

# Comparative Akpes

[WORK IN PROGRESS]

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## 1. Introduction

Akpes is an unclassified Niger-Congo language spoken southwest of the Niger-Benue Confluence, divided into a number of dialects. Wordlists of these dialects were collected by Femi Ibrahim under the supervision of Kay Williamson in the 1980s. The data has been left unanalysed since that time, but I am beginning to type up the lists and to annotate them with potential cognates in nearby languages. The transcriptions are not 100% reliable, especially in the matter of tone.

## 2. The classification of Akpes

Akpes first appears in Hansford et al. (1976) as 'Kwa unclassified'. By the time of Williamson (1989) Benue-Congo had been extended to include all the languages of Eastern Kwa, typically Yoruboid, Igboid and Edoid. In this classification, Akpes and Ukaan were put together, and treated as an independent co-ordinate branch of Benue-Congo. Although Williamson (1989:267) has a short discussion of these languages, no evidence is given for grouping them together and it is stated, incorrectly, that Akpes does not have alternating nominal prefixes. Crozier & Blench (1992) also classify Akpes an independent branch of Benue-Congo, a view reproduced in Williamson & Blench (2000). Agoyi (1997) presents the nominal alternations of Ekiromi and suggests that this is evidence that Akpes (and indeed Ukaan) are members of Edoid. Elugbe (2001) later reprised this view except that he treated Akpes and Ukaan as earlier branchings of the tree that gave rise to Edoid; co-ordinate with it rather than simply a member of Edoid. These arguments seem in part to depend on typological similarities, namely the alternating V- prefixes. Agoyi (op. cit.) includes a valuable table of glosses in comparable languages that show prefix alternation, but no evidence of regular lexical morphological cognacy.

It seems fair to say that the question remains open; and the data presented below in Table 1 includes a commentary with cognates as part of the process of making sense of these languages.

### 3. Akpes phonology

#### 3.1 Vowels

Daja probably has seven phonemic oral vowels;

	Front	Central	Back
<b>Close</b>	i		u
<b>Close-Mid</b>	e		o
<b>Open-Mid</b>	ɛ		ɔ
<b>Open</b>		a	

Three nasalised vowels are recorded; ã, õ, ě. All the vowels exist in lengthened forms although whether this is a true length contrast or simply a sequence of two like vowels remains for interpretation.

According to Raji (1986) in Ekiromi the high vowels /i/ and /u/ can also be nasalised.

#### 3.2 Consonants

Daja consonants are as follows:

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Labial-velar	Glottal
Plosive	b		t d			k g	kp gb	
Nasal	m		n			ŋ		
Fricative		f	s			x		h
Affricate				ts dz				
Approximant					y		w	
Trill			r					
Lateral			l					
Approximant								

Daja has only very limited contrasts between voiced and voiceless consonants. The three nasals can be either integrated into the syllable or they can be syllabic.

According to Raji (1986) Ekiromi has /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ but no /dz/.

#### 3.3 Tone

All Akpes lects appear to have three level tones.

### 4. Akpes nominal morphology

Information about Akpes nominal morphology concerns Ekiromi, as described by Agoyi (1997). Affix alternations fall into two simple classes, with a third category of nouns unmarked for number.

<b>Class</b>	<b>Alternation</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
1.	o/ɔ~a	<b>ɔsɔ</b> pl <b>asɔ</b> <b>oɲo</b> pl. <b>aɲo</b>	in-law wife
2.	V/i	<b>àkpòmì</b> pl. <b>ikpòmì</b> <b>ena</b> pl. <b>ina</b> <b>òli</b> pl. <b>ìli</b>	load cow dress
3.	None	<b>ɔbɔ</b>	hand

The similarities between the prefixes of Ekiromi and other lects suggests that a similar system applies there. Agoyi(1997) argues that similarities with the reduced prefix systems of Edoid argue for a genetic link, but prefix systems have a habit of eroding in analogous ways.

Table 1 is a comparative wordlist of the Akpes languages based on the Ibadan 400 word list.

**Table 1. Comparative Wordlist of Akpes languages**

	Akunnu	Daja	Gedegede	Ibaram	Èkiròmì	Ase	Eşuku	*PA	Notes
Head	icùm	icũ	ícúm	icum	icum	isum		icum	cf. Proto-Ukaan <b>ifúmV</b> , Edoid, e.g. Ukue <b>ú-kòmì</b> . Weakening of widespread #-tu root.
Hair	etif	itifi	itíf	etev	ètiv	etef		itifi	cf. Yoruba <b>irũ</b> , Ukuen <b>étù</b> , Ayere <b>itu</b> . ≠ Ukaan.
Eye	àyò	imúyù	èyò	eyo	ayò	ayò		èyò	Other languages all have # <b>iji</b> or similar, but cf. Ebira <b>eyí</b>
Ear	ansò	asugù	àsùg	àcùk	asùk	asùk		àsùgù	cf. Iyinnò Ukaan <b>òfòg</b> , other languages have a different root. This could well be a local spirantisation of Niger-Congo -tuk roots.
Nose	àhũ	àhũ	ahumũ	àkù	ahùn	ahum		àhũ	≠ Ukaan.
Mouth	onu	enũ	ónú	onũ	onũ	onu		onu	cf. Ukaan <b>òṅwò</b> , cf. Yoruba <b>enu</b> , Ayere <b>anu</b> , Arigidi <b>orũ</b> , Gade <b>gà-nú</b> , a Niger-Congo root
Tooth	iyũ	iyũ	iyũ	iyũ	icàgà	ifaga		iyũ	Ukaan * <b>òṅòg-</b> , Igala <b>éjì</b> , Oba <b>eyĩ</b> ,
Tongue	indòw	idalì	índà	ndà	idáy	idayì		indàlì	Distinctive?
Jaw	ngbangba	òkpà	ègonu	àkpà	akpàm	àkpàṅ		àkpàṅ	cf. Ayere <b>àngbà</b> , Arigidi <b>àmgbà</b>
Chin	àgònú	ikpàga	akpàgà	àkpàkà	ikpagà	ikpagà		ikpagà	Distinctive?
Beard	infi	itifi	ifóṅu	usákpaka	ifúyonu	ifiyonu		—	
	àgonú	enũ							
Neck	òhò	ìṅgò	òhò	òhò	òhò	òhòk		òhònk-	Distinctive?
Breast	imbwé	umì	ìmbè	ngbè	ekàk	ùbwi		ìmbè	cf. Ayere <b>émo</b> [?]
Heart	òkò	èmí	èkèkì	òkò	òkò	èmí		òkò	cf. Ayere <b>òkò</b> , Yoruba <b>òkò</b> ,
Belly	anku	aku	ánkú	anku	aku	àkù		ànkù	cf. Amusigbo <b>ukù</b> , Ibilo <b>ùgù</b> ,
Stomach	èfèsègi	aku	ánkú	ojeje	abérígí	òkwuhu		—	
Navel	ònkò	òkò	òṅkò	òṅkò	òkò	òkò		òṅkò	cf. Iyayu <b>òkò</b> ,
Back	òcum	èjũ	ecúm	òcum	ocúm	òcum		òcum	cf. P-Akokoid <b>òsũ</b> , Ishèu Ukaan <b>ifũ</b> , NW Edoid, Uhami <b>éjìmì</b> , EBC #- <b>jim-</b>

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