

**GBE AS A GROUP OF MIXED LANGUAGES? ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE RECONSTRUCTION OF PROTO KWA AND
PROTO BENUE-CONGO**

SANDRO CAPO CHICHI

SORBONNE PARIS CITE / CNRS- LABORATOIRE DE LINGUISTIQUE FORMELLE / NEW AFRICAN CULTURES™

SANDRO.CAPOCHICHI@NEWAFRICANCULTURES.COM

PARIS, 18-21 SEPTEMBER 2012

'TOWARDS PROTO NIGER CONGO:

COMPARISON AND RECONSTRUCTION'



O. ON MIXED LANGUAGES

1. In a wide sense : If one agrees that all languages have been influenced by others at some point of their history, then one would have to admit that all languages are mixed to some extent.
2. In a narrow sense : *"languages that emerged in situations of community bilingualism, and whose structures show an etymological split that is not marginal, but dominant, so that is difficult to define the variety's linguistic parentage as involving just one ancestor language"* (Bakker & Matras 2003:1). Examples of mixed languages in a narrow sense : Michif, Ma'a / Mbugu, Mednyj Aleut, Media Lengua, Para Romani, etc.

STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENTATION

1. THE GBE CLUSTER AND ITS PLACE IN VARIOUS CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES
2. STEWART (2002, 2004) AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE RECONSTRUCTION OF PROTO NIGER CONGO
3. REFLEXES OF EARLIER UNVOICED LABIAL VELAR STOPS IN PROTO GBE AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH KWA AND BENUE CONGO
4. TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

1. THE GBE CLUSTER AND ITS PLACE IN VARIOUS CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES

1. Spoken in Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria
2. Spoken by from 4 to 8 millions people
3. Most spoken languages : Ewe (ca 3 millions speakers), Fon (ca 1, 7 millions), Aja (ca 515000), Gen (ca 330000)



TABLE 1 : THE GBE SPEAKING AREA AND ITS MOST WIDELY SPOKEN LANGUAGES

4. Gbe is a group of languages belonging to Niger-Congo (Greenberg 1963, Bennett & Sterk 1977, Blench & Williamson 2000, Blench 2006).
5. Gbe has been classified by scholars as either belonging to Kwa (Akan, Bia, Guan, Potou, Central Togo, Ga-Dangme (Westermann 1925, Bennett and Sterk 1977)), to Benue-Congo (Yoruboid, Edoid, Igboid, Akokoid, Akpes, etc. (Blench 2006)), or both, Kwa and West Benue-Congo constituting one Niger-Congo sub-family in the latter case (Westermann 1927, Greenberg 1963).

TABLE ILLUSTRATING THE GENETIC POSITION OF GBE IN VARIOUS CLASSIFICATORY SCHEMES

	POTOU	BIA	AKAN	GUAN	GA-DANGME	TOGO CENTRAL	GBE	YORUBOID	EDDID	NUPOID	AKOKOID	IGBOID	BANTU
WESTERMANN (1925)	[Shaded]							[Light Blue]					
WESTERMANN (1927)	[Dark Blue]												
BENNETT & STERK (1977)	[Light Blue]						[Medium Blue]						
BLENDH (2006)	[Light Blue]						[Dark Blue]						[Light Blue]

(c)

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[visual + scientific]

TABLE 2: THE GENETIC POSITION OF GBE IN VARIOUS CLASSIFICATORY SCHEMES

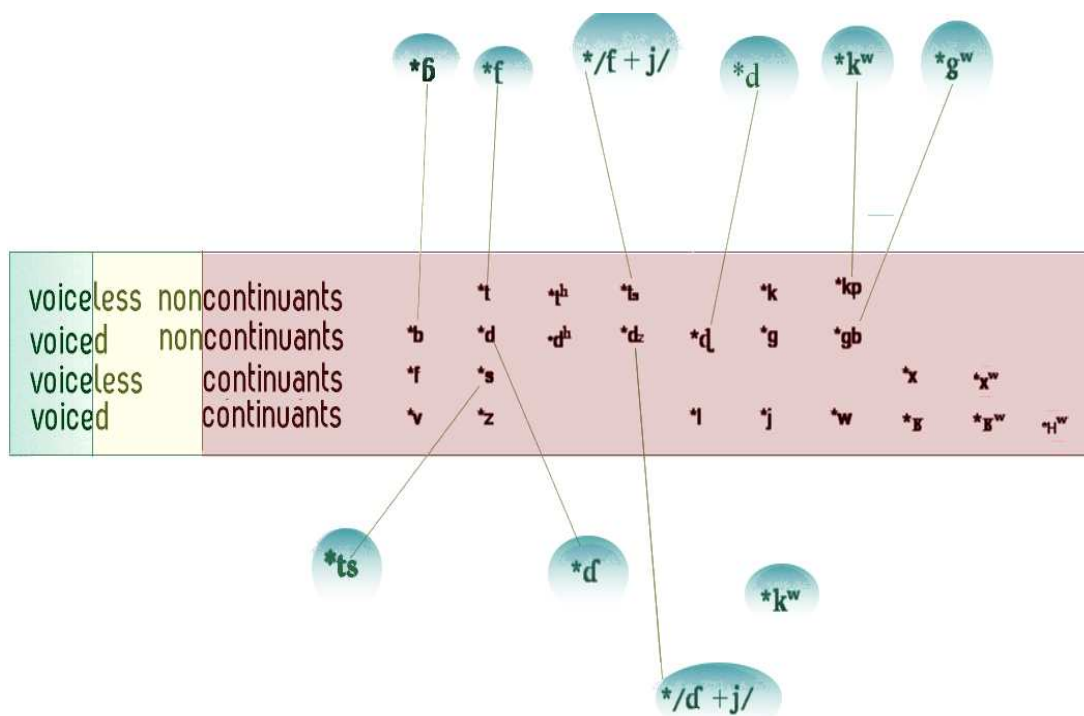


TABLE 3 : THE RECONSTRUCTION OF PROTO GBE CONSONANT SYSTEM (ADAPTED FROM CAPO 1991) WITH OUR OWN MODIFICATIONS IN THE BALLOONS.

2. STEWART (2002, 2004) AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE RECONSTRUCTION OF PROTO NIGER CONGO

6. Stewart (2002, 2004) has reconstructed the common ancestor to Bantu, Akan, Bia and Guan (Akanic), Potou languages that he termed Proto Potou-Akanic-Bantu.

7. He also established the rules deriving its daughter languages from it.

8. The point of this reconstruction is to use this proto language as a pilot for reconstructing Proto Niger-Congo with the help of other Niger-Congo language groups

9. By using Gbe in this respect we will at the same time contribute to the reconstruction of Proto Niger-Congo as well as checking whether of Bantu (Benue Congo) or Potou Akanic (Kwa) shares more phonological innovation with Gbe. If found to be quite distinct from both Benue-Congo and Kwa, one will have to agree with Blench (2006)'s classification, if closer to Kwa, one will have to agree with Bennett & Sterk (1977), if closer to Benue Congo, one will have to agree with Westermann (1927).

10. Our conclusion will be that Gbe seems to have items rooting into both Benue Congo and Kwa.

3. GBE AS A MIXED LANGUAGE GROUP? (A FOCUS ON PROTO PROTO AKANIC BANTU VOICELESS [LABIAL] VELAR STOPS AND ITS REFLEXES)

11. When one compares some Proto Gbe items with corresponding Kwa items with velar initial consonants, one is able to find some regular sound correspondences.

	Proto Gbe	Proto Potou Akanic	Proto Potou Akanic Bantu
12. "cough (verb)"	*k ^w ɛ (verb) *-k ^w ɛ (noun)	*k ^w avi	*k ^w api
13. "death"	*-k ^w u	*-k ^w u	*k ^w u
14. "die"	*k ^w u	*k ^w u	*k ^w u
15. "dry up"	*a-k ^w u "drought"	*k ^w ɔ	*k ^w ɔ
16. "you (singular)"	*h ^w i ~ *h ^w ɛ and not *k ^w u	*k ^w ɔ	*k ^w ɔ
17. "dry up"	*x ^w u and not *k ^w u	*k ^w ɔ	*k ^w ɔ

TABLE 4 : SOUND CORRESPONDENCES BETWEEN PROTO POTOU AKANIC BANTU ITEMS BEGINNING WITH *k^w AND THEIR REFLEXES IN PROTO POTOU AKANIC AND PROTO GBE.

18. So as one can see, Proto Potou Akanic Bantu *k^w seems to have been maintained in Proto Gbe. However, some of the other Gbe items corresponding with Proto Potou Akanic *k^w and do not have an initial *k^w, and have the initial fricatives *h^w and *x^w instead.
19. One could wonder why there is such irregularities for consonants supposed to have evolved in the same phonological context. Indeed, as one can see in table 4, example 17, Proto Gbe has another word obviously derived from Proto Potou Akanic Bantu *k^wɔ. It is *x^wu "become dry, be dry". Here, we then have a doublet with Proto Gbe *aku "drought".
20. Again, this divergence does not seem to be based on phonological grounds. One could suggest that this divergence could also be based on morphological grounds. Due to their position in the morphological structure of nouns, the *k^w present in roots such as *k^wɔ "dry up", would have evolved into a labial velar voiceless fricative in verbs, but would have been maintained in nouns. In the same vein, the *k^w present in pronouns would also have evolved into a labial-velar fricative, albeit voiced, *h^w.
21. But this argument does not seem to stand on solid grounds. Indeed, several items such as "cough", or "die", seem to have both nominal and verbal reflexes in Gbe, but none display any alternation in regard to the manner of articulation, as one can see in Table 5.

	Proto Gbe	Proto Potou Akanic	Proto Potou Akanic Bantu
22. "die"	*-k ^w u (and not x ^w u)	*k ^w u	*k ^w u
23. "death"	*k ^w u	*-k ^w u	*-k ^w u
24. "cough" (verb)	*-k ^w ɛ (and not x ^w ɛ)	*k ^w avi	*k ^w api
25. "cough" (noun)	*k ^w ɛ	*-k ^w avi	*-k ^w api

TABLE 5 : UNEXPECTED NOMINAL REFLEXES OF PROTO GBE ITEMS DERIVED FROM POTOU AKANIC BANTU ROOTS WITH INITIAL *k^w

26. This approach raises too many unanswered questions and must be, in our opinion, discarded.

27. What is interesting here is that if one treats differently the sets of fricative and stops reflexes of items with Proto Potou Akanic Bantu initial *k^w, the unexpected difference between voiced and voiceless fricatives becomes clearer.

28. Indeed, in his reconstruction of Proto Bantu, Stewart (2002, 2004) has suggested four shifts from Proto Potou Akanic Bantu that are very relevant for our purposes.

29. The first one is the evolution of all plain stops from Proto Potou Akanic Bantu to non explosive consonants in Proto Bantu. Thus, Proto Potou Akanic Bantu *k^w would have evolved into *k^w on its way to Proto Bantu.

30. If those two phonemes have merged in Proto Bantu and if this fricative set of Proto Gbe is as closely related to Bantu as I claim, then one could expect reflexes of Proto Potou Akanic Bantu with initial *k^w to have seen their initial consonant merge with that of Proto Potou Akanic Bantu with initial *k^w. As one can see in table 6, it is the case in Gbe, as shown by the example of the reflex of Proto Potou Akanic Bantu *k^wɪɪɪ "hit" which has the same initial consonant as that of the item "dry up" in Proto Gbe, which is derived from a Proto Potou Akanic Bantu root beginning with *k^w.

	Proto Gbe (fricative set)	Proto Potou Akanic Bantu
30. "dry up"	*x ^w u	*k ^w ɔ
31. "hit"	*x ^w o	*k ^w ɪɪɪ

TABLE 6 : PROTO GBE ITEMS ILLUSTRATING THE LIKELY MERGER OF PROTO POTOU AKANIC BANTU EXPLOSIVE AND NON EXPLOSIVE LABIAL VELAR STOPS

31. The second shift would have been the rounding of non-round vowels after round consonants. It neither seems to have happened in the stop set, nor in Proto Potou Akanic, although it seems to have happened in both Proto Bantu and Proto Gbe.

	Proto Gbe (fricative set)	Proto Bantu	Proto Potou Akanic Bantu	Proto Potou Akanic	Proto Gbe (stop set)
32. "cough"			*k ^w api	*k ^w avi	*k ^w ɛ
33. "hit"	*x ^w o	*kɔɔ	*k ^w ɪɪ		

TABLE 7: ILLUSTRATION OF THE ROUNDING OF VOWELS AFTER ROUND CONSONANTS IN THE FRICATIVE SET OF PROTO GBE AND PROTO BANTU AND THEIR NON ROUNDING IN THE STOP SET OF PROTO GBE AND IN PROTOU AKANIC

34. The third one would have been the evolution of *k^w into *ɸ when preceding *ɔ, except for the pronoun "you" (singular), in which it would have remained *k^w, probably, according to Stewart, because of its pronominal status.

35. Interestingly, just like in Proto Bantu, the Proto Gbe reflex for *k^wɔ came to have the same initial consonant as the item for stomach, that is *x^w, while the item for "you" would not have been subject to this shift, since he indeed does not have an initial *x^w, but a *h^w.

	Proto Bantu	Proto Potou Akanic Bantu	Proto Gbe
36. "to dry up"	*ɸɔ	*k ^w ɔ	*x ^w u
37. "stomach"	*ɸu	*ɸu	*x ^w o
38. "you (singular)"	*kɔ	*k ^w ɔ	*h ^w i ~ *h ^w ɛ
39. "hit"	*kɔɔ	(*k ^w ɪɪ) → *k ^w ɔɔ	*x ^w o

TABLE 8: ILLUSTRATION OF THE SHIFT OF PROTO POTOU AKANIC *k^w TO *ɸ IN PROTO GBE AND PROTO BANTU BEFORE *ɔ

40. The fourth one would have been the unrounding of round consonants. Reflexes of Proto Potou Akanic Bantu $*\text{ɕ}^w, *k^w$ and $*\text{ɕ}$ would thus have come to merge into a single consonant. This is precisely what happened in Proto Gbe, since these items all became $*h^w$, except in the aforementioned case before ɔ , where it became x^w . A case in point is the root for “kind of hawk”, Proto Potou Akanic Bantu $*\text{kɔli}$ which likely became $*-h^w\text{ḡ}$ “eagle”, in Proto Gbe.

41. A fifth shift, apparently not shared with Bantu would then have been the fronting of high back vowels in Proto Gbe after non labial consonants. In this very context, the Proto Gbe items below from having actually been respecting this earlier synchrony of Gbe’s phonotactics, one would have expected the Proto Potou Akanic Bantu items for “to die”, “death” to have seen their vowels to front, which is not the case, unlike that of $*k^w\text{ɔ}$ “you (singular)”, whose vowel indeed became a front vowel ($*i \rightarrow *e$).

	Proto Potou Akanic Bantu	Proto Bantu	Proto Gbe (my reconstructions)
42. “honey”	$*\text{ɲ}^w\text{ɔ}\text{ŋk}\text{ɔ}$	$*\text{ɲ}\text{ɔ}\text{ŋk}$	$*w\text{ij}$
43. “sky”	$*\text{j}\text{ɔ}\text{ɔ}$	$*\text{j}\text{ɔ}\text{ɔ}$	$*gi$
44. “die”	$*k^w\text{u}$	$*ku$	$*ku$ and not $*ki/ke/kε$
45. “dry up”	$*k^w\text{ɔ}$	$*\text{ɓ}\text{ɔ}$	$*aku$ and not $*aki/ake/akε$
46. “you”	$*k^w\text{ɔ}$	$*k\text{ɔ}$	$*h^w\text{i} \sim *h^w\text{e}$
47. “elephant”	$*\text{j}\text{ɔ}\text{w}\text{ɔ}$	$*\text{j}\text{ɔ}\text{w}$	$*geli$

TABLE 9: ILLUSTRATION OF THE FRONTING OF HIGH BACK VOWELS AFTER NON LABIAL CONSONANTS IN PROTO GBE

48. Here, one can see that this group of items characterized by the maintaining of initial labial velar stops from Proto Potou Akanic Bantu seems to have violated two constraints of the phonology of this synchrony of Gbe (partly shared with Bantu), while the set that has seen their spirantization seems to have respected it.

4. TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

49. Gbe as a mixed language in the wide sense.

50. Further research will establish if it is the narrow sense as well.

51. Is this mixture specific to Gbe or common to Yoruboid, Igboïd and Edoid as well?

52. One needs to include more languages into Stewart’s (2002, 2004) pilot language to found out.

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