

# NEW PERSPECTIVES IN EDOID STUDIES:

## ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF RONALD PETER SCHAEFER

Edited by Ohioma I. Pogosan and Francis O. Egbokhare



The Centre for Advanced Studies of  
African Society (CASAS)

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*Kwesi Kwaa Prah*

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## FOREWORD

The geopolitics of the Nigerian environment sets it up into majority and minority cultures based essentially on population. Very simply, the larger groups such as the Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa are regarded as the majority just as the smaller (independent) groups such as the Edo, Ibibio, Efik, to mention a few of them, are regarded as some of the minority groups. To be branded a minority group (or person) has tremendous negative implications within the Nigerian environment. One of these negative consequences is the lack of attention paid to understanding such minorities. While the minority groups are ignored, the majority groups get a lot of attention. They therefore appear to be representative of all other groups within the same geo-political environment. In some cases, traditional history even supports this position. But this is anomalous considering the fact that all students of culture accept it as inherently unique, even though dynamic. The bottom line is that majority cultures are well studied to the detriment of the minority cultures. This has been the case since the colonial build-up to independence and beyond.

Concerted efforts towards looking at minority cultures is relatively recent. Academic interest in the minority cultures is, at this period, making great advances. A reflection of this is Emai (a small Edoid language spoken in Nigeria), that has undergone the most extensive documentation of any Nigerian language in recent time.

Why Edo? Of the three regions that emanated following independence, the Midwest region was carved out of the former Western region. Then employing the same criteria of selecting majority and minority peoples, the Edo emerged the dominant group in the Midwest. This attracted a lot of attention to it. Since then, Bendel and Edo states have been formed. Such further fragmentation has led to the creation of more minorities. Edo, which seemed homogenous during the clamour for states is now multi "ethnic". In present Edo state, all the peoples of its northern region are in the minority. This realisation led to the formation of the (MCN) Minority Cultures Network and another stream of the Northern Edo Working Group.

The larger of the two initiatives (MCN) aims at identifying minority cultures for the purpose of studying them while the NEWG seeks to understand the minority peoples of Northern Edo. The collection of essays presented here straddle both groups - four of them deal with cultural issues relating to the larger, now dominant (but previously a minority) Edo of Benin, while two of

the remaining four deal, in the main, with historical and linguistic issues pertaining to the minority peoples of Northern Edo. “The idea of Edo: People, Place, Culture or Language” and “Relevant Linguistic and Material Evidential Inferences and Edo Histories” are more general in content but raise potential historical questions which it is hoped will help conceptualise Edoid studies and instigate continuing investigation of the “minority”. These essays are presented in honour of Ron Schaefer of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, USA, who turned 50, two years ago. Of the 50 years, 20 have been spent actively working (teaching and research) among the Northern Edo. The result is an enviable publishing record and a bright future for Edoid studies. Indeed Prof. Ron Schaefer has so much affected Edoid studies that this little contribution in his honour can only be considered modest. We therefore invite you to join in sharing these works in the hope that it will condition further research on the northern Edoid minority groups.

**Ohioma I. Pogoson**

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# RELEVANT LINGUISTIC AND MATERIAL EVIDENTIAL INFERENCES AND EDO HISTORIES

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## 1. Introduction

The origins of African peoples are often shrouded in their myths and legends that can be found in their oral traditions. This immediately gives a hint, by implication that many of them have a long history. Oral traditions as a source of history has its problems - among them is the question of how far back human memory can go. Another problem, resulting from the above is how reliable these stories of origin are, having been passed down from several generations and also considering individual biases. These handicaps notwithstanding, the oral traditions of origin of several African peoples have provided valuable insights into their histories. When gathered and employed properly and then corroborated against other more concrete evidences, they have been found to be invaluable in identifying the origins of African and indeed other peoples of the world. Questions about the origin of African (indeed all) peoples are an on-going academic activity. Atanda has noted that questions about the origins of peoples are a function of their reasoning faculty and therefore constitute an index of man's historical consciousness without which he ceases to be rational (Atanda, 1980).



This paper raises questions about the history of origin of the Edo (Bini) and contiguous groups whose traditions of origin appear to bind them together. It raises other questions about the associations that have been made and seeks to confirm or refute them using concrete material and linguistic evidences. These groups are the Esan, Ora, Emai, Iuleha and the entire Edoid peoples who speak related languages and whose traditional origins have hitherto linked them with Benin. Do concrete evidences corroborate these bonding histories? How plausible are these histories when passed through the multi-disciplinary sieve? Indeed today there is a thriving monarchy in Benin, the ancient capital of the Edo. The origin of this monarchy and Benin brasscasting have traditionally been traced to Ile Ife, religious capital and cradle of the Yoruba civilization and a town with outstanding and ancient artistic productivity.

Until quite recently, a local historian, J.U. Egharevba, had answered many of the questions about the origin of the Edo. Egharevba, in his famous book, *A Short History of Benin*, narrates the origin of the Benin monarchy in Ife; Benin's other relationships with Ife. He also mentions the dispersal of Benin princes to found other groups of peoples who are now being referred to in this paper as the northern Edo. According to him, these contiguous groups had at one time or another been part of Benin but moved away from there to found their present abodes where they are presently situated (Egharevba, 1968). Usually such dispersals are motivated and often justified by tyrannical rules or the need to expand and grow. However it appears that as they moved away from the central Edo kingdom, they took only the basic Edo language. But what else, the arts, monarchy and form of administrative government? As a result of new information now originating from Benin itself about the authenticity of Egharevba's presentation and his version of Benin oral traditions, a new variant of the traditional origin of the Edo explaining the origin of the ruling dynasty has come out. This variant which accentuates the need for a re-examination of the various theories of origin of the Edo, their ruling dynasty and the art of brasscasting; and their northern neighbors, has been more or less upheld by present court historians. According to the Oba of Benin in the foreward to a book on Benin monarchy by Prince Ena Basimi Eweka, the introductory theme, which deals with the origin of the monarchy itself, "is thought provoking". He concurs substantially with the

theme of Benin monarchy as discussed in the book, not because he is the Oba of Benin, but because he finds the author's efforts to be in line with Benin ancient history handed down by their forebears. The book largely deals with the "Ekaladeran theory" of the origin of the Benin monarchy and its connections with Ife (Eweka, 1991).

Before going into the details of the traditional origin of the Benin and its connections with its northern neighbors, we should point out the need for a multidisciplinary approach to this paper. It was Graham Connah, the authority on the archaeology of Benin, who pointed out four sources for the history of Benin. According to him, historical records, principally the travelogues of the early European visitors to Benin between the 16th and the 19th century, oral traditions of the Edo, the famous Benin arts as well as the archaeology of Benin are major sources through which Benin history can be explained. Archaeology and the arts, like linguistics have great potential to provide what we term, in this paper, concrete material evidences with which to corroborate, uphold or refute the earlier two or other sources. Unfortunately while true that Benin arts are extant, many of the outstanding examples were lost to the British in the 1897 Benin/British war that Benin lost and resulted in the looting and burning of the Oba's palace. This unfortunate situation obliterated many useful materials for understanding Benin history and culture. Most of the ancient traditional Benin arts are, for example, now out of the reach of local scholars (Pogoso: 1997), having been sold in European and American auctions as early as the late 1890's and upwards. Indeed, a lot of the Benin artistic productions of the pre-1897 period are now in Western museums. Then the archaeology of Benin has not been undertaken on a wholesale basis, and no archaeological activity whatsoever has been undertaken in Northern Edoland. As a result of these lapses, scant material evidences in terms of the arts and other material culture are available at the disposal of the Benin scholar. Noting the paucity of extant material culture Atanda (1980), a historian, believes that language should be regarded as the most important determinant factor in considering a group as a group. Even Alagoa (Alagoa, 1978) also a historian noted language as the most obvious indicator of kinship among members of the various units of a "tribe". Having thus established the importance of linguistics in seeking evidences of contact, kinship and relatedness as well as the need for a multidisciplinary approach we shall now go back to the question of the origin of the ruling

Benin dynasty. According to Egbarevba, after the fall of the Ogiso dynasty, the people of Benin sent word to Ile Ife (See map) for assistance with the administration of Benin.



*The map of South Western Nigeria showing Ile, Benin and some towns mentioned*

He mentioned that Oduduwa, the Oni of Ife, sent his beloved son, Oranmiyan. As the tradition goes he first of all sent them lice to take care of as a test that they would look after his son Oranmiyan. The Benin people passed the test and Oranmiyan was sent in about 1170 AD (Egharevba, 1968:p. 90). But on getting to Benin, Oranmiyan found the Benin people to be very belligerent. He therefore spent just enough time there to marry Erinmwinde, daughter of Ogiegor and father a son. Oranmiyan's son was called Eweka. And it was to Eweka that Oranmiyan handed over the reign of power of the town, before tracing his steps back to Ife and subsequently to Old Oyo (Egharevba, 1968: p. 6-7). At a basic level, this popular account establishes the Ife origin of the Eweka

dynasty in Benin. But it is interesting to note that according to Ena Eweka, Oranmiyan entered Benin "amidst serious opposition of Ogiamien" (the administrator of Benin during the interregnum period) who refused him entry into the city which was still under the firm grip of his administration (Eweka, 1991: p.15).

In the emerging version to which I have referred earlier and that is now being vigorously pursued, Ekaladeran - a Benin prince who had earlier been banished is said to have wandered off into the forest and eventually appeared in Ife. He settled down at Ife, and rose to become a prosperous and important citizen and later king Oduduwa. This version is suggesting that Ekaladeran is Oduduwa who is referred to in Benin as Izeduwa or Ododoa (I have come home). According to the tradition, it was therefore to Izeduwa, the Benin prince that the Benin elders sent when they ran into trouble after the rejection of the Ogiso dynasty and Evian who administered Benin for nearly 40 years before handing over to his son, Ogiamen. But Oduduwa, now too old and set, and more or less a "Yoruba man" in Ife but still sitting on the Ife throne opts to send his son, Oranmiyan to help govern Benin. If truly Oduduwa is Ekaladeran, then it is quite plausible to believe that they would return to him for help when they ran into trouble, rather than ask a complete stranger.

What is however consistent in both versions is the existence of Ekaladeran. Egharevba also recognizes Ekaladeran, but in a slightly different way, as the banished Benin prince, the only son of Ogiso Owodo (the last in the Ogiso dynasty), who founded Ughoton, the famous Benin port town. Egharevba (1968, p. 2-3) adds that even though it was later discovered that Ekaladeran was unjustly banished and therefore invited back to his position as crown prince, he simply turns it down and disappears. But in the new version, Ekaladeran plays a more prominent role. He is reported to have wandered around in the forest before settling down in Ile Ife where he grew to become very successful, and became the Oni. Ekaladeran is therefore the Oni of Ife which Benin tradition credits with sending his son, Oranmiyan, back to his roots when his help is sought. It is even argued in Benin that the title of Ooni is translated in Benin to mean, "he is not" and is meant to point out the anomalous occupation of the Ife throne by Oranmiyan. (Personal Communication, Omokaro Izevbigie, 1983)

The interpretation of Egharevba's version for understanding Benin origin is that it implies an incontrovertible Ife, Yoruba

origin for the ruling Edo dynasty. And although art historical evidences from both towns support this position, there are still several unanswered questions and gaps that are yet to be filled. Some of the plausible arguments for the Ife origin of Benin arts over a local one include the confirmation of the antiquity of Ife art over Benin and the discovery of an Ife type sculpture in Benin (plate 1).



*Plate 1: Small figure of an Oni of Ife found in Benin City (c. 1500)*

This piece of sculpture in bronze is said to belong to the early period of Benin art and therefore, on the basis of its stylistic affinity with the naturalistic Ife pieces is believed to be an extant model Igueghae took with him from Ife. According to the oral tradition reported by Egharevba, the Oni accepted the request of the Oba of Benin for a brasscaster from Ife to teach the art of brass casting in Benin and he sent Igueghae (Egharevba, 1968: p.11).

Let us now return to the question of history. Consider the implication of the new variant that although the origin of the new dynasty may be traced to Ife, it was from parent stock Benin that it came. The origin of brasscasting in Benin is also credited to an

"Ife caster" who was sent to Benin to introduce the art tradition. We should prefer to lay this case to rest on the bases of outweighing material evidences provided by the arts. We admit a possibility of the art tradition being introduced from Ife. But it neither detracts from the suggestion that it was Ekaladeran, the banished Benin prince who might have been sitting as the Oni, in Ife. Is there a possibility that the Ife we refer to is not that located where present-day Ife is situated? If so, there might be a chance for explaining such an unusual situation. But also, how a foreigner might have worked to reach the level of an Oni at Ife is a pertinent question that the Benin story does not explain. Or could we be dealing with two periods in histories that have been conflated? Could the Oduduwa incidence have predated the art of brass casting or indeed could both have been referring to two different Ife towns - an earlier and smaller settlement or a later and more prosperous kingdom? Undoubtedly, implausible stories abound in both Benin and Ife tradition of theirs and each other's traditions of origin. And if this were the case, it may explain why an Igueghae was sent to Benin to teach the art of brasscasting rather than an "Elu...something" (a more typical Ife name) or any one with a more Yoruba sounding name. Igueghae is with small doubt, a Benin name. Then it may also explain the reason why the heads of the Benin Oba's were sent to Ife, but to which Ife? Is it the Ife of our present experience or another one?

But it is noteworthy to mention here that there are traditional references to Uhe (Ife) in the traditions of other Edo peoples. It is supposed to be the land of purity, the place where the soul returns to, the source and beginning of life. Uhe is also the place where the migrating cattle egrets return. This suggests a northern location of Ife as opposed to the present westerly location. Is it not quite possible that two Ifes are in contention here? A Yoruba one from which brass casting was borrowed at a point when both Benin and Ife were established and perhaps competing kingdoms with some form of relationship? A confusion of names is easy to imagine over time in memory as a result. Traditional histories in both Benin and Ife have it that the head of dead Benin kings are usually taken to Ife and buried at a site called Orun Oba Ado. We assume that this means that the heads of the dead kings were simply being sent to their wronged prince, Ekaladeran, alias Oduduwa of Ife. The implication here is that previous contact existed between Oni Oduduwa (Ekaladeran or someone else) and

the Edo before representations were sent for help when Benin ran into problems with the Ogiso dynasty. But, nowhere in the history of Nigerian peoples is such a tradition known to exist whereby heads of deceased kings are sent for burial elsewhere.

Indeed Orun Oba Ado (heaven of the Benin kings), an archaeological site in Ife that has been scientifically well investigated does not reveal overwhelming material evidences of the practice of burying heads of Benin kings there. Except that there is truly a previous Ife site, it is expected that substantial traces of Benin objects and even physical remains of past Benin kings will have been easily brought to light at Orun Oba Ado in Ife of our present experience. The results of Willett's excavations at Orun Oba Ado do not controvert claims in Ife that the heads of Benin kings were truly buried there. Then attempts to explain the lack of overwhelming evidences at Orun Oba Ado are implausible. Since this practice is said to have been carried on for over four centuries, one would have expected that the weight of concrete material evidence at the burial site should be lopsided. Here again we consider the possibility of an earlier Ife site that could have been peopled by diverse groups from where later migrations might have taken place. Then, we do not consider the interview of the "small boy" who claimed that he accompanied the bearers of the "head" of Oba Adolo to Ife for burial in 1888, to be reliable (Frank Willett, 1967: p.132). On the whole, even Willett does not accept *in toto*, the oral tradition of the suzerainty of Ife over Benin as explained in the origin of the present ruling dynasty of Benin. In his concluding response to the doubts cast by Ryder on the Ife/Benin relationship, Willett suggests that until when more sites are excavated in the confluence area and securely dated by radio carbon, 'we cannot hope to prove much'. He however believes that the whole idea "promises to be a very fruitful area for future work". The point must be made, before moving into the next section of this paper, that it is the origin of the art tradition in Benin and of the ruling dynasty that is believed to have a relationship with Ife. We do not think that this situation bears very much upon questions of the provenance of the Edo. Certainly, the weight of evidence on the links between Ife and Benin on the issues of the origin of the ruling dynasty and brass casting is on the possibility that there is connection. The question now is, what is the origin of the non-royal Edo or, shall we say, the autochthonous Edo. And what is his relationship with the Northern Edo groups.

This leads us naturally to kinship issues, which we have indicated earlier on, are best handled by linguistics. The paper now looks at the issues of language and their implications for the oral traditions that we are dealing with here.

The importance of Linguistics to history as we have hinted earlier on is now generally well known. Murdock writes that in the absence of written records, linguistic relationships provide by far the most dependable evidences of historical connections (1959: 12). Clark (1970: 7) speaking in similar vein, states that: Linguistic data are... providing a record of ethnic movements in prehistoric times as well as demonstrating the antiquity of the languages of Africa. These data are not only extremely precise but, when correlated with the archaeological evidence and oral history, should be able to provide ethnic and cultural affiliation for languages far back into the past, of a kind that can never be obtained from archaeology alone.

Elugbe (1992) enumerated the following as sources of the information that linguistic can provide to history. These are genetic relationships, prehistoric ecology and life styles, evidence of cultural contact, information about migrations, etc. He states that glottochronology, a logical arm of lexicostatistics, involves the use of lexicostatistical data to compute time or length of separation between languages. Glottochronology is an analogue of carbon 14 dating in archaeology (p.23). Written history is relatively recent in Africa. In spite of this situation, African history has depended largely on oral traditions, which as we have indicated earlier on, has its problems as a source for history.

Linguistic evidence therefore, can play a very important role in evaluating oral traditions and other sources of history. The various accounts of history can be corroborated, contradicted and balanced-up if linguistic evidence is employed in a principled way. This study represents such an attempt to deploy linguistic evidence in significant and revealing ways in the accounts of the histories of the Edoid speaking people.

The African continent has over two thousand languages; one quarter of these languages are spoken in Nigeria. Geographic overlapping and discontinuousness characterize the languages of Africa. Whereas related languages may be flung and scattered over geographical zones, enmeshed in between disparate languages unrelated languages may be geographically contiguous. According to Murdock (1959:12) if two people speak related languages,



however much they may differ in race or in culture and however remote may be their geographical location, either both have descended from a single ancestral society or the ancestors of one have at some time ... abandoned their own language and adopted that of their neighbors. Elugbe (1992) states that besides the political scramble for Africa, there was an earlier struggle for Africa, a prehistoric one that has created the existing linguistic diversity. The prehistoric scramble finds causes in desiccation of the Sahara and the restlessness of the prehistoric peoples. These have led to the separation of peoples in space and time and the mixing up of populations with distinct languages. The desiccation of the Sahara some 5,000 years ago caused a southward push of linguistic fragmentation (Dalby 1977: cf Elugbe 1992:15).

The family tree is a useful end product of a comparative and historical and linguistic study of relevance to history. It makes assumptions about genetic relationships between languages. It does not only define the existence of a relationship but also defines the degree of relationship between languages. This can easily be calculated from membership of a class and numbers of nodes separating the classes. The family tree here is a genealogical table. Elugbe (1979) sums up the role of the family tree thus:

The family tree is a convenient way of showing at a glance the relationship between languages and language groups. It displays, in terms of 'branching' or 'splitting', the way in which the daughter languages are derived from the parent language. Innovations in sound, lexical and syntactic change helps us in determining the internal relationships within the group. As an instrument of prehistory, this method is one of the most reliable (1979: 89).

From Elugbe's linguistic classification of the Edoid languages, the northwestern Edoid languages are close to the original Edo language. But it is not only in language that such proximity exists. The northwestern groups principally inhabiting two local government areas, Akoko Edo and Etsako West are traditionally historically connected with the Edo. The local histories of their origin closely associate them with the Edo of Benin and this neither should surprise us. It is a fact in history that smaller groups desire to associate and be linked with the larger groups within the same vicinity. As a result, all the Yoruba, for

example, originate from Ife while many groups in the former midwestern part of Nigeria tend to trace their origin to the Edo, for obvious reasons, even though they may speak mutually unintelligible languages and their cultures appear at a base level to be distant from one another. The thinking is that much of the peoples inhabiting the Edo-Benin area and Northern Edo area are homogeneous. The reason is not farfetched. Indeed they are, to a reasonable extent, linguistically homogenous and then of course, they share a common history of origin from Benin. According to Ogbomo (1997), the general thrust of Owan tradition of origin suggests that the people migrated from the highly centralized kingdom of Benin. And here lies the problem.

There is a marked difference in the political organization of the Benin and the Northern Edo groups, which raises suspicions about the authenticity of the migration theories of the origin of the northern Edo people from Benin. Then elements of high culture, which ought to be transmitted between both groups if such a filial relationship is upheld, are scant among the Northern Edo. Consider that the spectacular castings of the Edo that stunned early foreigners and many of which were removed by the British in 1897 are unknown, even in an archaic form anywhere in Northern Edo.

The classification of African Languages and the Linguistic map of Africa are presented in figures (1) and (2). There are over 2,000 languages spoken in the continent. In spite of this number, African languages come under four families.

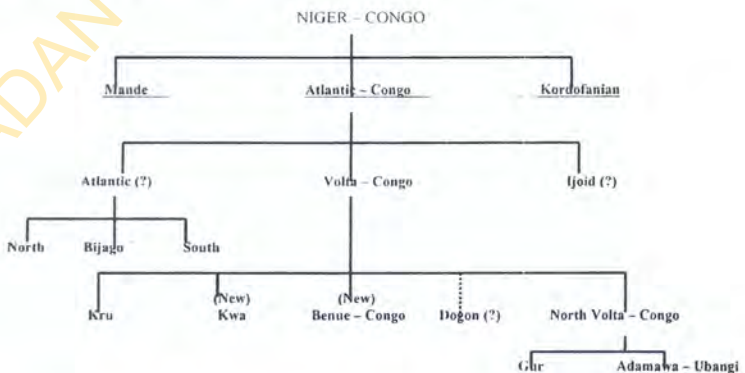


Figure 1: The latest classification of Niger - Congo (=Greenberg's Niger-Kordofanian)  
(Bendor - Samuel, 1989 : 21)

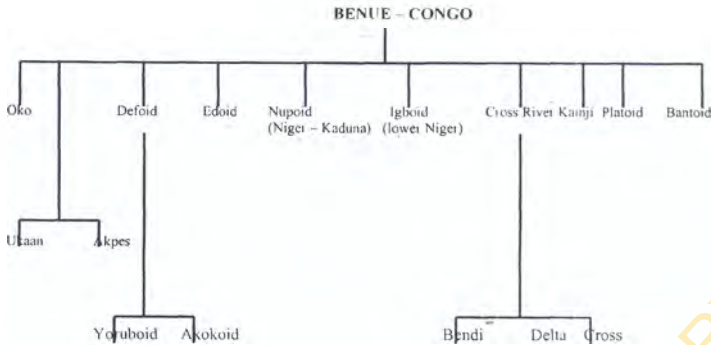


Figure 2: Benue - Congo family tree (Williamson 1989)

These are the Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, Afroasiatic and Khoisan. The largest group of these is the Niger-Congo. Yoruba and Edo languages come under this group. The origin and homeland of this group is still being debated. But Welmers (1971), Heine (1979) and Horton (1982) locate it at the Upper Nile Valley, the valley of the Niger and Fouta Djallon and Nimba mountain ranges and the headwaters of the Niger respectively.

Elugbe (1992) opined that Welmers and Heine might have been referring to different times in history. He argues that "since Heine himself suggests that Niger-Congo peoples may have occupied larger parts of the Sahara, he must accept the merit of a postulated migration from the general direction of the Sahara ... the presence of Kordofanian peoples in the Sudan, in the absence of any claim that Niger-Congo peoples migrated in that direction, makes it likely that before the West African homeland, the Niger-Congo peoples were farther towards the central Nile valley (p8). Williamson (1988a: 93) locates the homeland of Proto-Benue-Congo from which proto - Yoruboid and proto - Edoid and other Nigerian languages derived in a loose sense in the Niger and Benue confluence. From here, they spread in all directions and occupied most of southern Nigeria and the middle belt. From here also, the Edoid peoples moved south to the west of the Niger (Elugbe 1992:24). The Yoruba peoples moved south.

Edoid histories can be examined on the basis of histories of origins and histories of relationships. The former establishes a descent, a source of being. The latter establishes kinship and common ancestry.

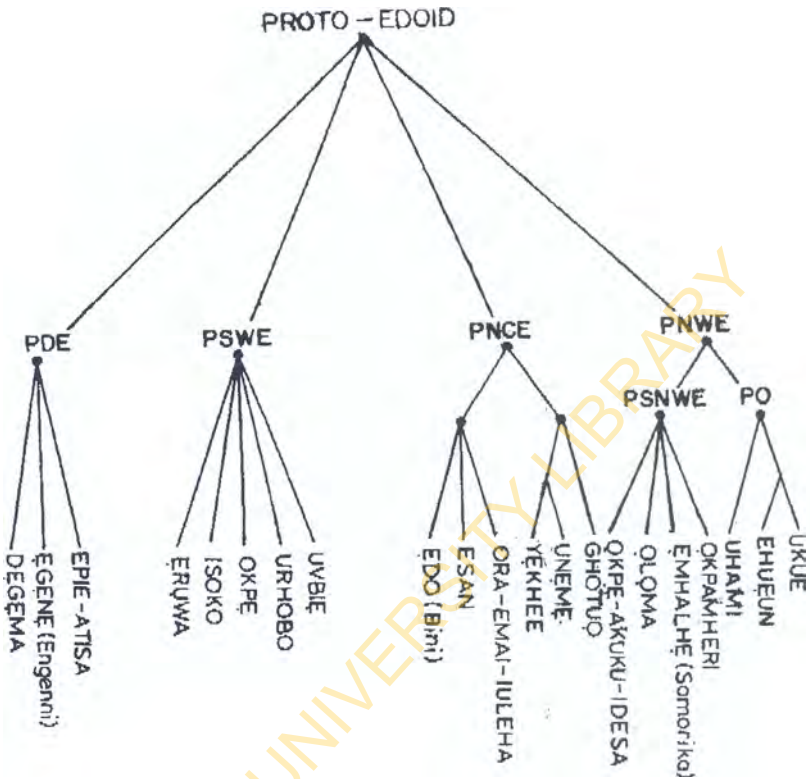


Fig. 3: *The Edoid Family Tree* (Elugbe, 1986)

From proto-Edoid, four distinct languages split up. These are PDE, PSWE, PNCE PNWE. Again, this means that Degema, Engene, Epie were once one language known here as Proto-Delta-Edoid; Eruwa, Isoko, Okpe, Urhobo and Uvbie were together in Proto-South-West-Edoid; Edo (Benin) Esan, Ora, Emai, Iuleha, Ghotuo, Uneme, Yekhee were all one language represented here as Proto-North-Central-Edoid and finally, Okpe, Oloma, Emale, Okpameri, Uhami, Ehueun, Ukue all were in Proto North-West-Edoid. PNCE split again into two languages, just as well, PNWE split into two languages; Edo, Esan and Ora-Emai-Iuleha are closest, and were once one language. Ghotuo, Uneme and Yekhee were also once one language. The important thing to stress here is that every node in the classification is a statement about relationships and origins. Members belonging to the same node

are related and descended from a common source. Historically speaking, a lot of implications arise from the family tree. For instance, it is clear that claims of Benin origin are very suspicious. There is in fact no way in which languages of the PDE, PSWE and PNWE can claim a Benin origin since about 2,000 years ago when they split up there was as yet no such entity. The only way a Benin (i.e. Edo) origin may be justified is if the original homeland itself was known by the same name.

It is interesting to note that Ora-Emai-Iuleha communities each claim separate origins from Benin. Yet linguistic evidence shows all of their languages to be one language at a point and such language, which we refer to here as "Proto-Ese" together with Esan and Edo, was once a single linguistic form. Except this linguistic form was itself known as "Edo" (i.e. Benin) there is no way in which these groups could lay claim to a Benin origin. In other words, the Benin origin claimed by many Edoid speaking peoples may refer to an earlier homeland known as Edo but certainly not the Benin of present experience. Several of the communities' predate the emergence of the Benin speech form and in fact the kingdom.

Elugbe (1979) states that the asynchrony in the historical claims and linguistic evidence may be due to time depth contrasts. Whereas linguistic evidence deals with time depth of a prehistoric type, traditions of origin may be referring to later migrations. In fact, stories of Benin origin may refer to later migrations from the Benin Empire to already established homelands. This is most likely to be the core since there is little affinity in art and religion between these groups and Benin. Finally, linguistic evidence tells us to trace Edoid peoples to a common origin, to a common homeland. The common language is closer to the Northwest Edoid languages in sound and morphology. NWE is less innovative than other Edoid languages. It is also here that we have small linguistic groups scattered among the hills.

Elugbe (1979) concludes that NWE must have been the longest of all Edoid speaking peoples at their present site. The area is closest to the homeland from which the Edoid-speaking peoples originate. If this homeland was known by the name "Edo" or "Benin", then stories of Benin origin are imaginable. Otherwise, it is preposterous to justify any Benin origin except otherwise there is a period of history predating the great empire for which oral traditions make no reference.

Finally in the Benin palace, a language said to be a mixture of Yoruba and Portuguese is spoken among the chiefs. It is even said that as a part of the palace rituals and rites of consecration of the chiefs, they are required to learn to communicate in this language. This is a further confirmation of the royal relationship between Ife where the Yoruba elements in the language could have come from, and Benin. Indeed it is on record that the Oba sent his son to Portugal to be educated in the culture and language of the Portuguese. This may have conditioned the development of the palace language.

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