On the So-called Akokoid/North-West Akokoid

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Abstract

There have been three main contentious issues about the nine speech forms, christened Akokoid or north-west Akokoid in the North-western part of Akoko. These issues are: (1) the appropriate name for the speech forms (2) whether or not they are dialects of Yoruba or a distinct language, and (3) the internal relatedness of the speech forms. In an attempt to resolve these controversies, some existing scholarly works have come up with some proposals and suggestions. However, their proposed suggestions and solutions have not been able to sufficiently resolve the contentious issues. This being the case, this present study, leaning on history of migration, mutual intelligibility, syntactic evidence and neutrality hypothesis[1], advances fresh evidence and plausible arguments that would hopefully be generally acceptable and permanently resolve these lingering argumentations. Data for this study were elicited with syntactic checklist from purposefully selected native speakers, and were subjected to descriptive method of data analysis.

Keywords: Akokoid, speech forms, mutual intelligibility, syntactic checklist, neutrality hypothesis

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[1] Neutrality hypothesis is used here to mean that the proposed name in this work is not suggestive of any linguistic affiliation with any of the communities where the language is being spoken.

1. Introduction

In the Akoko region of Ondo State, scholars and linguists alike have identified three main language groups, namely, Yoruboid, Edoid and Akokoid. Of all these groups, the most controversial one is the Akokoid or what Olúwadọrọ̀ (2014) dubbed North-west Akokoid. Many controversial issues about this language group remain unresolved. These issues are: (1) the appropriate name for the speech forms, (2) whether or not they are dialects of Yoruba or a distinct language, and (3) the internal relatedness of the speech forms. For instance, the following comments and observations made by Olúmúyìwá and Oshòdì (2012) as well as Olúwadọrọ̀ (2014) on the issue of getting a name that would be appropriate and generally acceptable to both the native speakers and the linguists are a clear attestation that argumentations surrounding this particular issue are still ongoing and unresolved.

> *Àkókóid is a coinage used to cover other speech forms in Àkókó, Òǹdó State, that are neither Yoruboid nor Edoid. The speech forms of Arigidi, Erúsú, Oyín, Ìgásí, Ùrò and Òjọ̀ in Àjọwá and Òkè-Àgbè (where we have the following speech forms. Àjè, Àfá, Ùdò and Ògè) belong to this language group. In fact, these speech forms are dialects of the same language whose name has not yet been determined by linguists….*

> *Olúmúyìwá and Oshòdì (2012, p. 6)*

> *…we can solve this problem partly by proposing 'North-west Akokoid' which would just refer to the exact location of the speech forms in the Akoko North-west Local Government Area in Ondo State.*

> *Olúwadọrọ̀ (2014, p. 1)*

Attempts made so far to resolve these argumentations have been found to be deficient for, they are merely helpful up to a point. Therefore, this paper, aims to provide a better explanation with fresh and compelling evidence that would not only be descriptively and explanatorily adequate but also provides a generally acceptable solution.

According to Olúwadọrọ̀ (2014), the language, that is, the so-called North-west Akokoid is spoken by over 250,000 people in about nine communities in the North-West Local Government of Àkókó in Ondo State, Nigeria. These communities are: Oyín, Urò, Ìgásí, Arigidi, Erúsú, and four quarters in Òkèàgbè; Àfá[2], Ùdò, Ògè, and Àjè.

2. Previous Studies

Hoffman (1974) christened these speech forms Northern Akokoid while Akínkùgbé (1978) named them Northern Akoko Cluster. Capo (1989) criticized the names on the ground that the term could be misleading as it might be suggestive that there is Southern Akokoid. Therefore, he proposed the name Akokoid. Crozier and Blench (1992) radically differed from the earlier proposals as they suggested the name Arigi Cluster. In the same spirit, Akínyẹmí (2002) suggested the name Arigidi-Amgbẹ while the relatively most recent attempt, Fádọrọ̀ (2010)

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[2] Àfá dialect is used in this study as the representative of the Ǹjọ̀-Kóo Language.

proposed Arigi-Ọ̀wọ̀n.

Olúwadọ̀rọ̀ (2014) opines that the term Akokoid is also problematic in that not only the nine speech forms are spoken in the Akokoland. He then suggested that the problem could be partly solved by adopting the name North-west Akokoid. The justification he provided for his proposal is that the name would just refer to the exact geographical location of the speech forms.

The proposed name by Olúwadọ̀rọ̀ (2014) would also be problematic in two ways; the first one is that it will include some languages or language groups that are not part of the speech forms. That is, the problem of overgeneralization. For example, apart from these speech forms, other languages/dialects such as Yorùbá and Edoid are spoken in the North-west Local Government of Akokoland. These Yorùbá dialects are Ìrùn, Ọ̀gbàgì while Edoid are Ìkáramù, Àsè, Ìbáramù, Ìyànì, Gèdègédé, Èsùkù and Dája which Àgóyì (2008) classified as Àbèsàbèsì.The second is its propensity to be misleading as envisaged by Capo (1989) in respect of the name Northern Akokoid. This is because it will equally and abundantly suggest that there is South-west Akokoid, and, apparently, there is nothing of such.

3. Ǹjọ̀-Kóo: The New Proposed Name

This paper rejects the existing proposals because of two major problems, namely, overgeneralization and lack of neutrality. It clearly suggests that any name proposed that features the word Akokoid will tend to fall victim of overgeneralization because three major language groups are spoken in Akokoland. As hinted above, there are other languages and dialects spoken in the area. Precisely, there are towns and villages that speak Edoid languages as well as those that speak Yorùbá dialects.

Also, the name Arigidi Cluster, Arigidi-Ọ̀wọ̀n and Arigi-Amgbẹ́ might not be accepted by other native speakers that are not of Arigidi extractions in that they would think that the name implies that the language or the speech forms belong to Arigidi. This being the case, any name that is devoid of 'Akokoid' and 'Arigidi' might receive general acceptability which is why the present study suggests Ǹjọ̀-Kóo. The preference for the adoption of the name Ǹjọ̀-kóo is predicated on its neutrality. The name is not suggestive of any linguistic affiliation to any particular community unlike Arigidi-Amgbẹ́, Arigidi cluster, and Arigidi-Ọ̀wọ̀n which presuppose that the language belongs to Arigidi community.

The name, according to Olaogun (2016a & b, 2018, 2019) has its etymology in the greeting system. The language, Ǹjọ̀-Kóo is a compound name formed from Ǹ jọ̀ o and Ǹ Kó o (or Ǹ ghó o the variant of Ǹ kó o used in Urò) which is a form of greeting, in all of the communities where the language is spoken, equivalent to Pẹ̀lẹ́ o in Standard Yorùbá.

The system of naming a language or dialect using the greeting system of the native speakers is never bizarre, in that, some scholars had adopted this same system. Táíwò (2005) used the same method to name Ào, a South-Eastern Yorùba dialect spoken in Ìfira, Ikún, Ìpèsi, Imerì, Ìdógún, Ìdóàní and Àfò of Ọsẹ́ Local Government Area of Òǹdó State, Nigeria while Àgóyì (2008) adopted the same mechanism for naming Àbèsàbèsi, an Edoid language spoken in Àkùnnù

Àjọwá, Ìkamramù, Gègègédé, Dája Ìbáramù, Èsùkù, Àsẹ̀ and Ìyànì of Àkókó North West Local Government and Àkókó North East Local Government Area of Òǹdó State, Nigeria. If the linguists and the native speakers of these language and dialect could accept these names, the expectation is that the name, Ǹjọ̀-kóo would equally receive general acceptability.

4. The Status of Ǹjọ̀-Kóo in Relation to Yorùbá.

The existing works on Akokoid that have discussed the status of these speech forms in relation to Yorùbá are: Oshòdì (2011), Olúwadọrọ̀ (2014) and Awóbùlúyì (2015). Their views are critically presented below.

Oshòdì (2011) opines that the speech forms are dialects of Yorùbá without taking into cognizance the level of mutual intelligibility between these speech forms and Yorùbá. According to Olúwadọrọ̀ (2014), there is no mutual intelligibility between Yorùbá and these speech forms, because, the speakers of these speech forms are competent and they can speak Yorùbá, but most speakers of Yorùbá are neither competent nor can they speak these speech forms. Awóbùlúyì's (2015) view slightly coincides but significantly differs from that of Oshòdì. His position is that these speech forms are dialects of a language that we do not know its name yet. This implies that Awóbùlúyì never considered them as dialects of Yorùbá.

Olúwadọrọ̀ (2014) employed lexicostatistics, mutual intelligibility, phonological and morphosyntactic structure semblances to show that the speech forms are not Yorùbá dialects but a distinct language that is distantly related to Yoruba.

Awóbùlúyì (2015), a renowned linguist, who is a native speaker of Àfá, also employed word-structure rule semblance between Standard Yoruba and Àfá. On the strength of the comparison, he concluded that these speech forms are dialects of a language that is 'distantly related to Yorùbá language'. But no attempt was made by him to propose any name. He emphasised that the language has the same origin with Yorùbá in that, there are some morphosyntactic structure rules that are common to both of them. And that we cannot claim that these speech forms borrowed these structure rules from the Yorùbá language or vice versa. This is because rules are not part of linguistic resources that languages borrow from one another. Thus, the only plausible claim we can make is that both of them inherited these word-structure rules from the same parent/proto-language.

5. Evidence of Common Syntactic Structure Rules

On the issue of using syntactic similarities to establish that Ǹjọ̀-Kóo and the Yorùbá language are distantly related, Olúwadọrọ̀ (2014) only considered the word-order while Awóbùlúyì (2015) exclusively employed the following morphosyntactic rules: (1) the rule that says that all nouns in Yorùbá must be vowel-initial, (2) the rule that guides the occurrence of nouns in relation to their qualifiers, (3) the rule guiding the use of prefixes for deriving nominal words, (4) the rule that guides the use of report verbs such as wí, sọ and ní in Yorùbá, and (5) the rule guiding the use of àní for emphasis in Yorùbá (Awóbùlúyì 2015, pp. 3-7). The present study

however observes that the existing works have only discussed a handful of common syntactic similarities in the two languages. Therefore, the motivation for providing the following fresh, additional and different syntactic structures that are common to both Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo and the Standard Yorùbá which significantly reinforces the claim that they both have a common proto or parent language.

(1) Negative Constructions: As evident in 1(b) and 2(b), the subject (3rd person singular pronoun) is not phonetically realised before negative markers in the two languages. Also, the negative marker changes form in the two languages when the first-person singular pronoun is used. The kò in Yoruba changes to ì in Yorùbá while káà in Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo changes to à as demonstrated in1(c) and 2(c) below.

1　(a) Òjó　　kò　　wá　　　　　　Yorùbá

　　　　　Ojo　　NEG　come

　　　　　'Ojo did not come'

　　(b) Ø　　　kò　　　　　wá

　　　　　3sg NEG come

　　　　　'He did not come'

　　(c) Mi　ì　　wá

　　　　　I　　NEG　　come

　　　　　I did not come

2　　(a) Òjó　　káà　　　vá　　　　　　Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo

　　　　　Ojo　　NEG come

　　　　　'Ojo did not come'

　　　(b) Ø　　káà　　　vá

　　　　　3sg NEG come

　　　　　'He did not come'

　　(c) Má à　　vá /mu áà vá

　　　　　I　　NEG　　come

　　　　　'I did not come'

(2) Yes/no question expression: The two languages are similar in this respect in terms of syntactic distribution of the question markers. Yes/no question markers: a and yè come immediately after the nominal subject and before the verb in both Ǹjɔ̀-kóo and the Yorùbá language as exemplified in examples 3(a-b)

3. (a) Ìwọ   a   mọ̀   (Yorùbá)

     You   INTER   know

     'Did you know?'

    (b) Olú   yè   rán   (Ǹjò̩-Kóo)

     Olu   INTER   know

     'Did Olu know?'

(3) Relativization. Relative clause constructions have similar structures in the two languages as exemplified in 4(a) and 4(b) below.

    4. (a) ìwé tí mo rà   (Yorùbá)

        The book that I bought

     (b) ìwé é mu dà   (Ǹjò̩-Kóo)

        The book that I bought

In the spirit of Dixon (2010), four features of relative clause constructions are discussed in relation to the two languages: (1) each of the relative clauses in the two languages is a complex sentence with a main clause and a relative clause respectively as in Mo ra ìwé and tí mo rà in Yorùbá, and Mu da ìwé and é mu dà in Ǹjò̩-Kóo. (2) the underlying structure of these two clauses shares one common argument. (3) the common argument functions as an argument in the main clause and in the relative clause. The common argument in this case is ìwé in the two languages. The relative clause tí mo rà and é mu dà each modifies the common argument of the main clause and, (4) the relativized constituent is always followed by tí in Yorùbá and é in Ǹjò̩-Kóo.

(4) Focusing: In the two languages, focusing requires movement of a focused constituent to the clause initial position, closely followed by a focus marker. For instance, in Yorùbá the nominal object ìwé in 5(a) is focused in 5(b) and it is closely followed by the focus marker ni. Similarly, in Ǹjò̩-kóo, the nominal object ìwé in 5(c) is focused in 5(d) where the focus marker úwò̩n directly follows it.

5 (a) Mo   ra   ìwé   (Yorùbá)

     I   buy   book

   'I bought a book'

  (b) ìwé   ni   mo   rà.

     Book   FOC   I   buy

     'I bought a BOOK'

(c) Mu   da   ìwé   (Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo)

   I   buy book

   'I bought a book'

(d) ìwé   úwɔ̀n mu dà   á

   Book FOC   I   buy Emph

   'I bought a BOOK'

(5) Perfective aspect markers as in many other languages and dialects occur as preverbal elements in both Yorùbá and Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo. Yorùbá employs ti while Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo uses á as shown in 6(a) and 6(b).

  6   (a)   Òjó ti sùn   (Yorùbá)

      'Ojo has fallen asleep'

     (b)   Òjó á   sẹn   (Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo)

      'Ojo has fallen asleep'

Ekiti, Ìrùn, Ọ̀gbàgì, Esé and Ìjùmú/Owé are other languages and dialects where the perfective markers behave similarly as given below in 7(a) and (b).

  7. (a)   Òjó ká sùn   (Èkìtì/Ìrùn, Ọ̀gbàgì. Eṣé, etc)

      'Ojo has fallen asleep'

     (b)   Ó ká dé   (Ìjùmú/ Owé)

      'He has arrived'

(6) Imperative Sentences: An imperative sentence is used to convey imperative mood such as expressing a direct command, giving an instruction, making a request or offering advice. The imperative sentence could be negative or positive. The structure of imperative sentences is also the same in the two languages in question. According to Adéwọlé (1991), one of the features of the imperative sentence is that its structure may or may not have an overt grammatical subject. When it has a subject, it is always a second person pronoun. This is exemplified in both negative and positive imperative sentences below.

8. (a)   Máà/má rà á!   (Yorùbá) (Negative imperative)

     Don't buy it!

(b)   Tíà dà á!   Àfá

Don't buy it

(c)   í va! 'You, come!' (Ǹjọ̀-Kóo) (Positive Imperative)

(d)   n gbà/o gbà 'You, take!(Yorùbá)

Awóbùlúyì 2013: 198)

As evidenced in 8(a) and 8(b), Yorùbá uses máà/má, which Adébáyọ̀ (2021) dubbed má-morpheme for irrealis mood, for negative imperative sentence while Ǹjọ̀-Kóo uses Tíà for the same sentence type. It is further observed that in the negative imperatives, the grammatical subject is null while in the positive imperative, the subject is spelt out in the form of second person pronoun as n/o in Yorùbá and í in Ǹjọ̀-Kóo.

(7) Verbal Emphasis: Structural semblance is equally found in the two languages in sentences with verbal emphasis. When the verb is emphasized in any of the two languages and other related languages such as Ìyàgbà, Ijùmú, Owé, the indicator is a low-toned v-syllable at the clause-final position as exemplified in the sentences 9(a)-(d) below.

9.   (a) Kò mà wá à!   (Yoruba)

'He actually did not come'.

(b) Káà mà vá à!   (Ǹjọ̀-Kóo)

'He actually did not come'.

(c) Éè mọ̀ á à! Èkìtì

'He actually did not come'.

(d) Éè mọ̀ gháà!   (Ìyàgbà, Ijùmú, Owé)

'He actually did not come'.

(8)   Conditional clauses: The two languages are also comparable in terms of the structure of conditionals. According to Awóbùlúyì (1978 & 2013), a conditional clause is conceived as two events or parts where one precedes another and the second one normally modifies the other. The expression usually consists of two clauses, namely, embedded or If-clause and matrix or Then- clause. The embedded clause expresses the condition while the matrix clause expresses the result. Each of the conditionals always contains a clause-typing marker or clause identifier and the marker or identifier is domiciled in the embedded or if-clause. In Yorùbá, the marker is Bí/Tí while it is Ti in Ǹjọ̀-Kóo as exemplified in 10(a)-(d) below.

10. (a) Bí/Tí Òjó bá rọ̀, mi ò níí wá   (Yorùbá)

'If it rains, I'll not show up'.

(b) Tì ùji làá dà á, máà gavá   (Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo)

'If it should rain, I'll not show up'

(c) Bí òjò kò bá rò̩, mà á wá   (Yorùbá)

'If it doesn't rain, I'll show up'.

(d) Ti ùji làá gè dà á, mu gavá   (Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo)

'if it doesn't rain, I'll show up'.

As noted by Akíntóyè (2017), one feature of conditional clauses in Yorùbá is that the two clauses that make up a conditional clause can be transposed without affecting the semantic interpretation of the utterance. This is demonstrated below in examples 11(a)-(d) in both languages.

11. (a) Mi ò níí wá bí Òjó bá rò̩,   (Yorùbá)

'I'll not show up if it rains'.

(b) Máà ga vá ti ùji làá dà á.   (Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo)

'I'll not show up if it should rain'.

(c) Mà á wá bí òjò kò bá rò̩.   (Yorùbá)

'I'll show up if it doesn't rain'.

(d) Mu gavá ti ùji làá gè dà á. (Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo)

'I'll show up if it doesn't rain'.

(9). Phono-syntactic rule: the rule that changes the low tone of a monosyllabic verb to a mid-tone whenever such a verb takes an object noun. For instance, the verb rà and dà which mean 'to buy' inherently has low tone in both languages but the tone usually changes to mid when taking an object DP as shown in the examples 12 (a)-(b) below:

12. (a)   Olú ra iṣu   (Yorùbá)

          Olú buy yam

          'Olu bought yam'

 (b)   Olú da àju   (Ǹjɔ̀-Kóo)

          Olú buy yam

          'Olu bought yam'

As evidenced in the examples above, it is very apparent that the same syntactic and phono-syntactic rules that apply to formation of various structures in Yorùbá equally hold sway for Ǹjọ̀-Kóo. These semblances can never be mere coincidence or as said earlier, be that one language borrowed these rules from another because according to Awóbùlúyì (2015), rules, unlike words or lexical items are not part of linguistic nuances that language easily borrow from one another. So, the simple implication of this is that the two languages diverged from the same parent or proto language.

6. Internal Relatedness and Their Groupings

In an attempt to capture the internal relatedness of these speech forms, Fádọrọ̀ (2010) employed mutual intelligibility and sub-grouped them into three as follows:

(i) Arigidi and Erúsú

(ii) Àfá, Àjè, Ògè, and Ùdò (all spoken in Òkèàgbè)

(iii) Oyín, Ìgáshí, and Urò

However, the present research reveals that Fádọrọ̀'s grouping is not descriptively adequate. The reason is that he only took proximity into consideration but neglected the history of settlements and the native speakers' intuition. Awóbùlúyì (Personal Communication) which is also supported by migration history shows that, given mutual intelligibility, the dialects could be categorized into three as follows:

(i) Arigidi, Erúsú and Àjè

(ii) Àfá, Ùdò, and Oyín

(iii) Ìgáshí, Urò, and Ògè

The migration history that partly informs our grouping is explained below. In the first class or group, Fádọrọ̀ excluded Àjè probably because the dialect is spoken in another town far from the two he grouped together. Fádọrọ̀ neglected history of migration which this study takes into consideration. Migration history had it that part of the people that make up Àjè quarters came from Erúsú, as confirmed by Fábóyèdé's (2011, p. 23) that:

> *Aje community is inhabited by two prominent groups of different sources. The groups are Olóníyọ̀ ruling family and those that claimed to have migrated from Erúsú via the ancestral homland to the present domain.*

Fádọrọ̀'s second group consists of four dialects while the present study is comprised of three dialects. Again, Fádọrọ̀'s grouping is influenced by proximity and he totally glossed over history of migration. He grouped all of the four dialects together because they are spoken in the same town. However, migration history reveals that Oyín, a dialect that is spoken in a village next to Òkèàgbè is more related to Àfá and Ùdò than Àjè and Ògè that he grouped together. This is exactly what informed our grouping which is also supported by the migration history below.

Fábóyèdé's (2011, p. 26) description of historical relationship that exists between Ìdò and Oyín correctly explains their linguistic similarity. He says:

> *Surprisingly, Oyín and Ìdò/ùdò people speak the same dialect. Today, it is possible to make use of language as scientifically testable to proven historical connections between ethnic or sub-ethnic groups.   Thus, the genetic resemblance between Ìdò and Oyín cannot be unconnected with the traditions of origin of Ido people*

In the third group, Fádọrọ̀ took into cognizance mutual intelligibility and abandoned history of migration which was why he never believed that Ògè and Urò could be related. This revelation is given in Fábóyèdé (2011:19) when he says:

> *Oral evidence had it that Ige Omi, the ancestral father of Ògè immigrants gave birth to three children at Uma. The names are Ológè, Ogbogoro and Ohodo. The first child, Ologe inhabited Uro, while his brother founded Ogbogoro after himself. At present, Uro is one of the eight communities that make up Ajowa in Akoko. Specifically, the dialectal semblance has proved that they are families of ancient lineage from Oge. This claim is also supported by the cognomen below:*

> *Eemi ló tẹ bí dó*

> *Ọya ló niìlú Edugbe-Omuo*

> *Àkọ́bí Ọwágè ló tẹ Urò dò*

> *I settled here*

> *Oya is the owner of Edugbe-Omuo*

> *The first son of Owagbe settles in Urò*

7. Conclusion

The present work has considered various proposed suggestions offered by the existing scholarly works to resolve the lingering linguistic controversies surrounding the so-called Akokoid/North-west Akokoid. It was discovered that some of these proposed solutions are inaccurate and not conclusive. This being so, this study, employed; syntactic structure semblance to lend credence to the existing claim that the language in question is distantly related to Yorùbá, neutrality hypothesis to establish the reason why Ǹjọ̀-Kóo is better than the existing proposed names, and migration history to accurately and descriptively capture the internal relatedness of all the dialects. It is my hope that this will serve a better explanation and solution to the lingering controversy.

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