

# PAPERS IN ENGLISH AND LINGUISTICS (PEL)

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## Towards Akokoid Orthographies

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### Abstract

Language contact between Akokoid and Yoruba has resulted in gradual shift from Akokoid. Thus, the speech forms subsumed under Akokoid now face a precarious problem of extinction in the near future. As a step towards the possibility of preserving these speech forms, previous scholars have prescribed the need to analyse and describe them as well as propose good orthographies for them. In response to this prescription, the present study proposes two orthographies for the Akokoid speech forms. Jules Gillieron and Edmond Edmont's pioneering theory of traditional dialectology, served as the theoretical framework. The University of Ibadan 400 wordlist was used to obtain data from 34 informants. Selection of informant was guided by the Acronym NORM(s) (Non-Mobile, Old, Rural, Males). In analyzing the data, Pike's discovery procedure in phonological analysis and Williamson's Orthographic Conventions were employed. Lexicostatistics conducted earlier revealed that Arigidi and Erushu are 88.5% cognate and are also mutually intelligible, so we classified them together as dialects of Arigidi. By contrast, the Qwɔn varieties, comprising of Afa, Aje, Udo, Oge, Igashi and Uro are 81.0% cognate and they are mutually intelligible, therefore they are classified together as Qwɔn. Two distinct but related languages within the nine speech forms were identified. These are Arigidi and Qwɔn, jointly referred to as Akokoid. As a result of their endangered status, there is need for harmonisation and standardisation within each group. This paper responds to this need by providing two orthographies, one for Arigidi and the other for Qwɔn as a preliminary measure towards their preservation and use in education.



## Preamble

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 Ishekiri do not see themselves as Yorùbá, they see themselves as Yorùbá and bear names identical with their Yorùbá counterparts (Oyetade 2002:40).

## Background to the study

This work proposes orthographies for the nine speech forms which scholars have given different names such as Northern Akoko Cluster (Hoffman 1974); Akokoid (Akinkugbe 1978); Amgbe (Capo 1989) and Arigidi-Amgbe (Akinyemi 2002). This is necessary because these speech forms are seriously endangered as a result of the intimidating status of Yoruba in the community. Akinkugbe (1978: 74) captures the status of these speech forms in the following words.

Indeed, the present state of affairs calls for urgent attention to the study of the NAK (Northern Akokoid) languages, not only from the diachronic point of view so as to determine their true place within kwa, but also from the synchronic point of view. Already because of the socio-political importance of Yorùbá, speakers of the various NAK languages are fast adopting Yoruba as a first language and thrusting their own languages into the background. The sad effect of such attitudes is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to elicit true forms of the NAK languages, and a time

may come when true forms of the languages would have even become extinct.

The summary of the above excerpt is that Yorùbá is fast displacing Akokoid as a means of communication to the point of extinction. Bamgbose (1993), Dada (2006) and Oyetade (2007) confirm this. For this purpose, this study aims at examining Arigidi, Erushu, Afa, Oge, Aje (Ese), Udo, Oyin, Igashi and Uro all spoken in the present Akoko North-West Local Government of Ondo State in Southwestern Nigeria with its headquarters in Oke-Agbe more closely. The major issue that engages our attention in this work is orthography.

### The Akoko community

The Akoko community is one of the groups that constitute the present Ondo State of Nigeria. The other groups are the Akure, the Ondo, the Ọwọ, the Ilaje and the Ijaw. At present, the Akoko community is made up of four local governments. These are: Akoko North-East Local Government with its headquarters at Ikare; Akoko North-West Local Government with its headquarters at Oke-Agbe; Akoko South-East Local Government with its headquarters at Isua and Akoko South-West Local Government with its headquarters at Oka. Akokoland is within longitude 5°E and 6°E and latitudes 7°N and 7°45 N. To the North and North-East, it is bounded by Kabba and Yagba areas of Kogi State. To the North-West, South and West, it shares common boundaries with Ekiti East, Ọwọ and Ekiti South Local Governments respectively. In the East, it is bounded by Akoko-Edo Local Government. Our areas of study are all situated in Akoko North-West Local Government, which has Oke-Agbe as its headquarters. The Akokoland comprises about 50 towns and villages covering approximately 1,368 square kilometers (Oyetade 2007). See appendix 2 for maps.



## Languages spoken in Akoko

With respect to languages, Akoko is the most linguistically diverse area of Yorubaland. In addition to Yorùbá, there are several languages spoken natively in the area. These languages, according to Oyetade (2007) belong to 4 language groups of the Benue Congo. They are shown in the table below:

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.	Akokoid	Arigidi (Comprising Arigidi And Erushu), Ọwọ̀n (Comprising Afa, Aje, Udo, Oge, Oyin, Igashi and uro), Ahan, Ojo
3.	Akpes	Akpes (Akunnu), Ase, Daja, Esuku, Gedegede, Ibaram, Ikaram (Ikorom), Iyani
4.	Ukaan (Ikani)	Auga (Iigau), Ise (Ishieu), Kakumo-Akoko (Ikaan), Ayanran (Iyinno) (Ayanran is spoken in Edo State)
5.	Edoid	Ehueun (Ekpinmi), Uhami (Ishua), Ukue.

Adapted from Oyetade 2007: 2.

These different groups of people who speak these languages claim origins from Ile-Ife, Benin, Kukuruku division and Kabba. Akoko tradition says that these varied migrations were the outcome of the desire of the people to have free land to settle in some cases, or disputes over titles at Ile-Ife and Benin in some other cases or as a result of wars.

## The speech forms and their speakers

By Akokoid in the present study, we mean Arigidi, spoken in Arigidi town; Erushu, spoken in Erushu town; Uro, spoken in Uro Ajowa; Igashi, spoken in Igashi community; Oyin, spoken in Oyin community and Oge, Èsè, (Aje), Udo, Afa, all spoken in Oke-Agbe. All these people have Yorùbá as their second language which is usually acquired simultaneously with their respective mother tongues.

## Previous classification

According to Bamgbose (2006), (Personal Communication), the Late Professor Kay Williamson accidentally discovered the group referred to as the Northern Akoko in the early 70s while going through the 10 wordlist filled by students who came to register in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ibadan for B.A. Linguistics/Yorùbá. Hoffman (1974), following Williamson's suggestion, classified a group referred to as the Northern Akoko cluster as a subgroup branch of the Yorùbá group; Yorùbá, Ishekiri and Igala formed the second group.

Northern Akokoid, according to Williamson (1989), Bennett and Sterk (1977), belongs to the Benue-Congo. Capo (1989) proposed a new name for Hoffmann's Yoruboid-Akokoid group, which he called 'Defoid'. Capo's 'Defoid', like Hoffmann's 'Yoruboid-Akokoid', consists of 'Yoruboid' and 'Akokoid' subgroups. He initially included Akpes and Ukaan in his Akokoid but was later discouraged by Williamson (1982) who suggested that Akpes and Ukaan be treated as direct branches of the Benue-Congo because their relationship with Yoruboid is quite remote.

Below is the sub-classification of Proto-Benue-Congo as presented in Williamson and Blench (2000: 31).



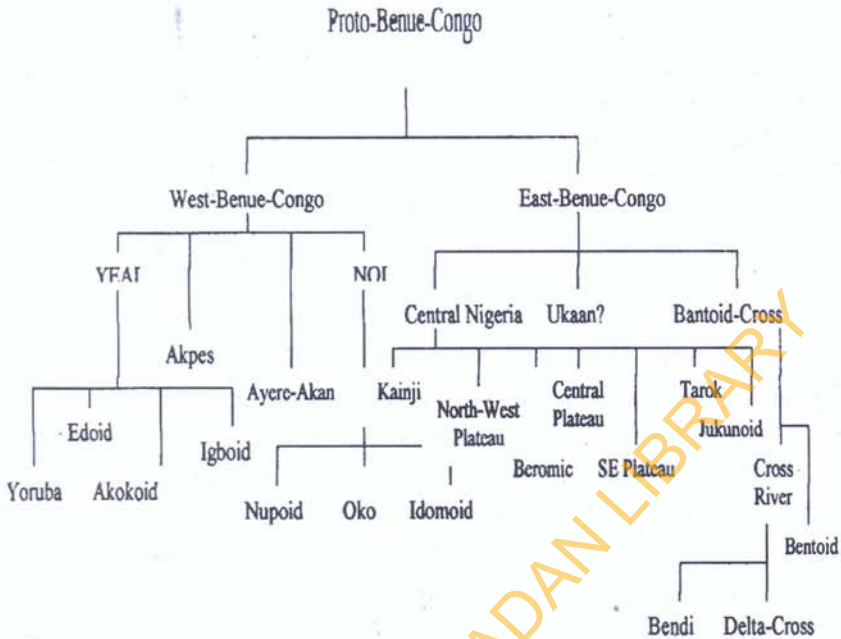


Figure 1.1: Classification of Proto-Benue-Congo Languages  
Williamson and Blench (2000: 31)

Note: The inclusion of Ukaan under East Benue Congo is questionable.

Capo (1989) also proposed a new name “Amgbé” for Northern Akokoid speech forms. He said an average of 80% cognacy among the speech forms presupposes a very close relationship. He therefore proposed an Amgbe language or dialect cluster for Northern Akokoid. Akinyemi (2002) carried out a lexicostatistic study of eleven speech forms using Swadesh’s revised 100 wordlist. His cognate percentages were determined strictly by sound correspondences. The result of his test is presented in a tabular form as shown below:

**Table 2: Cognate scores for Akokoid**

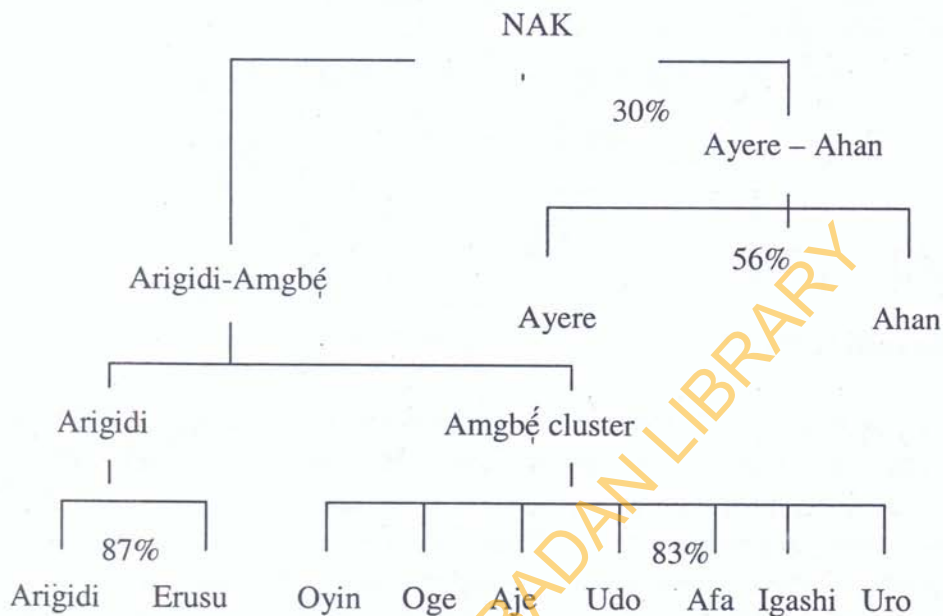
	Oge	Aje	Udo	Afa	Uro	Igashi	Erushu	Arigidi	Ayere	Ahan
Oyin	80.6	80.6	87.7	84.7	74.5	77.6	71.7	66.6	38.6	26.3
Oge		85.7	81.6	85.7	79.6	81.4	73.5	62.6	30.5	26
Aje			85.9	88.9	82.7	85.7	73.7	69.7	28.9	28.3
Udo				91.9	78.6	80.6	74.7	74.7	32.5	28.3
Afa					80.6	83.7	77.8	75.3	33.7	31.3
Uro						89.7	71.4	67.7	29.3	27.6
Igashi							71.7	66.6	34.9	26.7
Erushu								86.9	33.7	27.3
Arigidi									32.5	25.3
Ayere										56.1

**Akinyemi (2002:6)**

Based on the result presented above, he proposed the name Amgbe for (Oyin, Uro, Igashi, Afa, Udo, Oge and Aje) which, according to him average roughly 83% among themselves. This percentage according to Williamson (1973) qualifies them as 'arguably different languages'. However, going by Swadesh's (1951) parameter of 100 – 81%, they qualify as dialects of the same language. Akinyemi proposed them as a dialect cluster, which he referred to as Amgbe cluster. Arigidi and Erushu speech forms show an average of 87% between themselves and an average of 72% between them and Amgbe cluster, a closer group of speech forms to them. Following Williamson (1973), the 87% between Arigidi and Erushu speech forms establishes them as dialects of the same language and the 72% between them and Amgbe cluster establishes them as different languages. He therefore proposed Arigidi language for Arigidi and Erushu speech forms, where Arigidi and Erushu are dialects. This again is reflected in figure 1.2 below.

Northern Akokoid was used as early as 1974 by Hoffman to refer to some speech forms which were suspected to be closely related to the Yoruba group. Capo opines that the term is misleading because it presupposes the existence of a 'Southern Akokoid'. Therefore, he suggests that Akokoid should be adopted – Akokoid is derived from 'Akoko' and the suffix 'oid'.





Akinyemi (2002:8)

Figure 2: Northern Akokoid Language Family

#### Our proposed classification

The present study focuses on the nine speech forms classified above as Arigidi-Amgbé by Akinyemi (2002). These are:

- (i) Arigidi and Erushu (which he grouped together as Arigidi language).
- (ii) Oyin, Oge, Aje, Udo, Afa, Igashi and Uro (which he grouped together as Amgbé cluster).

However, rather than the compound 'Arigidi-Amgbé', we propose 'Arigidi-Ọwọ́n' in the present work. Arigidi and Erushu are grouped together as Arigidi. Whereas, the remaining seven speech forms are referred to as Ọwọ́n rather than Amgbé. There are two reasons for

this slight change. First, the term Amgbẹ is not acceptable to the speakers of these speech forms. In fact, according to Oyetade (2008) (personal communication), they regard it as a pejorative appellation.

Second, the term Ọwọ̀n, phonetically [òw̃ò] (which means 'tongue', 'language' or 'dialect') is already used as a prefix before some of the speech forms, especially the ones spoken in Oke-Agbe. So they have Ọwọ̀n Afa, Ọwọ̀n Ese (Aje), Ọwọ̀n Udo and Ọwọ̀n Oge (See Awobuluyi 1972 and Akinkugbe 1978). Let us summarise this in a family tree diagram:

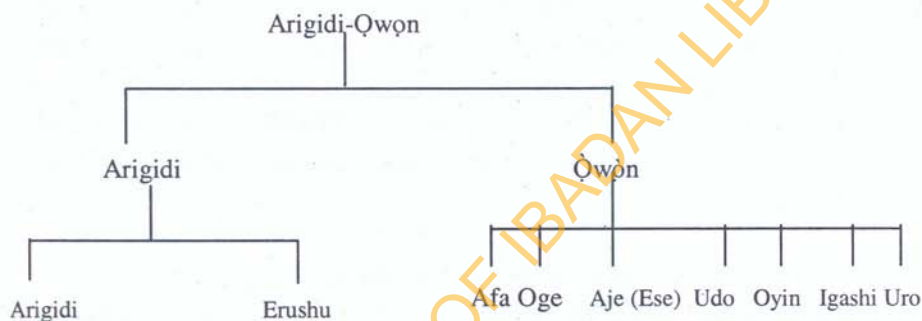


Figure 3: Classification of Arigidi-Ọwọ̀n

### Justification for this Work

Simply put, orthography consists of the symbols and the rules that are followed in writing a language. Why do we need orthographies for the Akokoid speech forms? The reason is clear and simple, the languages are seriously endangered (Akinkugbe 1978, Dada 2006 and Oyetade 2007). There is an urgent need to carry out linguistic research on every endangered language. This urgency is emphasised by Dixon (1997: 134) as follows:



The most important task in linguistics today – indeed, the only really important task – is to get out in the field and describe languages, while this can still be done... if every linguistics student (and faculty member) in the world today worked on just one language that is in need of study, the prospects for full documentation of endangered languages (before they fade away) would be rosy. I doubt if one linguist in twenty is doing this.

This same view on documentation has been extensively discussed among linguists. Prominent among them are Landweer (1998), Crystal (2000), Valiquette (1998), Thomas (1980), Gerdtz (1998), Rhydwen (1998), Jahn (1998), Yamamoto (1998), Furbee, Stanley and Arkeketa (1988) Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998), Adekanye and Salfner (2007) etc.

### Reasons for the ascendancy of Yorùbá in Akokoland

Speakers of Akokoid seem to prefer Yorùbá to their native languages for many reasons. These could be grouped into two, sentimental and instrumental (Akere (1982) and Oyetade (2003)). In the first place, these people regard their ancestral home as Ile-Ife (Beely 1934, Babalola 1984, Abiodun 2000, Akere 1992, Oyetade 2004b and Dada 2006). As a result of this, they consider Yorùbá as a mark of identification and link with their ancestral home. This is purely sentimental.

On the other hand, Yorùbá is learnt for instrumental motivation. This is because; the language offers them some benefits. They believe that their proficiency in Yorùbá would afford them the opportunity to communicate with and be accepted by other Yorùbá speakers. Secondly, knowledge of Yorùbá is considered a boost to their trades. Moreover, its knowledge would facilitate easier and faster learning for their children in school, since Yorùbá is used as a medium of instruction in the early years of primary school (i.e pry 1-

3). This is in accordance with the 1977 National Policy on Education and its revision in 1981. Apart from that, the policy stipulates that the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yorùbá) should be learnt by non-native speakers. Furthermore, Yorùbá is taught as a subject both in primary and secondary schools; even at present, it is taught in the Department of Linguistics and Languages, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko in Ondo State, Nigeria. Coupled with this is the fact that though the official policy prescribes the use of English as medium of instruction from the fourth year of primary school and beyond; there is evidence of informal bilingual education, involving Yorùbá and English in some primary schools. This was reported by Oyetade (2004b), Dada (2006) and Oyetade (2007).

Finally, in all formal contexts like churches, mosques, social institutions and service centres, such as hospitals, post offices, police stations, local government headquarters, etc. Yorùbá is mostly used. In fact, we visited the Akoko North-West Local Government Headquarters at Oke-Agbe twice and spent several hours there in the course of this research. Our observation was that Yorùbá was used virtually for all kinds of communication (official or personal). English language and the different mother tongues of the interlocutors were sparingly used. All these factors taken together agree both in theory and practice with Giles et al (1977) on the factors for promoting ethnolinguistic vitality. These are classified into three, viz- (i) Economic (ii) Demographic, and (iii) Institutional support factors. To this one must add 'historical factor'.

#### Williamson's principles of a good orthography

Following Williamson (1984), five principles govern a good orthography. These are:

- |                   |                 |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| i) Accuracy       | ii) Consistency | iii) Convenience |
| iv) Harmonization | v) Familiarity  |                  |



These principles have been followed in reducing many Nigerian languages to writing. All these languages adopt the Latin alphabet used in writing English. However, where there are sounds that have no equivalents in English, five methods could be employed:

- i) a special symbol, usually taken from the phonetic alphabet.
- ii) a letter with a diacritic, that is an extra mark placed below or above a letter.
- iii) digraph, i.e. two letters representing one sound.
- iv) a single Latin letter with an unusual value.
- v) Spelling rule.

#### Proposed spelling for Arigidi consonants

Since Arigidi, Erushu, Afa, Aje, Udo, Oge, Oyin, Igashi and Uro have been classified into two languages – Arigidi and Ọwọn above, it would be necessary to recommend two different orthographies for the two languages. This is ideal, especially since the two languages have some sounds that are not common to them. We therefore present our recommended spellings in two sections below. Arigidi has twenty consonants. These are presented below along with recommended spellings.

Consonant Sounds	Recommended	Example of Words Spelling
m	m	mọ (drive), umù (wine)
p	p	pé (tie) ẹpọ (breast)
b	b	bá (greet), ébo (year)
t	t	tú (close) ítò (five)
d	d	dé (throw) ída (three)
k	k	ké (make) ọkọtò (lizard)
g	g	go (dry) ọgòròlò (cassava)
kp	kp	kpá (sow) ẹkpe (bone)
gb	gb	gbén (dig) egbe (snail)
tʃ	ch	chọ (fall) àchà (waterpot)
dʒ	j	jìn (walk) eje (body)

ʃ	sh	shẹ (sow) ashe (seed)
h	h	hún (catch) óhun (okra)
f	f	fọ (wring) efúfù (white)
v	v	vẹ (go) iva (cap)
s	s	só (call) èsà (mat)
j	y	yá (pull) úyù (smoke)
w	w	wọn (laugh) éwà (cap)
r	r	rọ (weave) èrè (python)
l	l	lé (beat) àlà (cloth)

### Proposed spelling for Ọwọn consonants

The Ọwọn variety has twenty-two consonants. These are presented below with recommended spellings as well as examples of words.

Consonant Sounds	Recommended Spelling	Example of Words
m	m	má (divide) imù (palmwine)
p	p	pà (vomit) ópú (dog)
b	b	bàtà (shoe) bàlàtùdò (thigh)
t	t	tun (cold) útén (saliva)
d	d	dèdì (steal) idú (cap)
k	k	kú (die) íkukú (corpse)
g	g	gọ (refuse) úgo (oil)
kp	kp	kpú (kill) íkpin (bone)
gb	gb	gbẹ (dig) ugbọro (twenty)
tʃ	ch	cha (sell) ícha (earth)
dʒ	j	ájá (market) íjù (eye)
s	s	sì (pour) lisì (return)
ʃ	sh	she (pay) shishiri (grass)
f	f	fọ (break) ifà (six)
v	v	vẹ (go) sivẹ (surpass)
ɸ	ph	phé (call) íphé (fish)
h	h	úhẹ (fat) ùhò (leg)
ɣ	gh	enghe (axe) inghọ (horn)
j	y	yin (defecate) éyin (teeth)
w	w	wọn (laugh) chówọn (give birth)



r	r	ràn (know) àran (goat)
l	l	lí (beat) alá (skin)

Note : kp, gb, ch, sh ph and gh are digraphs.

The recommended spellings are in conformity with other Nigerian languages whose orthographies have been standardised. Examples of these are Yorùbá, Igbo, and Ijo etc. (See Adeniyi *et al* (2011), Emenanjo *et al* (2011) and Agbegha *et al* (2011)).

### Proposal for spelling Akokoid vowels

Just like Yorùbá, Akokoid operates a twelve-vowel system. Seven of these vowels are oral vowels, they are:

Vowels	a	e	ɛ	i	o	ɔ	u
Letters	a	e	ẹ	i	o	ọ	u

The remaining five are nasal vowels, these are:

Vowels	ã	ẽ	ĩ	ũ	õ
Letters an	ẹn	in	un	on	

The proposal above is in conformity with the practice in other Nigerian languages, though few Nigerian languages still use symbols with diacritics to represent nasal vowels. For example in Khana, Gokana and Eleme nasal vowels are written with the nasal diacritic (the tilde); (Williamson 1984), just as it appears in the phonetic form i.e. ã and ù ; whereas in Yorùbá, Edo, Urhobo and the Ijọ group, nasalisation is written by using the letter 'n' after the ordinary vowel letter, thus:

ĩ	→	in
ẽ	→	ẹn
ã	→	an
õ	→	on

ũ → un

### Proposal for tone-marking Akokoid

Akokoid operates a three-tone system like Yorùbá. These three tones are:

- (i) High, which is marked as ///;
- (ii) Mid, which is left unmarked; and
- (iii) Low, which is marked as √.

Our recommendation is that the convention of marking high, low and mid tones in Yorùbá should be upheld for harmonisation sake since Yoruba and Akokoid are related. (See examples of how these tones are marked on the words above.

### Conclusion

As a reaction to Akinkugbe's (1978), Oyetade's (2004b and 2007) and Dada's (2006) calls for the description and analysis of Akokoid now that many speakers are still alive, this paper presents orthographic representations of the sound systems of the speech forms. This is a preliminary step towards standardizing and harmonizing the speech forms so that they could be assigned roles in significant domains especially in education within the community as suggested by Oyetade (2007). Such a step would definitely lead to the preservation of these endangered languages.

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