Re-Visiting the Status of North-West Akokoid in Relation to Yorùbá

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Abstract

The North-West Akokoid speech forms are spoken by over 250,000 people in Akoko North-West Local Government of Ondo State, Nigeria. The origin of these people, as well as their speech forms is shrouded in mysteries. Majority of them refer to themselves as Yorùbá and regard their speech forms as dialects of Yorùbá. To compound this problem, some scholars in the intellectual circle appear to have agreed to this claim without any attempt to use established linguistic principles to confirm the claim. This paper presents systematic proofs to assert that these speech forms though, distantly related to Yorùbá, are not its dialects. The Ibadan 400 wordlist was used to elicit data from 34 informants across the nine communities where these speech forms are spoken. In analysing our data, Pike's discovery procedure in phonological analysis and Swadesh's principles of lexicostatistics were employed. Of the 200 lexical items extracted for the lexicostatistic analysis, 60 items which constitute 30% are cognate with Yorùbá. This establishes Akokoid and Yorùbá as members of a macro-family called Defoid, and not as dialects of the same language.

Keywords: North West Akokoid, Yoruba, Status, Relationship, Lexico statistics

1. Introduction

North-West Akokoid (henceforth N/W.Ak.) as used in this paper refers to the nine speech forms spoken in Akoko North West Local Government Area of Ondo State in South Western Nigeria. Though Akinkugbe (1978) refers to them as 'Northern Akoko Cluster'; Hoffman (1974) refers to them as 'Northern Akokoid'. Capo (1989) opines that the term is misleading because it presupposes the existence of a 'Southern Akokoid', which is not the case. So, he suggested that 'Akokoid' should be adopted. However, the term 'Akokoid' will still present its own problems because the speech forms so captioned are just nine out of the numerous ones that are spoken in Akokoland. Or what should we say about Ikaram, Ibaram, Gedegede, Iyan: Ikaan, Akpes, Daja, Esuku, etc? We can solve this problem partly by proposing 'North-West Akokoid', which would just refer to the exact location of the speech forms in Akoko North-West Local Government Area in Ondo State. Let us present a table to this effect.

Table 1. Benue Congo languages spoken in Akokoland according to group

	Language Groups	**Varieties in Akokoland**
1.	The Yoruboid	Oka, Ikare, Iboropa, Akungba, Ifira, Oba, Ikun, Supare, Irun, Afin
2.	(N/W Akokoid)	Comprising Arigidi, Erushu, Afa, Aje, Udo, Oge, Oyin, Igashi and uro
3.	Akpes	Akpes (Akunnu), Ase, Daja, Esuku, Gedegede, Ibaram, Ikaram (Ikorom), Iyani
4.	Ukaan (Ikani)	Auga (ligau), Ise (Ishieu), Kakumo-Akoko (Ikaan), Ayanran (Iyinno) (Ayaran is spoken in Edo State)
5.	Edoid	Ehueun (Ekpinmi), Uhami (Ishua), Ukue.

Adapted from Oyetade 2007: 2.

2. Research Problem

Sometime in year 2008, in a postgraduate seminar presented at the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan by the researcher, the question arose on the status of Akokoid in relation to Yorùbá, a member of the Yoruboid group. From the viewpoint of the scholar who raised the question, these speech forms are 'so closely related to Yorùbá' that many people regard them as dialects of Yorùbá. Moreover the speakers themselves regard themselves as Yorùbá and to drive home this point, they traced their ancestry to Ifẹ, the cradle of the Yorùbá race, they even bear Yorùbá names. Apart from that, some scholars have called for more research on N/W.Ak. to establish their true status. For instance, Oyetade (2002: 40) observes as follows:

> While the Yoruboid group has been extensively studied, much work has not been done on Akokoid. Our knowledge of the group still remains rudimentary … concerning the

status of these languages in relation to Yorùbá, Williamson (1975) says dialects of Northern Akoko cluster are often referred to as dialects of Yorùbá, although they belong to a language (as defined by linguists) quite distinct from Yorùbá'. The interesting thing, however, about the speakers of Northern Akoko is that while the Igala and Itsekiri do not see themselves as Yorùbá, they see themselves as Yorùbá and bear names identical with their Yorùbá counterparts.   (pp 40)

Furthermore, in his endnotes, Oyetade (2002) says:

The status of the languages in this area is still very much in doubt. Whereas some linguists believe they are more or less dialects of Yorùbá, others believe they are more akin to Edoid languages. More works need to be done in this area to ascertain the true status of these speech forms. (pp 50). (Our emphasis)

As if this was not enough, in another postgraduate seminar in October, 2012 at the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, a postgraduate student said it openly that some scholars who are from Akoko still believe that the Akokoid speech forms are dialects of Yorùbá. Our reaction to this is that rather than engage in that kind of talk, a tested linguistic proof should be used to establish the claim. Our major preoccupation therefore is to make use of lexicostatistic investigation, coupled with mutual intelligibility and other proofs to establish the status of these speech forms in relation to Yorùbá. We shall also briefly talk about the sound systems of the languages, as well as their syllable structure and some syntactic structures.

3. Justification for This Work

The very first discovery of 'Akokoid' took place in 1973. According to Bamgbose (2006), (personal communication), the late Professor Kay Williamson accidentally discovered the group referred to as the 'Northern Akoko' while going through the 10 wordlist filled by students who came to register in the then Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages (now known as Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, Ibadan) for B.A. Linguistics/Yorùbá. After this, Hoffman (1974) carried out an initial study on Akokoid.

Materials are very difficult to come by, such that 'contemporary linguists' are beginning to raise the question about the relationship between the Akokoid speech forms and Yorùbá again. This paper readily comes in to fill this vacuum in a more elaborate way. Instead of the 100 wordlist used by previous scholars, especially, Akinyemi (2002), 200 lexical items, made up of 100 nouns and 100 verbs which are basic, day-to-day items used among the speakers and are not easily susceptible to borrowing are used, this means the effort put into this paper is a renewed effort to answer a recurring question. Also the data in the paper will serve as a documentary data source for future researchers who are increasingly finding it difficult to have access to previous scholarly materials on the speech forms in question.

4. Data Elicitation Procedure

Overall, 34 informants spread across the nine communities where these speech forms are spoken supplied the data. They are: Arigidi (5), Erushu (3), Afa (3), Oge (3), Oyin (5), Igashi (4), Udo (3), Aje (5) and Uro (3). Our intention initially was to elicit data from two individuals from each community, but in some cases, we needed to go beyond this, especially, when we discovered that we needed to consult the traditional rulers or chiefs as the case might be. The traditional rulers who participated in the process were the Oloyin of Oyin, the Ọlọjẹ of Igashi, the Ajana of Afa and the Oluro of Uro. The other traditional rulers were either not around or too busy to participate personally, in which case they appointed trusted chiefs or elders to attend to us. Even though, the University of Ibadan 400 wordlist used as the researcher's guide in obtaining data, 200 lexical items were extracted to form the basis of the lexicostatistic calculation.

5. Data Presentation

Following Fadoro (2010) who classified the N.W.Ak. speech forms into two languages, Arigidi and Ọ̀wọ̀n, a speech form was taken from the two groups to represent each group. Thus, Arigidi was selected to represent the Arigidi group, while Aje was selected to represent the Ọ̀wọ̀n group. The standard Yorùbá is therefore presented side by side with Arigidi and Aje as follows:

Table 2. N.W.Ak. and Yorùbá Compared

Yorùbá	Arigidi	Aje	Gloss
orí	egŕí	igŕi	Head
iru⏝	i◁ŕí	isi⏝ ri⏝	Hair
od↗ú	ód↗ù	íl↗ù	Eye
etí	oto	útó	Ear
imu⏝	od↗uw⏝ɔ⏝	úw⏝ɔ⏝	Nose
⏜nu⏝	o⏝ru⏝	̀ru⏝	Mouth
e¾i⏝	é¾i⏝	é¾i⏝	Tooth
aw⏝ɔ⏝ /ah⏝ɔ⏝	⏜ r⏜	ŕ⏝⏜	Tongue
àgbɔ⏝	àgbɔ⏝	à·̇⇌ mgbà	Chin
iru⏝ gbɔ⏝	̀si⏝ r⏜ l⏜	esi⏝ ri⏝ l⏜	Beard

ɔru͡	úgɔ	ut◁͜	Neck
ɔmú	͜ pɔ͡	ṕɔ	Breast (female)
ɔka͡	ɔka͡	ɔka͡	Heart
iku͡	ɔgɔ	ǵɔ	Belly (external)
idodo	͜kpɔ͡	ṕɔ͡	Navel
͜ ¾i͡	ɔsɔ͡	òsu͡	Back
ɔwɔ	ɔ wɔ	úwɔ	Hand
èɛka͡ na͡	͜k͜	í·̇ à	Nail (finger or toe)
ìdí	͜d↗͜ m͜	(͜ t◁͜)	Buttocks
okó	ɔkɔ	ǹdù	Penis
ita͡	bàlàn tà	bàlàtùò	Thigh
͜s͜	ùhɔ	ùhò	Leg
òbò	͜h͡ɔ͡	ħ͡a͡	Vagina
ara	ed↗e	omid↗ò	Body
awɔ	(awɔ)	alà	Skin
egu͜gu͡	ɛkpe	ɛkpi͡	Bone
͜ d↗͜	͜ d↗͜	͜ d↗͜	Blood
itɔ	it͜	it͜	Saliva
ìɔ	ùtɔ	ìɔ	Urine
imíɡb͜	͜m͜	ḿí	Faeces
omi	ed↗i͡	ùd↗i	Water
ɔb͜	aj͜	àj͜	Soup

ꞷrꞷaꞷ	arꞷaꞷ	àrꞷaꞷ	Meat
úhꞷ	ɔ rà	ɔ rá	Fat
ꞷd⁄a	esɔ	í ꞷ	Fish
ekpo	ógo	úgo	Oil
ijɔ	(ɔwɔ)	ut◁iꞷ	Salt
ɔt í	or à	ùr à	Wine
ꞷmuꞷ/ògùrɔ	umuꞷ	imuꞷ	Palm wine
i◁u	i◁ꞷ	ìsi	Yam
ꞷ gꞷ	òg òr òl ò	òg òr òl ò	Cassava
ɔ k àb ꞷb à	ì◁ꞷ	ìꞷ	Guinea corn
àgb àdo	ìgb àdo	ìgb àdo	Maize
ꞷ w à	(ꞷ rꞷ hꞷ)	èd⁄ì	Beans
ata	ꞷ ◁ꞷ	ꞷ sꞷ	Pepper
Il á	ꞷhuꞷ	í· ꞷu	Okra
òrom b ó/ɔsaꞷ	òrom b ó	łòm í	Orange
ꞷ kp à	ꞷ kp à	ꞷ kp à	Groundnut
ob ì	e◁ó	it◁ è	Kolanut
t ꞷb à	t ꞷb à	t ꞷb à	Tobacco
Òw ú	or úru	or úru	Cotton
ekpokpukpa	et◁it◁ɔ òg ò	it◁ɔt◁ɔ ùg ò	Oil palm
èso	a◁e	àsi	Seed
ko r ꞷko	è◁ꞷi	ꞷꞷ ꞷꞷ r ì	Grass
i gi	ɔ hɔꞷ	uꞷ ·˙ꞷɔ	Tree
e w é	ìmꞷ	ꞷ mꞷ	Leaf

‿ gu‿	‿ d↗‿	u d↗‿	Thorn
èédú	̀d↗i‿	ési‿	Charcoal
èéfi‿	új ù	ówú	Smoke
i na‿	et◁ɔ	́sɔ	Fire
èérú	ɔ dɔ‿	u‿ dɔ	Ashes
k ̀k ò	̀t◁à	̀t◁à	Pot
i gbá	e ku‿	ƙu‿	Calabash
o dó	e bú	ɓú	Mortar
ɔ b‿	i s‿	ú ‿	Knife
ɔ kɔ	úhɔ‿	∴ ‿à	Hoe
à ́k é	ɔ hɔ‿	‿ ∴g‿	Axe
̀d á	‿ r‿	̀d á	Matchet
ɔ kɔ	ɔ kɔ	ɔ kɔ	Spear
̀wo	‿ hɔ‿	i ∴⇌mwá	Horn
i ri‿	́u‿	úr‿	Iron
‿ n í	̀s à	ià◁‿	Mat
a gbɔ‿ /a kp‿ r‿	e hɔ‿	í∴‿á	Basket
̀kp ò	̀kp ò	̀kp ò	Bag
o ku‿	̀ku‿	o ku‿	Rope
a b‿ r‿	i k‿ n‿	̀n‿	Needle
̀wú	o rúru	o rúru	Thread
f ̀l à	éw à	i dú	Hat

bàtà	bàtà	bàtà	Shoe
o wó	òkùbà	e wó	Money
ɫú	ègú	hú	Town
ka‿ ga	ka‿ .∵ga	kɔ‿ .∵ga	Well
ɔ d↗à	a d↗a	ád↗á	Market
o kó	jà	ùwà	Farm
òku‿	òku‿	òku‿	Sea
òkúta	⌣ ta	fa	Stone
òkè	àdè	ɫì	Mountain
¾a‿ ri‿	.∵⌣ .∵⌣	¾a‿ri‿	Sand
màlúù	àrɔ gɔ	màlúù	Cow
àgu‿ ta‿	a dɔ‿	ándá	Sheep
ad↗a	o fo	ópú	Dog
e ku	o d↗úwà	òdí	Rat
ɔ bɔ	ɔ bɔ	áká	Monkey
i l⌣	e si‿	é◁i‿	Ground
j◌̀kp◌̲̀	i ◁a	f◁a	Earth
òd↗ò	e d↗i‿	ùd↗i	Rain
òòru‿	ùhɔ	ùha‿	Sunshine
ò◁ ùkpà	e ri d↗a	ò◁ ùkpà	Moon
o gu‿	o lo	òlo	War
o ri‿	i ◁i‿	ù◁⌣	Song
d↗⌣	d↗o	d↗u	Eat

mu	bɔ	bɔ	Drink
gbémi͡ /rɔmì̀	tʃ fɔ mi͡	s f̓ɔ mi͡	Swallow
b ì	kpà	pà	Vomit
tɔ	tɔ	tɔ	Urinate
jàgb	j͡	j͡i͡	Defeate
b ḿɔ	tʃúwɔ͡	ʃúw͡ɔ͡	Give birth
kú	ku͡	kú	Die
su͡	ʃ͡	ʃ͡	Sleep
lɔ	k we	vè	Go
wá	k wa	va	Come
kpa dà	b fl/e hè	l ś ì	Return
ʃu bú	tʃɔ͡	jé	Fall
ri͡	d/i͡	s	Walk
s ár é	tu kɔ	ʃ ì	Run
fò	kòhò	hù	Fly
b	tá ʃ ʃá	b	Jump
r í	r í	gò	See
gbɔ	ʃ	ʃ	Hear
fɔ wɔ bà	gbɔ͡ hɔ͡ ʃó	fɔ wɔ bà	Touch
mɔ͡	r á	ra͡	Know
ra͡ t í	j fla͡	j dá	Remember
kɔ	kɔ	kɔ	Learn
r ri͡	wɔ͡	wɔ͡	Laugh

kɔ ri︡	◁i ◁︡	k ɒ̀s︡︡	Sing
d↗ó	r è	j︡	Dance
k í	b á	v à	Greet
ra︡	dɔ︡	nɔ︡	Send
kɔ	gɔ	gɔ	Refuse
gb à	b à	gb à	Take
d↗í	d è	d ɛ̀d↗i	Steal
r à	sa	t◁a	Sell
fu︡	gb ɐ̀j̧︡a︡	gb ɐ̀j̧︡a︡	Give
r à	b à	d à	Buy
sa︡ w ó	s︡ m︡	◁e w ó	Pay
k à	k à	k à	Count
kpi︡	mɔ︡	ma︡	Divide
j︡i︡ bɔ︡	mi︡	j︡i︡ bɔ︡	Shoot
kpa	k ó	kpú	Kill
◁ è	ra︡	ra︡	Cook
di︡	su︡	i︡	Fry
su︡	t◁a︡	su︡	Roast
gu︡	bu	b ú	Pound
lɔ	rɔ	rɔ	Grind
k ó	b á	p à	Plait (hair)
f à	j á	j á	Pull
fɔ	fɔ	fɔ	Break
gb︡	gb︡	gb︡	Dig

gb͟	gb͟	gb͟	Carve
gu͜	gu͜	gárà	Pierce
dé	.˙˙gù	.˙˙gù	Cover
tì	tú	(wúsì)	Close
kɔlé	kóso	ma͜ é e	Build (house)
là	lá	la	Split
si͜	lú	lu	Bury
gbé	gbé	gbé	Dwell
mu͜	d͗ádà	gbàda	Hold (in hand)
mɔ͜	ra͜	ra͜	Know
wú	(k͟͜)	hu	Swell
gbá	tɔ͜	d͗͟	Sweep
ra͜	◁͟	◁͟	Sew
wɔ (wɔ ◁ɔ)	t◁é	sa wù	Put on (cloth)
lù	s͟	d͗í	Beat (person)
lù	lé	lí	Beat (drum)
géd͗ ͟	ra͜ d͗ò	p͟ d͗u	Bite
dìle	◁i͜j͟	su w͜͟	Stand (up)
d͗òkó	◁i͜ ◁i͜	t◁e t◁é	Sit (down)
gu͜	jí	jí	Climb
ri͜	d͗i͜	s͟	Walk
wɔlé	sɔ gúbára	͟	Enter
dé	bɔ	pɔ	Arrive

fi h‿à	gb àga	gb àga	Show
w á	bi	t◁ɔ	Want
fèsì/dáhu̖	d áhu‿	gɔ h‿‿	Reply
b ềè	b ɪ̀l ì	b ɪ̀l è	Ask (question)
d ↗à	kp ɪl ↗i	kp ɪl ↗i	Fight
kp è	s ó	é	Call
b‿ rù	sɔ hɔ	ro hó	Fear
bɔ (‿ w ù)	h ó	h ó	Take off (Clothes)
t ì	ti‿	t ì	Push
fu‿ (a ◁ɔ)	f ɔ	fɔ rɔ ɔ	Wring (clothes)
d à	◁u	s ì	Pour
ta‿	ta‿	ta‿	Finish
m ú	hu‿	h‿u‿	Catch
gb àgb é	bi‿	wi	Forget
sɔ ku‿	(go g ò)	wɔ	Weep
sɔ	(k‿ ró)	d ↗e	Say
f́ ra̖	f‿ ra‿	f‿ ra‿	Like
sɔn ù	(t◁ɔ‿ hi‿)	r áwu	Lose
r ́gb à	d í	r í e	Get
s ́r é	s ùkɔ	◁ í	Run
jíkpo	j ɪkpo	kp ɔ̀j ì	Turn around
t‿ l é	t ɪ̀ke	ɔ̀dɔ	Follow

mɔ	mɔ	m á	Mould
d ↗ ó	t◁a ͜	dɔ	Burn
si ͜	l ú	l ù	Bury
ro ko	k ó	∴ g à	Hoe
ta jɔ	k ὲw è	k ὲv é	Surpass

Having presented the data as shown above, let us now attend to the major question that engages our attention in this paper. Are the N/W.Ak. speech forms dialects of Yorùbá? To this question, we say a categorical 'No'! What then are our proofs? We shall examine this by doing a kind of comparative studies between N.W.Ak. and Yorùbá. That is, we shall examine the differences side by side with the similarities between them and then draw our conclusion

(i) **The Consonant System**

To examine the relationship between Yorùbá and Akokoid, let us present their consonant systems in a tabular form as follows:

Table 3. Consonants of N/W Ak. and Yoruba

		N/W.Ak.		**Standard Yor ùb á**	
Plosive	Bilabial	p	b		b
	Alveolar	t	d	t	d
	Velar	k	g	k	g
	Labio-Velar	kp	gb	kp	gb
Nasal	Bilabial		m		m
Alveolar			[n]		[n]
Affricate	Palato-alveolar	t◁	d ↗	-	d ↗
Fricative	Bilabial				
	Labiodental	f	v	f	-
	Alveolar	s		s	
	Palato alveolar	◁		◁	
	Glottal	h		h	

	Velar		
		⏝	
Lateral	Alveolar	l	l
Trill	Alveolar	r	r
Approximant	Palatal	j	j
	Labio-velar	w	w

A careful look at the table above reveals that N/W.Ak. has 23 consonants while the Standard Yorùbá has 18. The five consonants which exist in the consonant chart of these speech forms which are not in Standard Yorùbá are /p/, /t◁/, /   /, /v/, and /⏝/. However, /t◁/, /⏝/ and /p/ occur in some dialects of Yorùbá, /   / and /v/ do not occur in any of them.

(ii)   **The vowel system**

Akokoid and Yorùbá operate a twelve-vowel system, consisting of seven oral vowels and five nasal vowels. Let us look at this in a vowel chart:
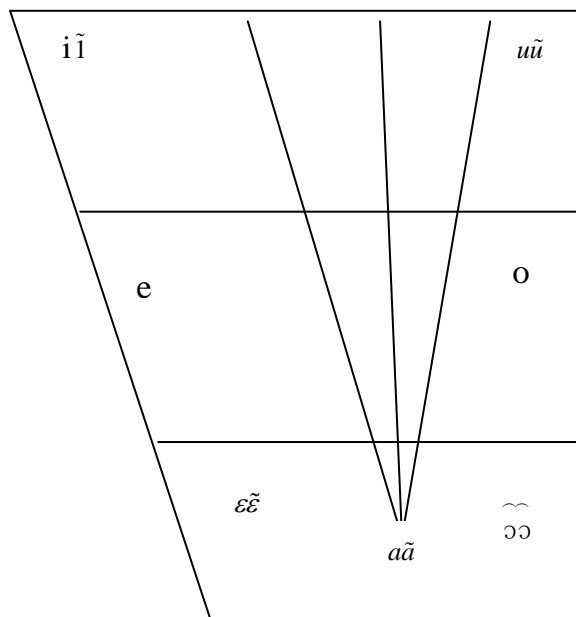
Figure 1. Phonemic Vowel Chart of N/W.Ak. and Yoruba

For details on how these vowels occur in words see the data on table 2 above.

(iii) The tone System

At the tonal level, Akokoid and Yorùbá are identical. They operate three-level tones, these are the high represented by / / /, the mid, represented as /Ø/ and the low, represented by / \ /. Note Ø stands for nil or zero, which means that the mid tone is not represented by any

symbol. Let us see some examples of how these tones contrast below:

Table 4. The tone systems of Yroùbá and N.W.Ak

Yorùbá	Arigidi	Aje
ìgbá 'garden egg'	úw᷄ 'child'	ɾ̆á 'send'
igbà 'climbing rope'	u`w̃ 'hunger'	ɾ̆ã 'cook'
igba 'two hundred'	ùw᷇ 'laughter'	ɾ̆ã 'know'
igbá 'calabash'		úw 'hand'
		uw 'bee'

As shown above, the three level tones are tonemic in that they occur contrastively in N/W.Ak. and Yorùbá.

(iv) **The syllable structure**

N/W.Ak. and Yorùbá operate a simple syllable structure. There is no occurrence of consonant clusters. Three phonetic syllable structures could be identified in these languages. They are V, CV and N (syllabic Nasal)

The V and CV syllable structures

V can be either an oral or a nasal vowel. The CV and the V syllables are significant in the languages.

Examples:

Table 5. The syllable structures of N/WAkokoid and Yoruba

	V- CV	V – CV	V-C V
N/W.Ak.	ɨ́tia (earth)	e-si᷈ (ground)	ù-hɔ (sun)
	è-ʤi (rain)	ù-si᷈ (song)	à-ra᷈ (goat)
Yorùbá	‿-ʤa (fish)	o-¾u᷈ (pregnancy)	a-ta (pepper)

(v) **The syllabic nasal**

The syllabic nasal in N/W.Ak. usually occurs before a consonant and it is realized as homorganic with the following consonant. In other words, it is a single phoneme /ɱ/, which has six variants: (allophones).

i.   [m] before bilabial consonants

ii.   [n] before alveolar consonants

iii.   [.ᐧ] before velar consonants

iv.   [.ᐧ≙m]   before labial-velar consonants

v.   [¾] before palatal consonants

vi.   [:̇] before labiodental consonants.

Let us look at the following examples:

(i)   /òròm̥bó/   →   [òròm̥≙bó]   'orange'

(ii)   /ám̥dá/   →   [án̥≙dá]   'sheep'

(iii)   /‿ m̥g‿ /   →   [‿ .ᐧg‿]   'Axe'

(iv)   /ùm̥gbà/   →   [ù.ᐧ≙m gbà]   'Horn'

As can be seen above, the variants are determined by the consonants that follow the syllabic nasal, therefore they are allophones of the same phoneme. This is exactly the way the syllabic nasal operates in Yorùbá e.g.

     bím̀bɔ   →   bím̀bɔ   (name)

     róm̋dó   →   róń̈dó   (small)

     k ̀m̀k ̀ →   k ̃ŋ̀k ̀ (toad)

     gbàm̥gbà →   g≙bàŋ≙m̥g≙bà (big)

bóm̩fò → bóm̩fò (short skirt)

(vi)   **Syntax**

At the syntactic level, N/W.Ak. and Yorùbá also share word order in common. They operate the SVO constituent order in their sentences. Let us look at the following examples to buttress this point:

i.   Èléówu uwà (N/W.Ak.)

Ìyá wa lọ oko (Yorùbá)

Mother our go farm (Gloss)

'Our mother went to farm'

ii.   Máà se ọ̀wọ̀n mẹ́ (N/W.Ak.)

Mi ò gbọ́ èdè yín (Yorùbá)

I don't understand language your

'I don't understand your language'

iii.   Olú dà àju (N/W.Ak.)

Olú ra iṣu (Yorùbá)

Olú buy yam

'Olú bought yam'

Ùjí dà (N/W.Ak.)

iv.   Òjò rọ̀ (Yorùbá)

Rain fall

The rain fell.

v.   Adé wò (N/W.Ak.)

Ade ṣọkún (Yorùbá)

Ade cried.

vi.   Mu sèn (N/W.Ak.)

Mo ṛẹ̀rì-ín (Yorùbá)

I laughed.

Furthermore, in the area of syntax, Dada (2006) observes that N/W.Ak. are related to Yorùbá because they lack 'conjugations and declensions that are characteristic of languages like Latin, Japanese and Swahili. He asserts that both (Yorùbá/N/W.Ak.) 'are synthetic in that some of their grammatical relationships can be expressed by adding affixes to root morphemes'. He cites the following examples:

	N/W.Ak.	Yorùbá
a.	a ri vè	ó ń lọ
	'He/she/it goes'	'He/she/it/is going
b.	a si vè	ó máa lọ/yóò lọ
	'He will go'	'He will go'
c.	a vè	ó lọ
	'He/she/it went'	'He went'
d.	irishọ	Ẹlẹ́ja
	owner fish	owner fish
	fish owner	'fish owner'
e.	irishẹn	oniṣu
	owner yam	owner yam
	'yam owner'	'yam owner'

However, we are of the opinion that the languages are not purely synthetic, rather, they combine features of both. As expressed by Yusuf and Oyebade (1990), the typological classification must be approached with caution, as there are no pure types. A language may

be largely one type but also showing traces of others. From this, we conclude that Yorùbá and N/W.Ak. are largely synthetic, but they also show traces of agglutination.

Furthermore, Awobuluyi (2007) (personal communication) is of the opinion that 'these speech forms are dialects of a language that is distantly related to Yorùbá language'. He emphasized that N.W.Ak. has the same origin with Yorùbá in that there are some syntactic structures that are common to both the Yorùbá language, and these speech forms; which we cannot claim that these speech forms borrowed from Yorùbá or vice versa. According to him, the only plausible claim we can make is that both of them inherited these structures from the same source. Such structures are 'yes-no question', 'the rule that changes the low tone of a monosyllabic verb to a mid tone whenever such a verb takes an object' and so on.

(vii) **Mutual intelligibility**

There is clear absence of mutual intelligibility between Yorùbá and N/W.Ak. The only thing we can say is that all the speakers of N/W.Ak. speak and understand Yorùbá, but the speakers of Yorùbá do not speak or understand N/W.Ak. The reason for this is clear, Yorùbá is the second language of the Akoko community. It is their language of immediate community and language of wider communication. It is their lingua franca and language of prestige. While the speakers of N/W.Ak. see the knowledge of Yorùbá as a necessity, the Yorùbá do not see the need to learn the N.W.Ak. speech forms. Dada (2006) captures the situation aptly by asserting that:

> Yorùbá… in this community serves two functions: the in-group function, but it is also used as lingua franca to communicate with members of other 'ethnic' groups in that these people understand Yorùbá. Indeed for this group, Yorùbá is the language of regional public life: political rallies, post office, transport, banking, schools, church, etc. And the language of specialized communication is English language. By specialized communication, we mean domains such as higher education, parliament, high court, and the court of appeal, diplomacy, foreign trade and any other public functions in multilingual situations where neither Erushu … (N/W.Ak.) nor Yorùbá … is considered to be adequate or appropriate. (pp 153)

In the same vein, Oyetade (1981: iii) says:

> going by mutual intelligibility as a criterion for distinguishing
> between language and dialect, Arigidi (N/W.Ak.) will be regarded
> as a language in its own right because it is not mutually
> intelligible to Yorùbá (speakers).

Our study confirms Oyetade's claims. During the field trip preparatory to this work, our experience shows clearly that N/W.Ak. speech forms cannot be classified as Yorùbá. In all the locations, we communicated with our informants in Yorùbá and they also replied in

Yorùbá However, each time they wanted to exclude us from their conversation, they switched to their local speech forms, which we did not understand at all. Furthermore, the data we gathered for this work shows clearly that Yorùbá is distinct from N.W.Ak..

(viii)   **Scholars' classification**

Scholars like Williamson (1973), (1989) Hoffmann (1974), Akinkugbe (1978), Bennett and Sterk (1977), Capo (1989) did not at any point in time classify Akokoid as dialects of Yorùbá Williamson (1973) earlier classified it with Yoruboid as a second subgroup based on genetic relationship. Capo (1989) proposed a new name for the same Hoffmann's Yoruboid-Akokoid group, which he called Defoid. Defoid was derived from 'ede' (the Yorùbá term for 'language') and 'Ife'. (The town believed to be the cradle of the Yorùbá race and 'oid' conventionally used as the group suffix.
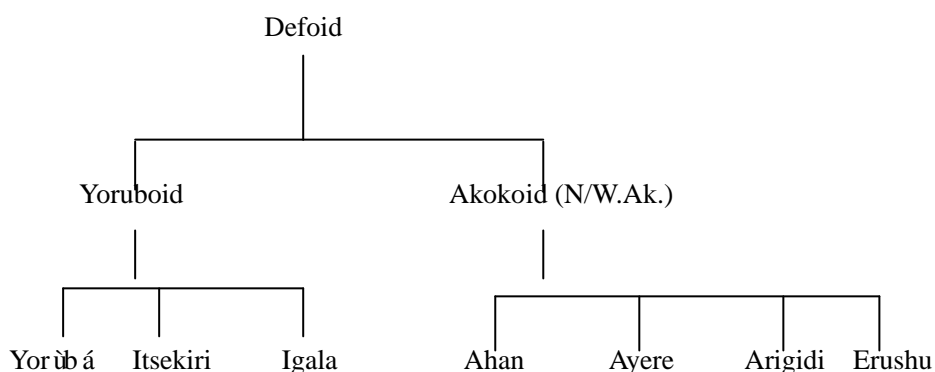
Going by the above, Defoid has two groups:

```
                              Defoid
                                |
              ┌─────────────────┴─────────────────┐
          Yoruboid                        Akokoid (N/W.Ak.)
              |                                    |
      ┌───────┼───────┐              ┌──────┬──────┴──────┬──────┐
   Yorùbá  Itsekiri  Igala         Ahan   Ayere        Arigidi  Erushu
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Figure 2. Capo's Defoid

From this we can imply that Itsekiri and Igala are closer to Yorùbá than N/W.Ak. As such, N/W.Ak. should be regarded as separate languages.

(ix) Lexicostatistics

A careful look at our data above shows that sixty (60) items are virtual cognates with the same items in Yorùbá. Though if we count partial cognates, we would get more than this figure. This implies that N/W.Ak. is 30% cognate with Yorùbá. Swadesh (1951) claims that language can be classified on the basis of cognation percentage as follows:

Table 6. Morris Swadesh's Cognation Percentage

Cognate %	Term
100 – 81	Language
80 – 36	Family
35 – 12	Stock
11 – 4	Microphylum
3 – 1	Mesophylum
Less than 1	Macrophylum

From Swadesh's table above, we come to the conclusion that with 30% cognates, N/W.Ak. belongs to a larger macro-family (the third category, which is 'stock') with Yorùbá. Borrowing Capo's term, we use the word 'Defoid' to capture this family. See figure 2 above.

6. Conclusion

From our discussion above, we have seen that N/W.Ak. is similar to Yorùbá in some ways. First, when we look at the vowel system of the languages, they are identical to that of Yorùbá. They operate a three vowel system. Secondly, when we look at the syllabic nasal, its behaviour in N/W.Ak. is identical to that of the Yorùbá language. At the morphological level, N/W.Ak. and Yorùbá operate a simple syllable structure in that there is no occurrence of consonant cluster. Finally, at the syntactic level, we have observed that N/W.Ak. and Yorùbá

share word order in common. They operate the subject/verb/object (SVO) constituent order in their sentences. All these similarities notwithstanding, we have presented five linguistic proofs that N/W.Ak. are not dialects of Yorùbá.

First, we have shown that their consonant system is not exactly the same with that of Yorùbá. They differ slightly. Secondly, N/W.Ak. and Yorùbá are not mutually intelligible. In fact, there is no intelligibility at all between them. Thirdly, lexicostatistic calculation shows that N/W.Ak. is 30% cognate with Yorùbá. Therefore, on the basis of cognation, percentage established by Swadesh (1951), N/W Akokoid speech forms are not dialects of Yorùbá. Fourthly, N/W.Ak. have been observed to be seriously endangered as a result of Yorùbá's overwhelming status. This cannot be said of dialects of Yorùbá, such as Ìjẹ̀sà, Èkìtì, Ègbá, Ìjẹ̀bú, and so on. The simple fact is that dialects of a language cannot go into extinction as a result of the standard variety of that language. They are already together as an entity. Finally, previous works on N/W.Ak. (from Williamson (1973) to Fadọrọ (2010) have never classified N/W.Ak. speech forms as dialects of Yorùbá. What they have done was to emphasise the similarities between N/W.Ak. and Yorùbá. These five incontrovertible proofs establish the fact that N/W.Ak. are not dialects of Yorùbá, rather they belong to the same stock with it.

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