

THE EGA LANGUAGE

of

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

**ETYMOLOGIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
CLASSIFICATION**

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1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

<u>Bole-Richard</u>	<u>This paper</u>
ɸ	ʎ
ɬ	ɿ
ɔ	ɔ

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

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

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

¹ Thanks to Kay Williamson (†) for comments on a preliminary version

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

Table 1. Analysis of Ega data

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
Body Parts		
arm	òwlà	? cf. Proto-Ijò ḃárà ,
back	ìṅwǎè	
beard	ìva /a-	cf. Dida and other Kru vá
belly	ɔnagù	# la- ‘intestine’ + ògù ‘stomach’
blood	àsò	
body	isřukpá /a-	
bone	ìkù	cf. common Kru kpa/kwa/kla but also Niger-Congo # -ku .
brain	àvèli	
breast	ìṅà	cf. Alladian ɛṅà , Eotile ɛṅè , and Kru: e.g. řrewe ṅèse but also in Dakoid, e.g. Nnakenyare ṅesa
buttocks, anus	até	cf. Abron tú , Eotile èyitè ,
cheek	àgbùgbù	cf. Godié, Bete (Kru) gbugbu
chest	èdègbè /a-	cf. Neyo (Kru) digblè also Kwa, Abure èdá ,
chin	ìmàvú /a-	cf. Alladian ɛmwá bù ('mouth-stone')
ear	elowá a-	cf. Nyabwa lòku ,
eye	efí /e-	
faeces	imní	cf. Dida ṅni , Neyo ṅlí , Abure àmíí , Eotile mí but an Atlantic-Congo root of the form (m)-bin (W.). Also cf. Proto-Ijò ḃíé ,
fart	umǎíse	? cf. Abure mǎíí ,
finger	etá /i-	
flesh	ena	cf. Avikam ɛṅá , but this is Niger-Congo # -na for ‘meat’.
foot	ìbèbé	
forehead	ìgbédè	cf. Attié gbá , Abbey gbèṅí ,
hair	ulòlò /e-	cf. Tepo lú púpú ,
hair of head	unulóló	head+ hair
hand	ìkòsá	cf. Dan (Mande) kò , also Baule sá ,
intestines	imamní	cf. Nzema àṅalè reflecting Niger-Congo root # -na , # -la
head	inú /a-	cf. Adyukru núnṅ , Tepo lú , but also Niger-Congo roots # -lu-
heart	ekpóyró	cf. Aizi prɔ ,
jaw	ògbàṅò	
knee	onó /i-	widespread forms in EBC e.g. Mambila nɔ² Buru e-nú /a-nu , Batu ø-nún /á-
leg	ówè	cf. Attie wè ,
liver	icɔ	
mouth	òmà	cf. Mbatto ómé , Alladian ɛmwá , but also Aizi mu ,
mucus	ìkò	? cf. ṅgò ,
nail	itónu	cf. Alladian átáwrò ,
nose	ìṅésí	cf. Alladian nnyè but also Kru: Tepo néé 'nostril' and Mande e.g. Guro ṅé
nostril	ɛnúvo	'nose-hole'
neck	ùṅwè	cf. Ebrie áḃwà , Avikam áwòḃà , if C ₁ was originally a labial-velar
penis	ewli	cf. Eotile èwrá , Nzema tùwálè ,
pus	ìfèni	cf. Abidji rífí ,
saliva	amadú	'mouth-water'
scabies	epí	
scarification	ànì	
shoulder	òdagblà	
skin	òyṛò	cf. Alladian ewrú , Avikam èfrú ,
stomach	ògò /i-	cf. Dan (Mande) gú , Mbatto ókò , Abbey òpu ,
sweat	ɔwówà	? cf. Abidji lówò ,
tears	amé	
thigh	ɔpú /i-	Widespread in Benue-Congo, e.g. Igala ò-pá , Erusu í-kpa
tongue	eno /i-	? cf. Eotile áné , Abure nàné , and similar forms.

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
tooth	enómà /a-	nominalisation of 'to bite', widespread Niger-Congo #-lum-
urine	ilòkpá /a-	
vagina	ènròfi	cf. Alladian esè nevrī,
voice	ùmàná /e-	
wound, sore	ìbó /a-	? cf. Abidji lúbúmò,
People		
baby	ofi weléèkpà	
chief	ùglònòtò	
child, son	òfi /e-	
co-wife	òdòdá	
family	itòpù /a-	
father	òtò /-mà	cf. Dida to,
female	ònájò /i-	
friend	ògwayi	cf. Neyo ðeyi perhaps ? Nzema ègówó,
girl	esuwókpè	
grandparent	òjò	cf. Ebrie èji,
husband	ògbì	see 'man'
honky	otrukpofi	
in-law	òbò /e-	
landlord (<i>hôte</i>)	olúgbofi	
leper	okú gbùgbù	= 'sickness-red'
man	ògbì	
mother	òná	cf. Neyo né, Attie nē, Abbey nò, Igbo òné etc. Niger-Congo root #-na
nephew	ògwe /e-	
old person	òglégléjàà	
older brother	ògbitòyi	
person	òjàà	cf. Aizi jò but Niger-Congo root #-ni-, -nu- (W.)
rich man	ònígbì /e-	
sister	ònáyofi	
slave	òbà /e-	
stranger	elúgbè	
twins	elóflè /a-	
uncle (maternal)	òdàbù	
wife	òsì /e-	see 'woman'
witch	ògòzìbù	
woman	òsì /e-	cf. Avikam, Krobu sì
young girl	eswekpè /a-	
young man	ònimá /e-	
younger brother	òbétùyi	
Animals & parts		
agama lizard	ewlégbì	
animal, meat	ena /i-	cf. Ebrie éná but a Niger-Congo root #-na(ma)
animal sp.	ifè	
animal track	ùdú /e-	
ant	esísàkpà	cf. Ebrie ésisré,
ant of corpse	ugofé	
antelope sp.	èdì /a-	
anthill I	igóle	
anthill II	idúlu /a-	
bat	òlà /i-	
bee, honey	élòvle /i-	probably a compound. ? cf. Neyo (Kru) lovue, Aizi lu
bird	enakpíèkpà	'animal + x' but see Nyabwa nekpèe,
bird sp.	eté	
buffalo	ègù	cf. Ebrie gò, Krobu gbró,

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
bushbaby	Ìvàla /a-	
bushpig	òvògbò /t-	
butterfly	offfi /i-	
'carp'	Ìdókpá	cf. Ebrie kpékpè ,
cat	ṗáṗṗoná	cf. ɟrewe (Kru) ṗáũ ,
catfish		
chameleon	glímyó	cf. Dida glimiò , and similar forms in other Kru
chicken	uwlá	
civet cat	ùblo /e-	
claw	itónu	
cock	owlá 'gbì	chicken + male
cockroach	òvívì	
cow	èdo /i-	cf. Ebrie èdwà byè , Adyukuru id ,
crab	owá	cf. common west Kru #ka but similar roots widespread in Niger-Congo
crocodile I	òwà	? cf. Alladian evá ,
crocodile II	ekpaké	cf. Dida kpàké , Koyo kaké ,
crow	dábòlò	
dog	òve /e-	cf. Aizi (Kru) ve though both could be related to Mande-Congo #-bu
donkey	àflùmú	common regional term, e.g. Baule aflùmú , Aizi afrumu ,
duck		
earthworm	ufró	cf. Attie hrò , Abbey ru ,
egg	Ìfù	
electric catfish	òdògbó	cf. Abidji, Adyukru didibò ,
elephant	ètè /a-	cf. Avikam étrí , Eotile èsò , but also Kru, Aizi dye , Tepo due ,
feather	òtò /e-	cf. Avikam ètú , Abbey èté ,
fish	edúne /i-	'water-creature'
fly	enó	
flying squirrel	idó /a-	
francolin	èbúlèkpè	
goat	ewi	cf. Tepo wli , Aizi wri ,
goat, male	ibówà	Niger-Congo root #-bori .
grasscutter	gligbó	cf. Dida (Kru) grigbó but also Avikam (Kwa) grigbé , and forms with #-gbe in EBC, e.g. Yangkam gbə^(k)
grasshopper	cogli	cf. Tepo kólu ,
green pigeon	ilòwlè	
guinea-fowl	kòjé	cf. Ebrie kòyè , but all regional Kwa languages have a similar form. Also Kru, cf. Aizi kòjé , Koyo kpògò ,
guinea-worm	ègòsrì	cf. Avikam égònrì ,
hare	sésékpè	
hedghog	igó /a-	
hippo	eníggbèle	cf. Koyo jíz~blé , Bete of Guiberoa (Kru) nígbulí . It probably means 'water-elephant' in another language
horn	ùgú /e-	cf. common eastern Kru forms such as Koyo gó
horse	kpàṗṗgó	cf. Aizi kpàṗṗgò , Krobu kpàṗṗgò but a regional culture-term
hump	ibúkù /a-	cf. Neyo búó , also ? Eotile àkùbó by metathesis
leopard	enó	
louse	ṗṗáàgrì	cf. Abbey ṗṗũ , also Kru e.g. Tepo nwó ,
manatee	dídífè	
mason wasp	étwekpà	
monitor lizard	owlu /t-	cf. Abure òhólòvò ,
monkey	ìlò /a-	cf. Adyukru lów ,
mosquito	enómí	cf. Dida ṗwomiè , Koyo ṗsómíye ,
mouse I	bùcré	cf. Koyo (Kru) ṗicrà although this is isolated
mouse II	ùgbò	cf. Abbey òkwó , Baulé kpó , but also Kru: Guere boè , Aizi bo ,
pangolin	eyí	
parrot I	ìsè /a-	
parrot II		
pigeon	igu /a-	

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
porcupine	dògòblí	
python	ɔyé	cf. Krobu àyrô , but also Kru, e.g. ɟrewe ɟrè ,
rat	bwri	
scorpion	ɪtatánìgla	cf. Tepo gàyà ,
sheep	ɪwówlá	cf. Abure ɔwáɪ , but also Kru e.g. ɟrewe bawlé ,
snail I	ɪfi /a-	
snail II	èlè /ɪ-	cf. Mbatto àlɔ ,
snake generic	élò	cf. Agni èó , Abidji ɔlô , also Kru: Koyo mlebòlú
snake sp. I	èlòlú /i-	
spider I	gɔɟɪ	
spider II	úɟonu	
squirrel	ɛtyákpà	
tail	ùlú /e-	cf. Adyukru lúwì , Baule lwá , Abure òlúè ,
termite	ɔɟnɔ	cf. Koyo ɟnɔ ,
toad	ɔxlɔ	cf. Abure klɔpókɔ but words with a kVrV formula are widespread in Africa
tortoise	òge /i-	? cf. Nzema èwòyà ,
turtle	odúge	water + tortoise
warthog	ibukpè	
worm	ufló	Kru, e.g. ɟrewe hɔlɔ ,
wing	upewú /e-	
Plants		
atieke	àvèɟná	
banana	elaba /a-	? cf. Hausa ayaba
baobab	ɔvè	cf. Koyo vada ,
bark	ɪyrukpá	#- kpa element is a Niger-Congo root
bean	àɖi	? cf. Krobu àbòlú
branch	ulú /e-	
bunch I	ìgɔlá /a-	
bunch II	ìdà /a-	
cassava	èvèɟná /a-	
coconut	ɪɟwá	
cocoyam	èkoko	cf. Nzema èkùkó , Agni kòókò , Nyabwa koókò but similar forms occur throughout the region
cola sp. I	ɔgá	cf. Nzema èyèsélè , but also Kru: Aizi ge , Koyo gole ,
cola sp. II	èdà /ɪ-	
cotton	ɟèsé fóxó	cf. Krobu ɟèse , but a regional culture-word
fruit	ìdò /a-	
gourd	ewá	< Baule āw ā . Likely to be a culture-term in this region
grass	uxlú	<French
guava	gòyávò	
indigo	gàli	
leaf	ɔlòkú /ɪ-	cf. Neyo ɟoku ,
leaf sp. I	ɪbá /a-	
leaf sp. II	ɔvòvò /ɪ-	
lime	idogóglèdò	
maize	ɖɖi	cf. Dida ɖɖí , Avikam, Alladian dùdu , Abidji dodo , but a recent culture-word.
millet	ɟɔ	cf. Abbey ɟɔ , Nzema ɟòú , but also Kru: Bete ɟɔ ,
mushroom	ɔlata /ɪ-	
okra	ègbáɪ	cf. Baule gbɔlu , Ebrie ègbòkhwé , also Kru: gbòé . Koyo gbègbáa
palm sp. I	ɔdà /a-	
palm sp. II	ilofó /a-	
palm-nut	àwà	cf. Alladian āvá , Abure èvê , also Kru: ɟrewe wé ,
palm-wine	alolú	
parasolier	òkòdú	

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

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
month	ùfè	see 'moon'
moon	ùfè /e-	Niger-Congo root #-fe. cf. Eotile éfè, Avikam éfé etc.
morning I	óflɪ	? cf. Koyo zəplí,
morning II	óóóí	
morning III	ə̀ʒùmó	
mound	idúké /a-	
night	ùdodó	cf. Bete dudo , Krobu dɔné
pond	ə̀və̀ʒə̀ /ɪ-	
potash	àglú	
puddle	ɪtəkpa	
rain	edú	Volta-Congo, e.g. Proto-Gurunsi *du, CB *-dùmbí continuous rain
rainbow	ulélé /e-	cf. Abbey lélé (also exceptional within Kwa)
rainy season I	odúóó	
rainy season II	igúdè	
river	udúgbí	cf. Mbatto ódube but also Nupe èdù 'large river'
road	ə̀və̀nə̀ /e-	
salt	àgù	cf. Koyo gùlù , Abbey ɲgu , Alladian ngɔ̀ ,
sand	ɔ̀ʒə̀lú	cf. Abbey ɲgə̀ɲ ,
sea	ɲɲè	< Dida ɲè
seed	epí /i-	old Niger-Congo root #-bi, meaning 'child, seed'
shame	ɲɲə̀ɲ	< Nzema nə̀nɲ ,
shelter	obí	
sickness	okú	
smoke	ugósi	cf. Guro (Mande) cé-goi (cé = fire). This may be exceptional within Mande
star	etáfune	
stone	igófi	Perhaps from Mande, as #g ^w V- is a common first element in CVCV structures, e.g. Dan gwɔ̀
sun	eyéfi	#eyi forms are found in Central Nigeria, especially Nupoid languages. Seme, the enclave Kru language among Gur speakers, has ye .
thorn	ègú /ɪ-	
today I	ɲɲə̀ɲó	? check
today II	íye	
tomorrow	ə̀ʒə̀gù	
village	ə̀gɪó	cf. Bete (Kru) gɔ̀lò and related languages, but also Baule klò , Abron kùró ,
wall	ubúddə̀gbló	
water	adú	cf. Ebrie édù , and perhaps Eotile ɲzú
week	ɲamàché	< Dida ɲamàcɪ but cf. also Krobu krí ,
well	idúgbə̀	
wind	upupolú /e-	cf. Dida pupulú , Eotile èfùbó , Mbatto ópùbè
world	ə̀gə̀fó	
year	oŋ ^w ni	? < French
yesterday	ɲɲə̀ɲó	

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
Propensities		
debt	ùdú /e-	cf. Avikam èdǎ,
darkness	isúkpò /a-	
death	ekú	cf. Bete kú, but a Niger-Congo root #-ku.
dirt	uplu	
enema	ece	
extremity	umé /e-	
fever	òyì	cf. Igboid óyí 'cold',
fight	ùgǎlú /e	
forgetting	ilú	
friendship	ùlǎ	
funeral	ɔwlé	
half	imekpí /a-	
heap	ùdé /e-	
hole	ìgbǎ	cf. Eotile àbò, Dida búku, but #-bo roots are also found in Gur, e.g. Dagbane boyli and EBC, e.g. Aten boŋ
hunger	ìgò	cf. Dida ñwǎmǎ, Koyo gbigbe, Mbatto óg̃, Abbey ayò, Ebie ákò, but perhaps much more widespread e.g. Mada (Plateau) gyòŋ
hunting I	ìvi	
hunting II	olí	
inheritance	àja	throughout Kwa in this region but also cf. Aizi aja, Godie ja, suggesting a regional culture-word
interest	ègòkǎ	
itch	epí /a-	
left	ɔmǎsí	
lie	efwé	
madness	uyɔ	
matter	ìmàyt̃ /a-	
medicine	awázt̃	
middle	ágodè	
moment	ìpù	
name	ìnt̃	cf. Kru: Koyo ñíní also Kwa: Adyukru nín, Abidji íné, Avikam èní. Niger-Congo root ? < Dida àtíkpa
namesake	atékpà	
naughtiness	afya	
news	ìgwe /a-	
opening	òmà /e-	
place	ábu	
price	efé	
proverb	ìjúnwǎé	cf. Abbey ànayá,
quarrel	èzǎ	
riddle	ifunegúnwǎé	see under 'story'
right	ómògbi	
shame	ɱap̃t̃	? < Nzema nǎní,
sickness	okú	
sleep	àlà	cf. Niger-Congo root #-la 'lie down, sleep',
slice	ɔnǎjǎ /i-	
smallpox	eyíft̃	
smell I	èvlu	
smell II	ujǎ	cf. Tepo nú and other Kru also widespread nVn- roots for 'to smell' in EBC
step, row	ùlògbì /e-	
story	ifunegúnwǎé	x + 'back' cf. Neyo núnúo,
thing	èjè	cf. Ebie áyí, Krobu yĩ, but then also East Benue-Congo parallels, e.g. Tarok iyám

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

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
mat	ḡgbé	cf. Koyo gbàtá , Adyukru ògò ,
meal	ḡlí	cf. Nzema àlè ,
millstone	ḡḡasé	cf. Alladian ebwasé ,
money I	ḡpì	
money II	ḡráà	
mortar	ìlògò /a-	cf. Abbey àlò , Krobu wró , Aizi lo , Guere dòò ,
nail	ulú /e-	
needle	uméselú /e-	< Baule âmēsřē
net for fishing	ìdàdà /a-	cf. Krobu, Agni dada also Kru: Aizi dada , Neyo dàda . A culture-word in this region
net for hunting	eségbì /a-	
net III	zò	? cf. Benue-Congo e.g. Nupe esa , Kulu isàk .
oil	àpì	see 'fat'. cf. Tepo pná ,
paddle	ùblò /e-	
palmwine	aḡlalolú	
pestle, large	ḡgbí	
pestle, small	ìḡḡúḡbó	? cf. Abbey orúgbò
pipe	èḡmàḡú	
porridge	afufú	cf. Agni, Baule m̀v̀ùf̀ú . A regional culture-word
pot	èḡú	
pounded yam	pá	cf. Ebrie èpá , Krobu, Abidji mpá
room	upalá /e-	
rope	upá /e-	cf. Tepo (Kru) pátà though this form is isolated within Kru, also Abidji bá ? cf. Proto-Ijò f̀ú̀l̀ù ,
sauce I	uplu	
sauce II	òḡḡgbá /i-	
sauce III	àsru	
shed	òvlu	
shoe	ḡbàbuá	cf. Ebrie égbàwà but a regional culture-word
shrine	imasá /a-	
spear	elú /i-	cf. Gban (Mande) dú , but ? Kru: Neyo lí ,
staff	kpámá	cf. Avikam kpàma but widespread in the region as a culture-term
stick	ete /a-	see tree
suck	pà	cf. Mbatto pē ,
threshing tray	èḡòbè	cf. Abure òbú , Krobu gbàlè ,
trap (animal) I	èḡdàlè /a-	
trap (animal) II	emáyì	cf. Ebrie émé ,
tool	òvè	
vehicle	òḡóló	= 'canoe'
whistle	vlévlécó	
winnowing tray	èḡòbè	
youth	ònimá	
Numerals		
one	ìlogbó	cf. Mbatto lóbo , Koyo ḡalò ,
two	ḡpò	cf. Eotile àp' , Abure ápù , and widespread in this region.
three	ìtá	cf. Koyo ta , Niger-Congo #- ta
four	ìlè	cf. Abbey alé ,
five	ìḡwè	cf. Dida ngbi , Niger-Congo #- na
six	ìḡwòḡḡ	? 5 + 1
seven	ìḡwalḡḡò	5 + 2
eight	ìḡwalḡtá	5 + 3
nine	ìḡwalḡlè	5 + 4
ten	izù	? cf. Abron dú? ,
twenty	úḡlu	cf. Godié (Kru) ḡòlò and related forms in other W. Kru languages
hundred	éḡluèḡwè	20 x 5. Most Kwa languages have a distinct lexeme, but three others use the 20 x 5 formulation, although with different basic terms. This pattern

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
		is also common in Kru
Adjectives		
all	ffí	
big	-gàgà	
black	kpíkpi	
good	kɔfɔ	
many	gàgàsa	
new	wólòwa	
plenty	ɔ̀tùkpà	cf. Ebrìe ɔ̀dùdù ,
red	-gbògbò	
rough	àgbókí	
round	ìkpòklòdò	cf. Baulé kùklù but similar words are found across the region and indeed the world.
small	-nèèkpà	
smooth	ɔ̀yéɔ̀yé	cf. Abidji trètré , and similar forms in many languages of the region
wet	wólò	? cf. Baule flòlò ,
wide	pà àtí	
white	-fòfò	cf. Eotile fúfú but Niger-Congo root #- fu .
yellow	-púpú	
Conjunctions etc.		
and	áyí	
close to	ìsò	
if	áyí....-xa	cf. Avikam èyì ,
inside	-ɲò	? Baule nú ,
this one	-má	
that one	-ɲó	
with	áyí	
yonder	asúwoɲú	
Interrogatives		
what?	ìyà	
when?		
who?	ònà	
Verbs		
to answer	tánà	cf. 'to speak'
to arrive	ɲé	cf. Tepo ɲné ,
to ask pardon	yúywè	
to attach	ɲwà	cf. Neyo gwa ,
to be able	kwlá	
to be afraid	bà okú	
to be alive	yró	
to be big	gà	
to be cooked	kù	
to be difficult	fí ìsò	
to be dry	yiyo	
to be far	wlá àtí	
to be full	yé	#yí is widespread in Kwa
to be good	kɔfɔ	
to be hard	fí ìsò	

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
to be heavy	lɔ́	A Niger-Congo root. cf. Abure lɔ́, Mbatto loà, etc.
to be hot	flɔ́	cf. Proto-Ijò ʒfirí,
to be in flower	flérì	< French?
to be liquid	críkí	
to be narrow	ménà ìsù	
to be old	ɲné	
to be pregnant	gɔ́ ògù	x + stomach
to be raw	ɲwǎḽḽḽ	
to be ripe	gbò	cf. Baule blò,
to be standing	pú èti	
to be strong	fí ìḽḽò	
to be thick	ḽónè isù	
to be tired	syé	? cf. widespread fɛ́ roots (e.g. Agni, Attie, Baule)
to beat (drum)	ḽè	cf. ɲrewe be, Dida ḽlá, also Kwa: Krobu bré, Baule bó,
to bite	gɔ́	
to blow	fó	cf. Eotile fù, but Niger-Congo #fu
to boil, cook	wélè	
to break	kótò	
to breathe	só àḽḽò	verb + 'air'.
to burn	fyá	cf. Abure fè,
to build	kò	cf. Alladian kù,
to buy	pè	cf. Dida pià, Mbatto pe, Abidji pà, Abbey ve, Proto-Ijò fɛ́,
to call	gló	
to carry	gɔ́	
to catch	ḽó	
to change	kéci	
to chew	tà	Niger-Congo root #ta
to choose	gbazḽàḽḽò	cf. Dida gbazrifi,
to close	ci	
to come	wà	cf. Abbey wa, Krobu wǎ, but widespread in Niger-Congo
to come back	kpàḽà ìbé	
to cook	gà	
to cough	kpòsò	cf. Eotile kónzò, Mbatto kro, but similar forms widespread in Africa. cf. PWS #kual-, kuan- (W.:245)
to count	gà	cf. ɲrewe gè, Mbatto g̃
to cut	vyá	
to dance	iwlí	cf. 'to sing'
to defecate	ḽḽ	
to die	kù	Niger-Congo root
to dig	ḽwé	cf. Benue-Congo, e.g. Igala gwà, Ayere gbo, CB #gúnḽù
to dig up	só àḽḽ	
to dive	pá	
to do	kò	cf. Adyukru kok,
to dream	ɲólò	cf. PWS #la 'to lie down or sleep' but #na- for 'to dream' is common in Benue-Congo
to drink	nò	cf. Tepo ná, Baule nˀ,
to eat	li	Volta-Congo root. cf. Baule dí, Abure li,
to fall	ḽà àḽḽ	
to feel	mó	
to finish	ḽá	? cf. Mande
to fish	pá	
to float	sépò	
to flow	bú	cf. Godie púlá, Abure bóḽò,
to fly	fé	cf. Ebrie fè, Abure fè, Nzema fi,
to follow	gò ìtò	cf. Ebrie gè tʰá,
to get s.t. I	wli	
to get s.t. II	xé	cf. Ebrie gè, Mbatto ge, Abidji hè,
to give	pù	

English gloss	Ega citation	External parallel (if any)
to give birth	bi	cf. Alladian bi , Attié ho bi , but Niger-Congo connected with #- bi for 'child'
to go	mì	cf. common Kru, Proto-Ijò mu , mù , also Adyukru (Kwa) im , though this is exceptional
to go down	dé èti	cf. Ebrie dyà thé , jrewé ti ,
to go in	wièné	? cf. Agni, Baule wùlò
to go up	òù	
to go up to	pé	
to greet	kò mókà	'make salutation'
to grow	lò	cf. Ebrie lé ,
to hang	gòé	
to have sex with I	dó	cf. Mbatto di ,
to have sex with II	mñi	
to hear	gò	
to hide	dá	
to hold	òó	cf. Ebrie òò phè ,
to insult	vlá	cf. Alladian wrà , Avikam wra , Abbey ra ,
to jump	kpátà	
to kick	òè	cf. Ebrie òé
to kill	wá	cf. Abidji wò , Mbatto we , Alladian wri but found throughout Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan, e.g. Oubi (Kru) wòlò , Debri Nubian wur- . Westermann (1927:225)
to kneel down	gò inó àti	
to know	ji	cf. Eotile jni , Avikam ji , but an Atlantic-Congo root #- niN- cf. Westermann (1927:x)
to laugh	ci	
to lay egg	dó	cf. Nzema tó , Abidji ròò ,
to learn	dídà	
to lend	òu ànà	cf. Nzema, Agni bò ,
to lie	tútù ugwé	
to lie down	dé èti	cf. Agni dá , Mbatto lé but these are probably local variants of Niger-Congo #- la , #- ra .
to light (fire)	òó	
to look at	véti	
to look for	yíyè	
to love, like	namà	
to make, do	kò	
to make fun of	ci	
to marry	yù	? Avikam zye ,
to measure	kéli	
to mix	cikànà ñjò	
to pierce	flu	? Kru e.g. Guéré flé
to plant I	lè àti	
to plant II	òè àti	
to play	pá	
to pluck	kpé	cf. Ebrie kpà , Abbey kpa ,
to pound	lò	? PMC #- tu- cf. Westermann (1927:x)
to pour	cé èti	? cf. Abidji kù éi ,
to pull	ji	
to punch	dò	
to rain	nà	cf. Mbatto nrã , Alladian nà ,
to remember	gwá	cf. Abbey yáyà ,
to rot	bù	cf. Ebrie b^u , Ibibio bù 'be rotten', PB #- bund- . but Niger-Congo (Westermann, 1927:213)
to run	bà	
to say	wa	
to scratch	ñwí	

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

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

4. Conclusions

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

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

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

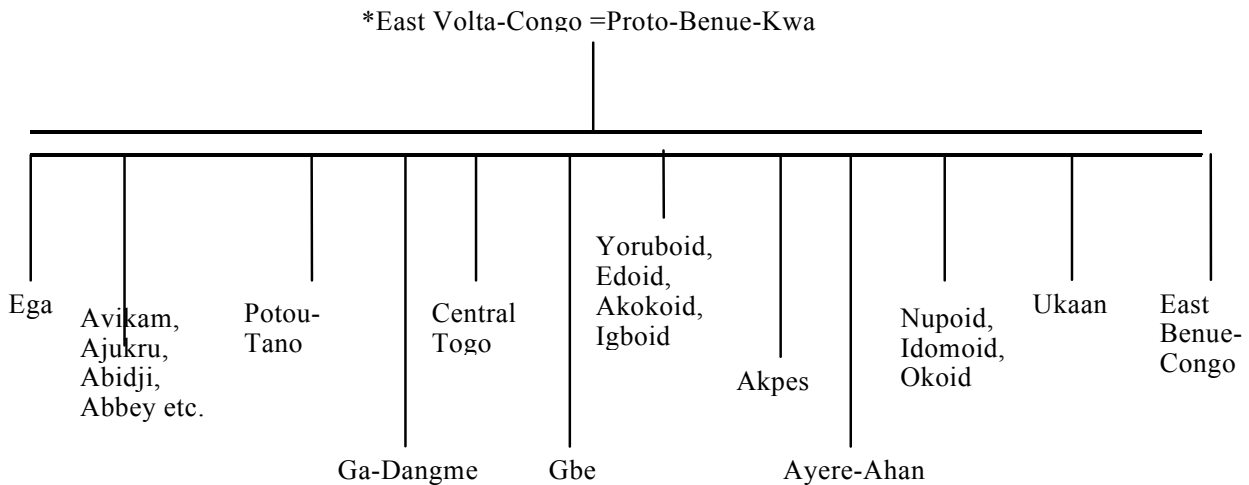
Considerable further work will be required to develop a more sophisticated means of deciding between these hypotheses. However, Ega provides a good illustration of problems of simply encompassing all West African languages in well-defined groupings on the basis of a limited number of cognates/lookalikes.

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

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

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

Figure 1. East Volta-Congo



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

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