‘animal’ in GTM languages, which can be compared with Heine (1968:266). Heine identifies a root **o-boké* for the NA languages and **o-ká* for the KA languages. Indeed the forms for the KA languages are clearly etymologically related to *#-ka* for ‘meat’ (Table 3).

Table 6. ‘animal’ in GTM languages

Language	s.	pl.
Adele Upper	ɛ̀- nàn	bà-nàn
Adele Lower	ɛ̀- nàn	bɛ̀-nàn
Anii	àbòrí	ìbòrí
Giseme	àbwé	èbwé
Logba	abwé	mbòwò
Lefana	e-buo	be-buo
Siwu	bǒy	mà-bǒy
Sekpele	úbùkí	
Selɛɛ	bóké	bà-bóké
Avatime	āgā	bāgā
Nyangbo	agǎ	bagǎ
Tafi	a-ga	baa-ga
Ikpɔsɔ	úye	éye
Ikpɔsɔ Uwi	íyoviû	
Wuli	ó-yáè	bá-yáè
Igo	ùwá	bùwá
Kebu	kèéyô	à-kèévô
Animere	du-bumaka	

As with ‘water’ the NA languages do appear to point to a reconstructible proto-form, although this root is attested elsewhere in Kwa, for example Abron **àbùà**, Eotile **ɛ̀búwù**. It seems harder to detect any proto-form for the KA languages, although clearly Avatime and Nyangbo-Tafi are linked together.

Table 7 shows the words for ‘oil, fat’ in GTM languages.

Table 7. ‘oil, fat’ in GTM languages

Language	s.	pl.
Adele Lower		bù-nò
Anii		bì-ŋi à-ŋi
Ikpána		ɔ̀nfɛ
Lelemi		nno
Siwu		nnoi
Sekpele	ñnwěbí, ańwǎ (Sekwa dialect)	
Selɛɛ		nɔyi
Avatime		kù-mūɔ bà-mūwà
Nyangbo		bɔbɔ
Tafi		bù-bɔ bàà-bɔ
Ikpɔsɔ		ámô
Ikpɔsɔ Uwi		ámó, zòmi
Wuli		kùgwâ
Igo		bubo
Kebu		awɔmpɾ
Animere		abaŋ

The NA languages retain the older root *#noi*, which, although not identified by Westermann, is widely attested in Kwa (Hérault 1983:98), Plateau (Berom **nóy**), Ubangian (Gbaya **nó**), Adamawa (Zing Mumuye **nun**) and Dogon (Walo **nù**). Heine (1968a:267) tries to link all the KA forms to a single reconstruction **m-búna*, but the evidence for this is quite weak. There appear to be at least two roots, *#-bɔ* and *#mwɔ*. The

#*mwɔ* root appears to be a retention of an older root, identified by Westermann (1927:257) as #*mi*, although synchronic forms often have a back vowel and nasalisation (e.g. Ga **mũ**, Ngbaka **mó**). The #-*bɔ* root may also be old, as it has remote cognates in Kordofanian Kaalak (*u-bo*), North Atlantic Baga Mboteni **mbòó**, and may well be cognate with such Kwa forms as Ga **fɔ̃** ‘animal fat’.

Table 8 shows the words for ‘bird’ in GTM languages. Heine (1968a:267) reconstructs **o-tsia* for the NA languages and **o-pulá* for the KA languages.

Table 8. ‘bird’ in GTM languages

Language	s.	pl.
Adele Upper	èsìsrá	bèsìsrá
Anii	gusaa	isaa
Ikpana	adzi	ndziwɔ
Lefana	à-asè	bà-asè
Siwu	kà-ròjâý	kù-ròjâý
Sekpele	òklòbè	
Selee	kànsíyè	bakànsíyè
Avatime	kādzòwīa	kùdzòwīa
Nyangbo	kahwé	bɔhwé
Tafi	ka-ɜwè	bu-ɜwè
Ikpɔsɔ	ívóɔ	ávóɔ
Ikpɔsɔ Uwi	ívlô	
Wuli	kà-vlàbì	kò-vlàbì
Igo	ilíbi	belíbi, bulíbi
Kebu	furiyɾ	
Animere	fùrúbí	àfùrúbí

In this case, Heine’s protoforms seem unduly optimistic. The #(t)*Sya* root is clearly attested in the Avatime/Nyangbo-Tafi languages, while Siwu and Sekpele seem to have unrelated forms. It seems difficult to extract **o-pulá* from the KA languages. Kwa languages in Cote d’Ivoire have a wide variety of lexemes, although as least one, Eotile (*èsí*) appears to be cognate with the **o-tsia* root. The majority of Kwa terms reflect the Niger-Congo root for ‘bird’, something like #*nUn-* (-*nùn-* in Mukarovksy (1976 No. 165).

Table 9 shows the words for ‘hill, mountain’ in GTM languages. Heine (1968a:267) reconstructs **ku-boní* for the NA languages and **-tũ* for the KA languages.

Table 9. ‘hill, mountain’ in GTM languages

Language	hill		mountain	
	s.	pl.	s.	pl.
Adele Upper	dì-dénbí	à-dénbí	òdón	ìdón
Adele Lower			òdón	ìdón
Anii			gubúnù	abúnù
Gilembulnya	go-bona	a-bona		
Ikpana	ukpó	ekpó		
Lefana	kò-bī	à-bī		
Siwu	kù-be	à-be	kù-be	à-be
Sekpele			kótini	
Seleē			kobòkòtè	abòkòtè
Avatime	lì-tò	è-tò	lītòlè	ētòlà
Nyangbo	butú	betú		
Tafi			bùtú	bèètú
Ikposo	ùkpó	—	íjǒ, ító	
Ikposo Uwi	íyímú		ítô	
Wuli			ǒ-tǎ	tǎtǎ
Igo	iqó	edó	oqo	boqo
Kebu			dutuviry	
Animere	tǔ	àtǔ	tǔ	àtǔ

The table puts together words glossed separately as ‘hill’ and ‘mountain’ in order not to miss potential cognates. In this case, unusually, the KA languages cohere with the *#-tU* root found throughout. Its presence in Adele (and perhaps Sekpele) implies that it cannot be an innovation defining the group. Although there is clearly a lexeme of the form *#-bIn-* in some NA languages it would be problematic to consider they formed a reconstructible set. However, the *#-tU* root is widespread in Niger-Congo (Wolof **tund**, Ijoid **tūdu**, Proto-Gbaya **tǎ*, Proto-Bantu **tòndà*) and even in Nilo-Saharan (Teda **tu**, Songhay **tondi**).

2.3 Does the NA/KA division stand up?

The data tables and the commentary show that the lexical boundaries proposed by Heine are nowhere perfect and perhaps appear more convincing when lined up as proposed starred forms with non-cognate forms omitted. Nonetheless, there are one or two common lexemes that match the NA group in particular *#-tV* ‘to give’ and *#-tU* for ‘water’. Against this, these are all retentions, and are attested elsewhere in Kwa and Niger-Congo. There are also plenty of ‘contrary’ items where the cognate roots seem to form quite different patterns across the GTM languages. Take, for example, the word for ‘blood’ (Table 10);

Language	s.	pl.
Adele Lower	̀̀nka`la`n	
Anii	a`ko`nò	
Gilembulnya	a`ko`na	
Giseme	a`kpà`ná	
Ikpana	dzò`sù	
Lelemi	ù-bò`ja	
Lefana	ù-bù`jà	
Siwu	i-mà	à-mà
Sekpele	kò`tò	
Seleë	ntò	
Avatime	dzèsi	
Nyangbo	dzosũ	
Tafi	jò`sũ	
Ikpɔso	òvò	—
Ikpɔso Uwi	ósefuá	
Wuli	bábò`ánè	
Igo	òbi`jà	àbi`jà
Kebu	mbrayɣ	
Animere	̀̀ndãŋ	

It seems unlikely that the further compilation of data would resolve this situation. The region is clearly marked by extensive mutual interaction of languages and borrowing, which make this type of boundary hard to delineate precisely. It would probably be more accurate to regard the GTML as a series of clusters linked by overlapping isoglosses. There is marginally more evidence to link together the NA languages than the KA languages, a view reflected in the revised classification shown in Figure 2;

A phylogenetic tree showing the relationships between several language clusters. The tree is rooted on the left and branches to the right. The clusters are labeled as follows:

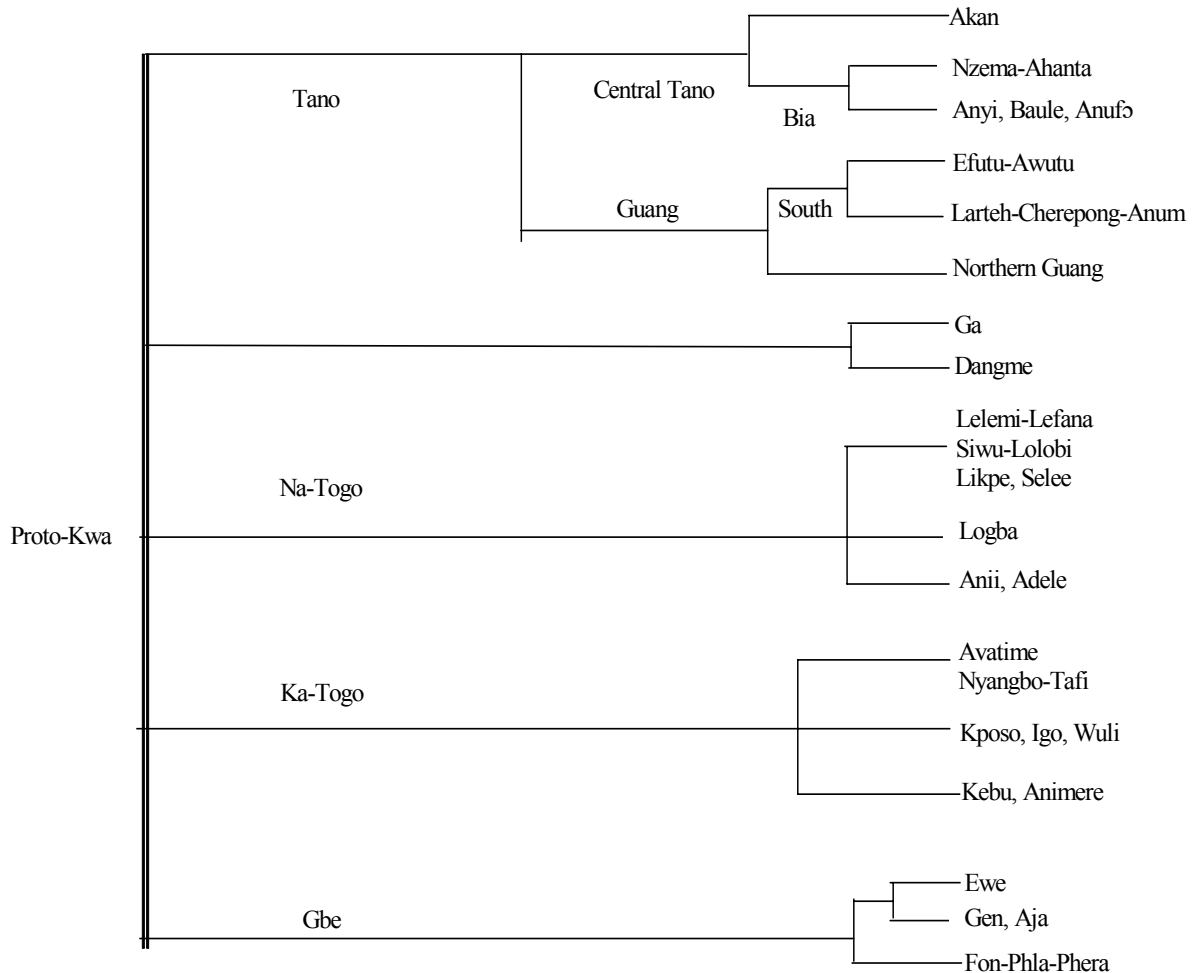
- Lelemi-Lefana
- Siwu-Lolobi
- Sekpele, Selee
- Ikpana
- Anii cluster, Adere
- Avatime
- Nyangbo-Tafi
- Wuli
- Kposo, Igo
- Kebu, Animere

Including the GTM languages within Kwa would require it to be a demonstrated entity. In fact, no evidence for such an entity exists, and many researchers now privately consider it a ragbag category. Niger-Congo is

probably a much ‘bushier’ tree than we have previously been willing to admit. In particular, it is difficult to establish any clear boundary between Eastern Kwa and Western Benue-Congo.

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 3 shows part of this family tree of Kwa indicating the position of the GTM languages.

Figure 3. Classification of the eastern Kwa languages



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.

4. Conclusions

The present paper presents some preliminary findings from a long-term project to revise the reconstruction and classification of the Ghana-Togo Mountain Languages. Although apparently a long-established group, the GTM languages bear features of a typological classification –i.e. languages with noun-class affixes in a region otherwise dominated by languages with residual morphology. Heine’s work has had the effect of making GTMLs seem more coherent 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. Nonetheless, a few lexical items seem to support the local specificity of the GTMLs and in part the KA/NA internal dichotomy.

The problem is partly simply a weak understanding of the broader context of Kwa languages. Arguments for the unity of Kwa and its coherence as a unity within Niger-Congo are yet to be made and limited comparative materials on the Kwa languages east of Cote d'Ivoire and the neighbouring Gur languages, make any conclusion tentative. Ideally such arguments would also include phonology, morphology and syntax, but the data is too patchy to produce any conclusive result. The significant expansion of work on the GTMLs from the 1990s and the increasing participation of speakers should make possible a more comprehensive argument in the coming years.

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[N.B. The bibliography includes all the works used in compiling the comparative lexical tables as well as those actually referenced in the text.]

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