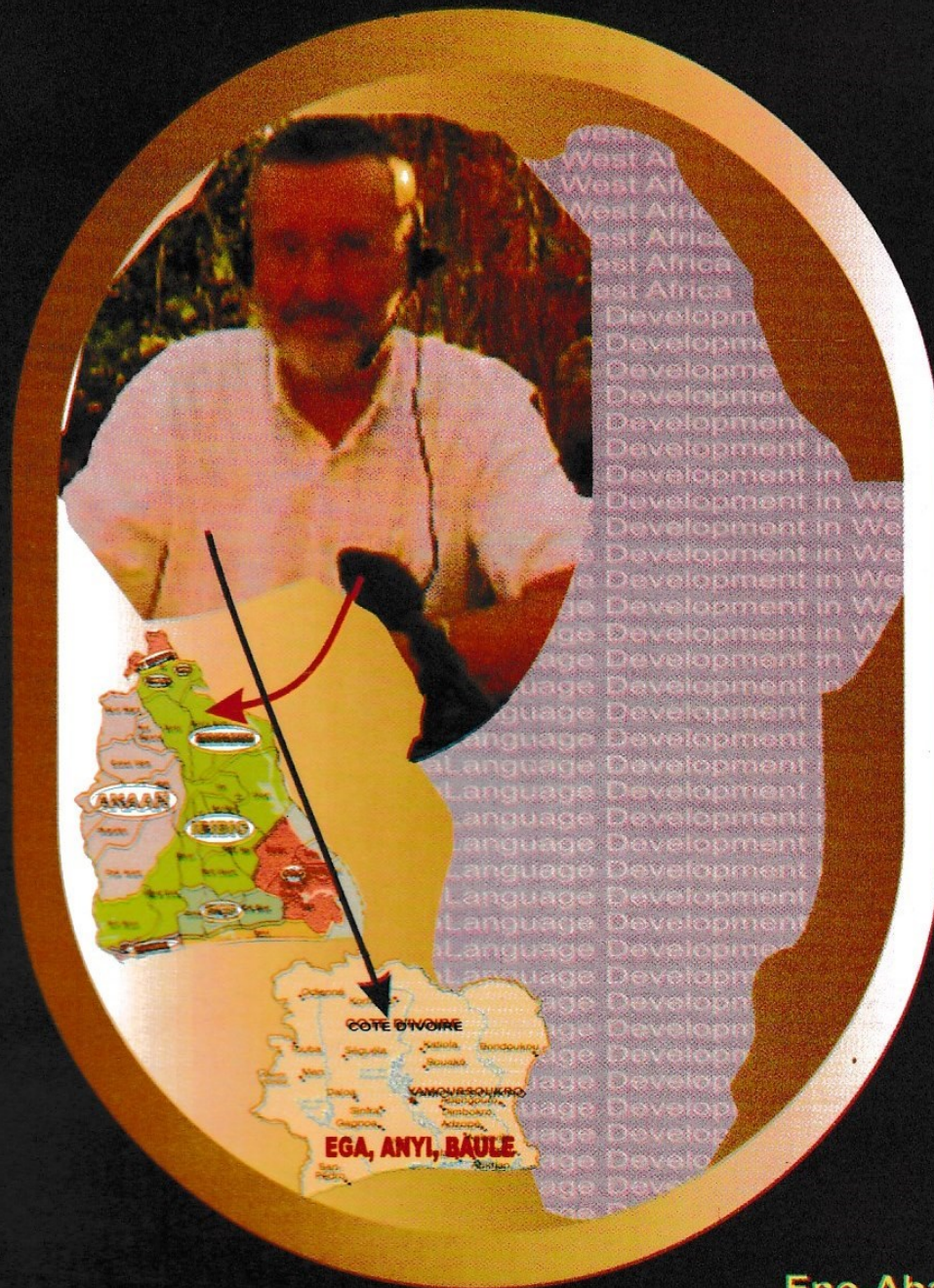# LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT
BEYOND BORDERS

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A Preliminary Report of Aspects of the Kiong Sound System

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Abstract

Kiong belongs to the Delta-Cross group of the Niger Congo family of languages and is spoken in Odukpani and Akamkpa Local Government Areas of Cross River State of Nigeria as well as in Cameroon. This paper is a preliminary report on an investigation into phonological aspects of the Okoyong variety of the Kiong language. The work elicited data from a 200 basic wordlist from Chief Eyo Otu Ekpenyong (our principal informant). This data was corroborated by information from Mr. Nsa Ita Okon and Miss Atana Okon. The aim is to document the language which seems to be dying out in Nigeria as most of its present speakers are elderly people. The vowel and consonant sounds of Kiong in particular and their distribution in isolated words, as well as certain phonological processes, are presented in this paper.[1] Our initial results show, among others, traces of the noun class system typical of Bantu, lack of consonant cluster, phonemic vowel length and a seven-syllable pattern.

1.   Introduction

Historical Background of the Kiong speaking People

Kiong is the name given to the language spoken in Okonyong in Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The other name of the language is Durop and the speakers are known as Kurop, Korop, or Korup. The name "Kiong" is a

consequence of migration. The people who speak it are said to have originated from the Bantu stock, in South Central Africa. History has it that the search for good farmlands and congenial habitation, coupled with frequent wars among the South African tribes in the beginning of the 16th Century gave the impetus for the Kurop people's northward movement across the Equator. They later moved westwards and stopped at Korup near the Bamendas in Cameroon. They remained there for some decades and established families and villages, among them in Ekon 1, Ekon II, Ekondo-Ekondo 1 and Ekondo-Ekondo 11 (Okpasan).

Not satisfied with the life there, many of them continued moving westwards and arrived at Budeng, Ewen and Okoyong Akani Obio, all in the present Cross River State of Nigeria. Sickness and frequent death caused by rats, snakes and insects did not allow them to stay long there. So, by about 1647, they had established villages and hamlets there. For now, there is no more migration of the Kiong-speaking people.

Having moved far from the Korup area, the Kiong language seems to be facing extinction, due partly to lack of congenial sociolinguistic environment. Presently, there are only a very few speakers spread over the four Kiong clans of Ekongatanako, Onim, Ankiong in Akamkpa, and Ekori in Odukpani Local Government Area. The language is also spoken in the Mundemba area of Cameroon, where it is known as Durop. Whatever variations there are between Kiong and Durop are dialectal, occasioned by distance in space. The data we collect in this work will give us a foundation to compare with that of Kastelein (1994) to help us determine the degree of relationship, in a future work, that we envisage.

For one thing, the nouns seem to bear traces of the noun class system typical of Bantu languages. Observe the following:

(1)   ɣuo kenɔm   'dance dance'

        ɣɔn kenɔm   'sing song'

yun nni	'drink water'
men nnok	'drink wine'
buka bunde	'my book one'

Sociolinguistic Status of Kiong

Language is consolidated by constant social use and lack of it is detrimental to any language. This is the fate of Kiong that is currently threatened by the overwhelming use of Efik and English. Kiong has hardly been passed down from generation to generation, in its present geographical domain, and speakers of other neighbouring languages do not speak it. It has no official status, as it is used neither in administration nor in education. It is not a language of the media. It is only used orally by a tiny fraction of the elderly people of its 2, 453 population, (1991 census figure) in local ceremonies such as in traditional religious ceremonies, cultural festivals and meetings of the Okoyong Development League. However, Gordon (2005) estimates the ethnic population at just 569.

The use of Efik and English in the cultural, religious (western), commercial and educational life of the peoples has adversely affected the growth of Kiong. Indeed, the number of Kiong speakers has drastically decreased over time. Furthermore, the geographical location of the Kiong language community does not help matters. It is hemmed in by other cultures of greater educational and commercial eminence (Efik, and Ejagham/Qua).

The Kiong language is now being promoted by the Okoyong Development League. The league sponsored a primer (written by Eyo Otu Ekpenyong) in 1932 and continues to encourage the Okoyong people to speak Kiong. Kiong is the natural language of cultural practice and ceremonies for the few surviving users. The eagerness to promote the use of the language has aroused the interest of a few Kiong-speaking youths and there is hope that with serious social engineering effort, the threat of extinction can

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be reversed.

Classification

According to Greenberg (1963), Ododop (also Korop) which is the Kiong variety spoken in the Republic of Cameroon and in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. belongs to the Benue-Congo branch of the NigerCongo family which in turn belongs to the Congo – Kordofanian family of languages. In a later classification by Hansford et al (1976). Kiong is actually identified as a language in the Benue-Congo branch which is subdivided into four sub-branches, one of which is Cross River. Cross River is sub-divided into Bendi and Delta-Cross. Delta-Cross, to which Kiong belongs, is subdivided into Lower and Upper Cross. Crozier and Blench (eds. (1992) divide the Upper-Cross group into North-South and East-West, with Kiong belonging to the later. Figure 1 summarizes the classification.

The Present Study

The aim of the present work is primarily to identify and describe the sound system of the Kiong language, the variety spoken by the Okoyong people in Odukpani L.G.A of Cross River State. This will contribute towards the preservation of the linguistic heritage of the world through documentation of a seriously endangered language, to a certain extent. Our next focus will be to compare our present sketch of the Kiong sound system with Kastelein's (1994) work on the Durop variety before embarking on a detailed phonological analysis.

2.   *The Phonemes of Kiong*

This section is concerned with the segmental aspects of the sound pattern of Kiong. We analyze the sound pattern from a basically phonemic viewpoint, based on the available data.

Niger – Kordofanian

|

Niger Congo

|

Benue Congo

|

Cross River

|

Delta Cross

|

Upper Cross

|

East-West ┌─────────────── **Kiong** (nearly extinct)
├─────────────── Korop
├─────────────── Ukpet Ehom
├─────────────── Agoi
├─────────────── Doko-Uyanga
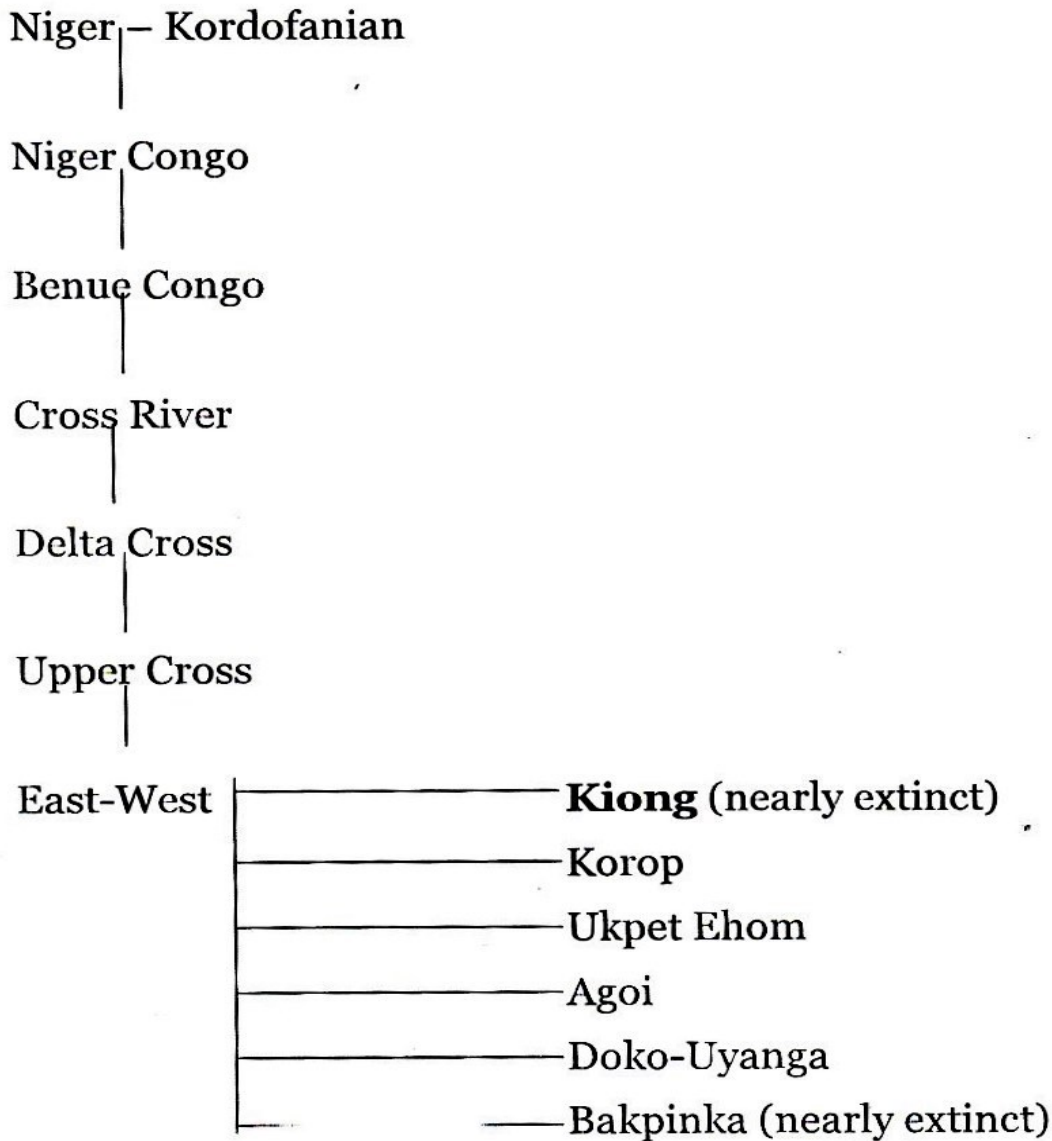└─────────────── Bakpinka (nearly extinct)

Figure 1. Crozier and Blench eds (1992)

Consonants

The minimal pair test is used to determine the phonemic status of the consonants. Near-minimal pairs are used where minimal pairs cannot be found or are not ascertained.

(2).

(i)	a. [bá]	'take'	/b/
	b [má]	'here'	/m/
(ii)	a. [kím]	'come last'	/k/
	b. [ṇím]	'grow'	/n/
(iii)	a. [tùȯ]	'remove'	/t/
	b. [dùȯ]	'know'	/d/
(iv)	a. [kpá]	'stab'	/kp/
	b. [má]	'here'	/m/
(v)	a. [éfén]	'people'	/f/
	b. [énén]	'way'	/n/
(vi)	a. [sǎ]	'eat'	/s/
	b. [nǎ]	'mother'	/n/
(vii)	a. [hèi']	'lick'	/h/
	b. [weì]	'sweep'	/w/
(viii)	a. [bùád]	'look for'	/d/
	b. [bùán]	'medicine'	/n/
(ix)	a. [bórúk]	'vulture'	/s/
	b. [bósúk]	'some'	/s/
(x)	a. [jà]	'love'	/j/
	b. [kà]	'if, whether'	/k/
(xi).	a. [ɲík]	'leave'	/ɲ/
	b. [dík]	'come from'	/d/

Table 1: Kiong phonemic consonant chart

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar		Palatal	Labial-velar	Velar	
Plosives	b		t	d	K	Kp		
Fricatives		F	S				x	
Nasals	m			n				ŋ
					ɲ			
Approximants			r		J	W		

Description and Distribution of the Consonant Phonemes

Plosives

/b/ is a voiced bilabial plosive, with two allophones: [b] and [p]. While [b] occurs word initially, medially and finally, [p] occurs word finally only, as the examples below show:

(3) (i)   [jàp]   'animal'

(ii) [wɔp]   'flog'

(iii) [bùká]   'book'

(iv) [bien]   'thing'

(v) [dèben]   'short'

(vi) [kɔbɔ̃ɔ̃b]   'wing'

Since the distribution of [p] is limited to final position only, and does not contrast with any sound in the language, we regard it as an allophone of /b/ which occurs more freely and frequently in the data; hence, the non-inclusion of [p] in the phonemic chart above.

/t/ is a voiceless alveolar plosive which occurs word initially, medially and finally as in

(4) (i)   [tie]   'do'

(ii)   [eta]   'cloth'

(iii)   [ibotibot]   'white'

/d/ a voiced alveolar plosive occurs word initially, medially and finally:

(5)   (i)   [dudem]   'bath'

(ii)   [beked]   'body'

/d/: also occurs after a nasal as in:

(6)   (i)   [nde]   'my'

(ii)   [timed]   'like this'

and before a velar plosive, as in [ibaadke] 'now'

Note, however, that final t/d contrast is impressionistic as we have no instrumental confirmation at this point.

/kp/, the voiceless labio – velar plosive occurs in word-initial and intervocalic positions, as in

(7)   (i)   [kpepe]   'all'

(ii)   [ikpei]   'rat'

(iii)   [okpa]   'river'

/k/ is a voiceless velar plosive which occurs frequently in the language. It can be found in word initial, medial and final positions:

(8)   (i)   [kek]   'pass'

(ii)   [dekon]   'farm'

(iii)   [abak]   'forest'

Fricatives

There is a lack of voiced fricatives in the Kiong consonant system. Three voiceless fricatives are attested.

/f/ is a voiceless labio-dental fricative that occurs initially and medially, as in

(9) (i) · [efen] 'people'

  (ii) [fepfep] 'quickly'

/s/, the alveolar fricative occurs in word initial and medial positions:

(10) (i) [seisei] 'gently'

  (ii) [isiin] 'root'

It occurs after an alveolar nasal:

(11) (i) [usaŋsani] 'sand'

  (ii) [nsaŋkimi] 'fish'

  (iii) [nsaŋa] 'friend'

/x/, the voiceless glottal fricative, has two allophones

/h/ and /R/ which are in free variation and occur intervocalically as in

(12) (i) /tuha/→ [tuha] 'sit'

  (ii) /naha/→ [naRa] 'sweeten'

and initially as in: [hei] 'lick'

Nasals

From data available, four nasals were attested, /m,n,ɲ,ŋ/.

/m/ is a (voiced) bilabial nasal that occurs in word initial, medial and final positions.

It also occurs pre-consonantally where it is syllabic [cf. 12 a & b, 2.4)

(13) (i) [ma] 'here'

  (ii) [kwomana] 'arrange'

  (iii) [inim] 'back'

(14) (i)   [mbuon]   'you(sg)'

      (ii)   [mbo]   'your[sg]'

/n/, a [voiced] alveolar nasal, occurs wood initially, medially and finally, as in:

(15) (i)   [niŋ]   'any more'

      (ii)   [odena]   'because'

      (iii) [budian]   'fear'

It is also syllabic, when it occurs word initially as in:

(16) (i)   [nnini]   'today'

      (ii)   [nni]   'water'

      (iii) [nta]   'hamlet, street'

/ɲ/, the palatal nasal occurs mainly word initially, and occasionally in medial position, as the examples below show:

(17) (i)   [ɲik]   'leave'

      (ii)   [ɲaŋ]   'urinate'

      (iii) [beɲoŋ]   'Efik (language & people)'

Data available to us do not indicate a syllabic nature for /ɲ/.

/ŋ/, the velar nasal has two allophones – [ŋ] and [ŋʷ]. However, ŋʷ occurs word initially and in intervocalic positions. Simply put, the occurrence can be summarized thus: [ŋʷ]: morpheme – initial [ŋ]: morpheme medial and final as shown below:

(18) (i)   [noon ŋa]   'hear'!

      (ii)   [boŋ]   'wait'

      (iii) [kebeŋta]   'big'

      (iv)   [iŋʷŋ]   'mouth'

      (v)   [ŋʷaŋ)   'urine'

The data above show that there is a preponderant existence of nasals over other natural classes of sounds in Kiong.

Approximants

Kiong has three approximants; all of them central: /r, j and w/. From a functional viewpoint, these sounds are more consonantal than vocalic and are hence, analyzed as such.

/**r**/: occurs only in medial position, as the examples below show:

(19)   (i)   [wori]   'near'

         (ii)   [oruk]   '[some] other'

         (iii)   [iyierikek]   'alone'

/**j**/ occurs in initial and medial positions, as in.

(20)   (i)   [jap]   'animal'

         (ii)   [jon]   'sing'

         (iii)   [toiji]   'plant(v)'

         (iv)   [tuja]   'spit'

/**w**/ is a (voiced) labio-velar approximant. It occurs in initial and medial positions, as in the following examples.

(21)   (i)   [wuni]   'play (v)'

         (ii)   [wen]   'child, baby'

         (iii)   [nuwa]   'stab'

         (iv)   [newi]   'quiet'

Consonant Processes

The following are the major consonant processes observed in the Kiong data.

Homorganicty

Homorganic nasals abound in Kiong, just like in most African languages. A fact to note about consonant cluster in Kiong, and indeed most Cross River or even Benue-Congo languages, is that

all clusters involve a nasal that shares a common place feature with the folowing consonant. Consider the following examples.

(22) (i)   [kebenta]   'big'

    (ii)   [nsaŋkimi]   'fish'

    (iii) [nambad]   'get up'

    (iv)   [nimbai]   'milk'

    (iv)   [unde]   'mine'

To account for this phenomenon, we could tentatively posit for the nasal an archiphoneme, /N/, which assimilates to the following consonant in the next syllable (homorganically) thus:

[m]	–	bilabial
[n]	–	alveolar
[ŋ]	–	velar
[ɲ]	–	palatal
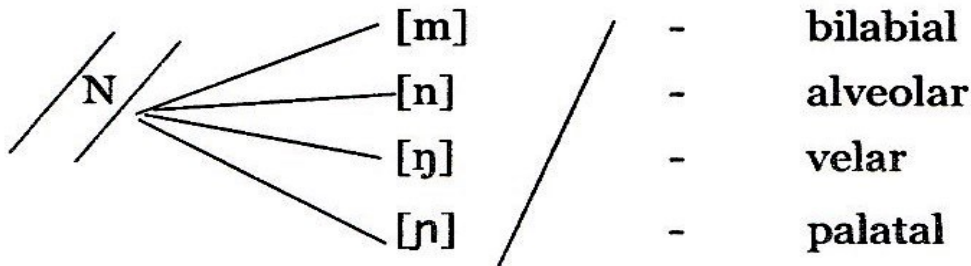
Our data, however, seem to present exceptions to this rule, as the following examples show:

(23) (i)   [timde]   'like this'

    (ii)   [timso]   'like that'

This is all the same quite understandable, as these items (23 a, b) are disyllabic; otherwise this heterorganicity would have presented a near articulatory impossibility. On the basis of these exceptions we propose that the underlying form is /m/ which usually, but not invariably, assimilates to the following syllable in place of articulation.

Labialization

Labialization involves the rounding of the lips in the articulation of consonants that ordinarily are produced without lip rounding. This process is attested in Kiong but with no phonemic import.

The voiceless velar plosive /k/ is labialized in the context where it is followed by a round back vowel, as the examples below indicate:

(24) (i)   kuomanan   [kʷuomanaŋ]   'arrange'

      (ii)   kuodi   [kʷuodi]   'evening'

      (iii) tuo   [tʷuo]   'remove'

Vowels

Six vowel phonemes are attested in Kiong. The six vowel system is typical of Niger-Congo languages. Kiong vowels are exemplified thus:

/i/ and /o/ as in [iwo]   'fruit'

/u/ and /a/ as in [usa]   'food'

/e/ and /ɔ/ as in [denɔnɔ]   'load'

These vowel phonemes are presented in the Table 2

Table 2. Kiong Phonemic Vowel Chart

	Front	Central	Back
High	I		U
Mid	e		o
	[ɛ]		ɔ
Low		a	

Description and Distribution of the Vowel Phonemes

/i/ high front unrounded vowel. This vowel has two variants, which are in complementary distribution. /i/ occurs in open syllables while in closed syllables it is realized as /i/, as in the following words:

(25) (i)   [isei]   'knife'

      (ii)   [iyan]   'leaf'

      (iii) [ebin]   'market, week'

[i] was found to occur in word medial position, but in that environment, it is either geminated or it occurs with another vowel, as in:

(26) (i)   [isiin]   'root'

      (ii)   [sainan]   'arrive'

/e/ mid front unrounded vowel. It occurs in word initial. interconsonantal and final positions:

(27) (i)   [efen]   'people'

      (ii)   [wene]   'return'

This segment is sometimes realized as /ɛ/- mid front unrounded vowel between voiced as in:

(28) (i)   [utɛre]   'vulture

      (ii)   [kebɛd]   'hill'

/a/ low central unrounded vowel. It occurs word initially. medially and finally:

(29) (i)   [atana] Atana   'girl's name'

/o/ - low back rounded vowel which occurs in word initial. postconsonantal and final positions:

(30) (i)   [onai]   'four'

      (ii)   [enoho]   'bed'

/ɔ/ - mid back rounded vowel. It could be found in word initial. medial and final position:

(31) (i)   [ɔmuna]   'God'

      (ii)   [ɔsuk]   'vulture'

(iii)   [jɔ]   'there'

/**u**/:   high back rounded vowel.   It occurs word initially, postconsonantally and finally:

(32)   (i)   [udim]   'bush'

        (ii)   [suon]   'enter'

        (iii)   [oju]   'cat'

Vowel processes

We present the data underlying some of the various vowel processes, without any detailed discussion on them, as this is envisaged in our subsequent work.

Vowel length

Phonetically, length has to do with the physical duration or quantity of a sound. But in phonology it is used to express the relative duration of sound and syllable when they signal a linguistic contrast. Kiong utilizes length from both perspectives. Phonetically, and as a matter of common knowledge, in most languages of the world, vowels are longer in open syllables, as these Kiong data illustrate:

(33)   (i)   usa   'food'

        (ii)   tene   'show'

        (iii) we   'come'

Lexical emphasis is achieved through vowel lengthening as the following examples show.

        tùhá 'sit'   tùhúá 'sit – don't do anything else'

        wȯ   'roast'   wȯȯ 'roast – rather than boil'

Vowel harmony

Vowel harmony is attested in Kiong. At the lexical level, there is complete vowel harmony, that is, vowel reduplication. There is also partial harmony, where the second vowel of the lexical item assimilates in certain features to the first vowel:

(34)   (i)   [akata]   'chair, stool'

       (ii)   [ibokon]   'hard, strongly'

       (iii)   [ɔkap]   'river'

       (iv)   [utɔm]   'sacrifice, prayer'

       (v)   [enen]   'way'

Vowel sequences

There are many cases of vowel sequences in Kiong as the examples below shows:

(35)   (i)   [sainaŋ]   'arrive'

       (ii)   [kpia]   'cover'

       (iii)   [tie]   'do'

       (iv)   [bukei]   'ground, land'

       (v)   [juo]   'dance (v)'

       (vi)   [kwoi]   'guard'

       (vii)   [enuɔ]   'house'

       (viii)   [uen]   'word'

Observe that the data above do not amount to diphthongization as the sequences cut across syllable boundaries.

Reduplication

Reduplication in African languages is a very productive phenomenon which can affect numerals, nouns, verbs and

adjectives, among others, as opposed to the situation (say) in English. In the Kiong case, reduplication is used mainly for emphasis and adverbial construction. As we shall soon discover, adverbials in Kiong appear mainly in reduplicated form, usually involving full reduplication of the stem:

(36)   (i)   [ibɔkɔn]   ]'hard'   (iv)   [nnini] 'today'

       (ii)   [fepfep]   'quickly'   (v)   [kpekpe] 'all'

       (iii) [kwɔkwop]   'fresh'   (vi)   [niɲiniŋ] 'little'

Syllabic Structure

Though a precise and an acceptable definition of the syllable is not an easy task, we will tentatively look at the syllable as "a segment or sequence of segments that has a peak of sonority and which coincides in number with a unit of utterance", (Noah 1996:66).

The following syllabic structures were elicited from the Kiong data in the course of our fieldwork:

(37)   (i)   V   e-efen   'people'

       (ii)   C(N)   n-ni   'water'

       (iii) CV   ma   'here'

       (iv)   CVC   bok   'wait'

       (v)   CCV   e-kpri   'little'

       (vi)   CVV   wɔɔ   'roast'

       vii.   CVVC   ko-bɔɔb   'wing'

Though the syllabic nasal can as well be analysed as an example of V, we prefer to treat it as a special syllable type N(C). It is obvious that Kiong, like most Cross River languages, does not accommodate complex consonant clusters at the syllable level.

We are almost certain the apparent clustering in syllable type 5 above is reducible to a single segment, on further analysis, Noah (1996:7).

Tone

The overwhelming majority of African languages are tonal or tonal-accent. In other words, differences in relative pitch are utilized for both lexical and grammatical distinctions. Though there are indications to the existence of grammatical tone in Kiong, in this work we will focus on its lexical function only. Two basic tonal distinctions are easily discernible given the benefit of our limited data. We do not preclude two or more modification of these tones.

The lexical function of Kiong tone: high ['] and low [`] are exemplified in the data below:

(38) (i) [kɔn] 'put'   usa   'food'   na   'for, and:

(ii) [kɔn] 'be strong' usa   'it hand' na   'mother'

An in-depth study of the contrastive functions of tone in Kiong will be carried out in a latter work.

3.   *Conclusion*

This paper is a preliminary report on aspects of the sound system of Kiong. It is an attempt to document a language which is nearly extinct. Data were not easy to come by and so it is not possible to discuss a number of phonological processes in detail. With time and an enhanced data it will be possible to make more definitive statements about the phonology of Kiong. We hope that the little data we have gathered here will serve as an inspiration for other researchers. In a future date, we expect to be able to establish the degree of relationship between Kiong and Durop, the sister dialect, spoken in Akamkpa and Cameroon. Traces of the noun class system typical of Bantu languages seem to collaborate the people's oral history that they migrated to their

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present location from the Bantu stock of South Central Africa. We also expect to be able to adopt the "Fieldwork BY the speakers of the language of the community" framework (cf Grinevald, 2008) for the comprehensiveness and sustainability of the documentation of the Kiong language.

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