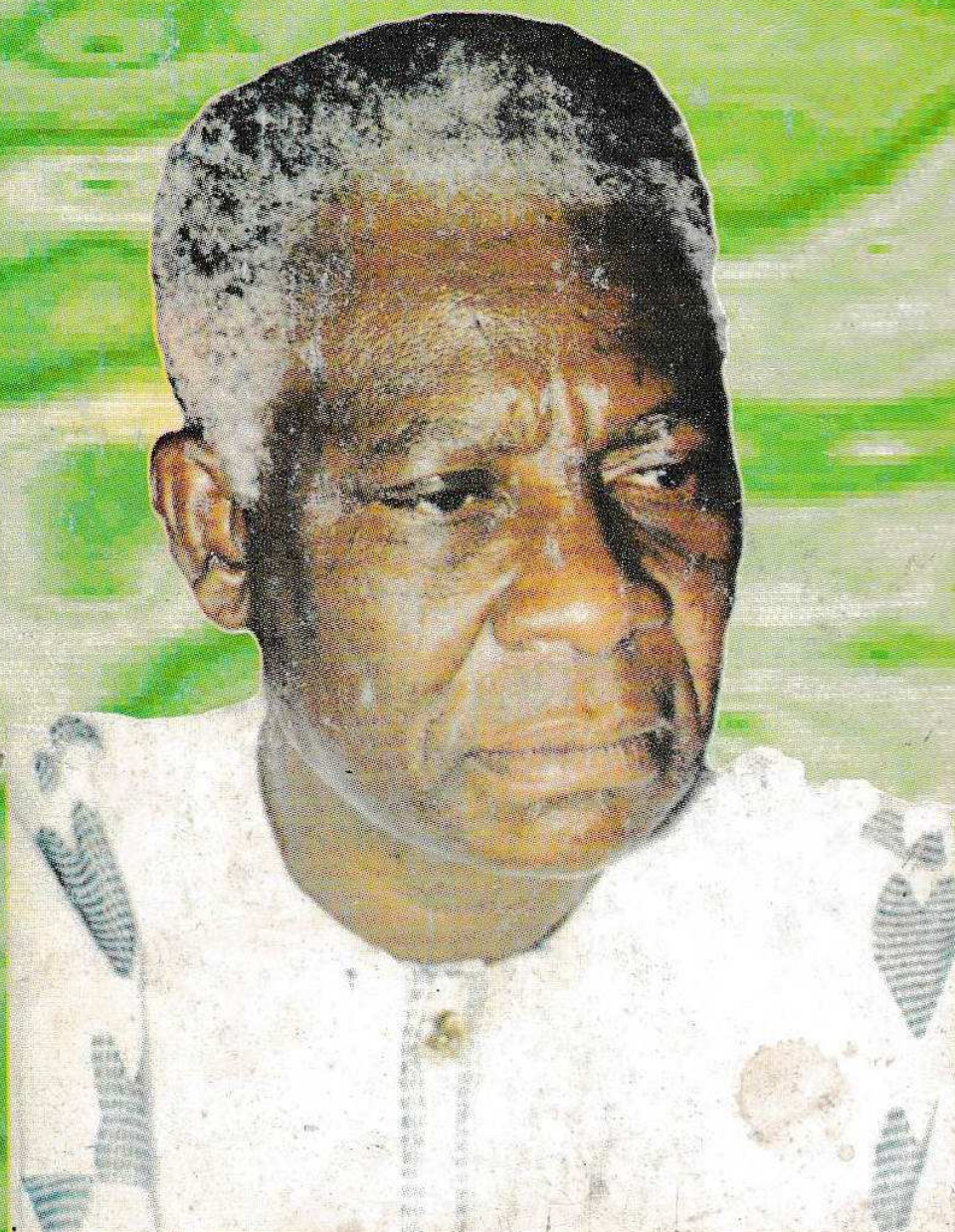


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12. Varieties of the Leggbo Language: A Preliminary Report

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Abstract

The Leggbo language is an *Upper Cross* language spoken by the Aggbo community of Cross River State of Nigeria. It has six varieties – Letatama, Lebamma, Lekuleku, Lemmabana, Leyigha and Lenyima. Linguistic classifications have consistently excluded Leyigha and Lenyima from the Leggbo language, as they are listed as separate languages (Faraclas 1989, Crozier/Blench 1992). The aim of this paper is to present preliminary evidence to show that Leyigha and Lenyima are varieties of Leggbo. Comparative data is presented and reconstructed. There are obvious segmental resemblances, which point towards regular correspondences and close relationships.

1.0 Background

1.1 The Aggbo People

The Aggbo people live mid way along the *Cross River* basin in the Cross River State of Nigeria. They are surrounded on the south by the Bahumono¹ and Yakurr people, on the east by the Mbembe and on the north and west by the Ibos of Ebonyi and Imo States. They form a homogeneous clan which speaks a homogeneous language inhabiting the towns Itigidi, Adadama, Ekureku, Immabana, Assigha and Inyima. Although four of these towns are in Abi Local Government Area (L.G.A.), two of them are in Yakurr L.G.A.

They are non-Igbo-speaking people who for many years were under Afikpo division. Oral tradition has it that these people originally lived near the southern bank of The Benue with Tiv neighbours. They were driven out by the Tiv who dominated the area and they thereafter migrated to their present settlement after many stops. Most of the villages, originally twelve in number were lost along the way.

They have been a minority group for centuries, with the Tivs first and with the Ibos. With the *1976 Local Government Reform*, many new L.G.As were created in Nigeria, with a view to bringing development nearer to the grassroots. They have felt the effect of the many political reforms in the country. With the creation of so many L.G.As, the Aggbo people were not left out in the splitting up of homogeneous communities that such political exercises create. Some Aggbo towns like Inyima and Assigha still form a minority in Yakurr L.G.A. which is a largely homogeneous Lokə-speaking L.G.A, while Itigidi, Adadama, Ekureku and Immabana are in Abi L.G.A.

Abi is an acronym for the communities : Aggbo, Bahomuno and

Immabana. One might wonder why Immabana is represented as a separate entity here. *Iggbo-Immabana* is another name for *Immabana*. Among the *Aggbo* communities, Immabana and Ekureku have the word *Iggbo-* attached to their names. *Iggbo* refers to the land or town, *Aggbo* refers to the people, while *Eggbo* refers to one person. If *Iggbo* should form part of the name for this town, then it is surprising that this *Aggbo* community should be represented separately, and it does not make much sense to separate Immabana from *Aggbo* in the ABI acronym. However, this separation may be for political convenience. Immabana is on the other side of the Cross River, but although it is on the same side with Bahumono, it is separated by many Yakurr towns.

While bearing in mind some of these political complications, we will like to point out here that there is no dispute regarding the choice of the language under consideration here. Our position is that Lenyima and Leyigha should not be listed as separate languages, and we present preliminary data in support of this position. The apparent division created by political sub-divisions in this case is neither linguistically nor sociologically significant.

The *Aggbo* people live in fairly compact villages of between five hundred to a thousand people. Two or more of such villages can adjoin as some kind of township, with smaller settlements scattered loosely around them. The villages are made up of varying sizes of compounds and the communities traditionally lived real communal lives with common bathing streams, toilets, playgrounds, farmlands, yam barns, etc. With modernisation, this tradition has changed as families now build compounds with a lot of grounds for a garden behind and space for other private facilities.

The primary occupation in these communities is farming. Yams, rice, cassava, palm products are the main staple food, and they constitute the cash crops. Garry making from cassava is a local industry.

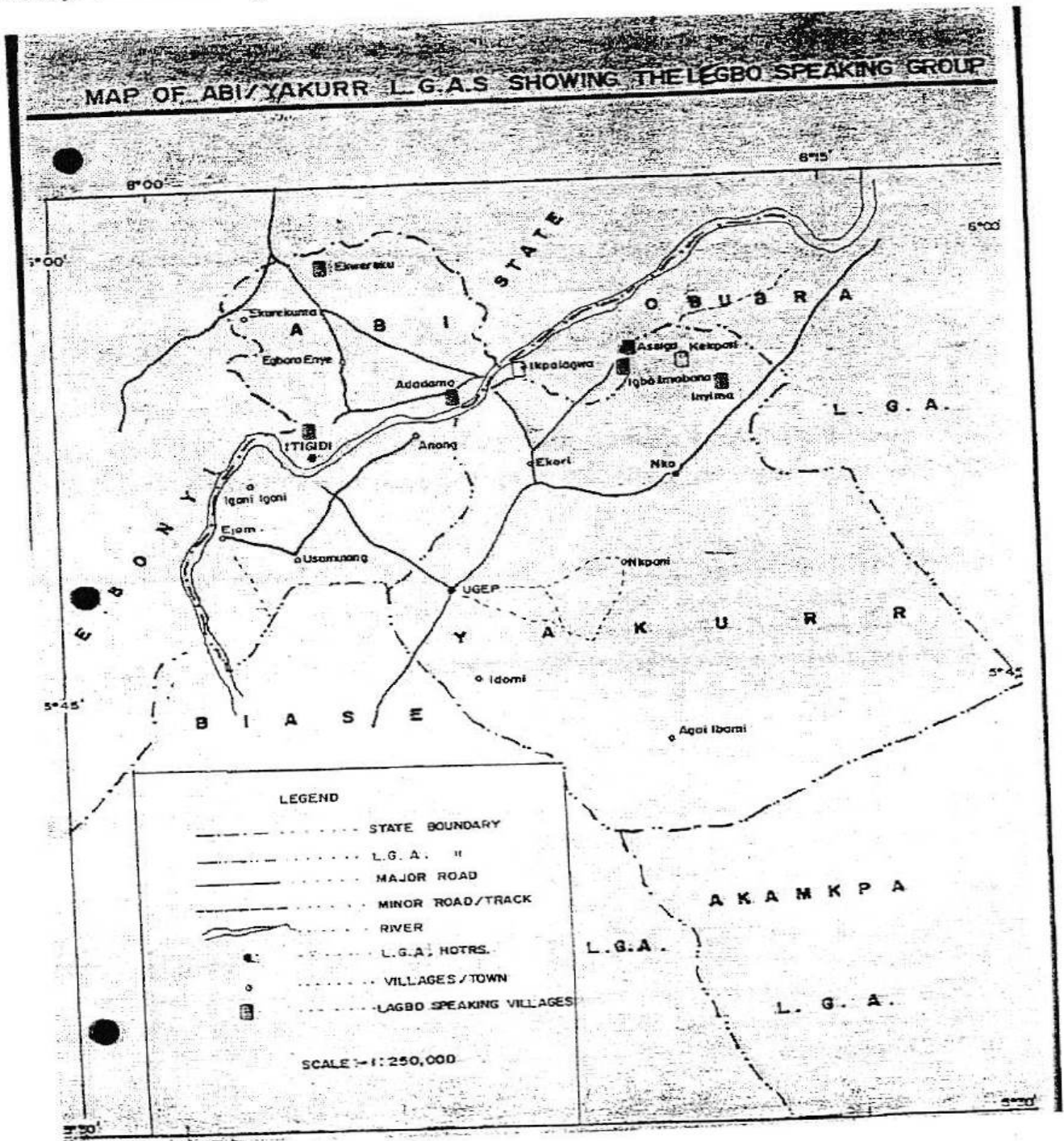
The Efik language was the main trade language, but now, English (the official language in Nigeria) is used as the language for education and business, while the Nigerian Pidgin is very popular among the youths. As a homogeneous community, the *Leggbo* language is commonly used in the community.

In this paper, we attempt to throw more light on the varieties of *Leggbo*. Using segment similarities/ semantic likeness and reconstruction from the core lexicon, we initiate the process of establishing that *Leyigha* and *Lenyima* may be varieties of *Leggbo*. This is part of a larger work geared towards providing some evidence for the internal re-grouping of the Upper Cross languages.

2.1 The *Leggbo* Language

The *Leggbo* language is the language spoken by the *Aggbo* people living in parts of Abi and Yakurr L.G.As of Cross River State of Nigeria. It is in close contact with many other Upper Cross languages like Bahumono (spoken in Ediba – Abi LGA), Lokə (spoken in Ugep – Yakurr LGA) and Mbembe (spoken in Obubra – Obubra LGA). Some varieties are also in close contact with Igbo, like

the Letatama and Lekuleku in Adadama and Ekureku who live near the Ibos of Ebonyi State. See map below.



2 Classification

Previous classifications have been consistent in classifying Leggbo as an Upper Cross language. Faraclas (1989) classifies it as an East West, Central

language of the Upper Cross group. It is listed under Mbembe (U12) as (U13) with Leyigha (U14) and Lenyima (U15) as its varieties (p384). However, in the inventory, Letatama and Lebammal are listed as the major dialects; while Lenyima has neither an estimated number of speakers nor major dialects. In fact Leyigha and Lenyima are suspected to be under (U9) i.e. Lokə.

Crozier/Blench (1992) appears to be the latest classification of the languages in this group. It classifies Leggbo, Leyigha, Lenyima as separate languages under East-West, Central of the Upper Cross Group Central, under Delta-Cross of the Benue-Congo family.

These attempts at the classification of Leggbo indicates a very hazy picture deriving from lack of inputs from the field to help update revisions. Faraclas' listing of Letatama and Lebammal as the major dialects of Leggbo is correct, for these two terms are both the Leggbo names for the dialects spoken in Adadama and Itigidi respectively. Leyigha and Lenyima of course have no major dialects because they are themselves dialects of Leggbo. The suspicion that Leyigha and Lenyima could be grouped under Lokə could have arisen from the political and geographical facts that they are on the same side of the Cross River as the Yakurr people who speak Lokə, and are currently in Yakurr L.G.A. on the eastern bank of the Cross River. They form a minority group here where Lokə dominates as a lingua franca, to a point of almost assimilating Leggbo in this environment.

Crozier/Blench's 1992 classification appears to have been based on Faraclas and previous works which have not been updated for a long time.

2.3 Previous Works on Leggbo language

The Leggbo language has not enjoyed much scholarship. Spreda/Spreda 1966 is a phonological description of the language. It has a proposed orthography and presents a comparative wordlists in four dialects spoken in Ekureku, Immabana, Adadama and Itigidi. This work also excluded data from Lenyima and Leyigha. It is an interim work with a lot of loose ends.

Bendor-Samuel/Spreda 1969 treats the fortis and lenis prosody of the present continuous verb in the language. This is the first report of the fortis/lenis contrast in Leggbo. Both works erroneously refer to Aggbo which is actually the name of the people who speak the Leggbo language.

Ekpa (1983) is a preliminary Bachelor of Arts Project of a description of Leggbo phonology. Besides these few works, there is very little work on the language.

3.1 The Varieties

The Leggbo language has six varieties spoken in six major villages which have assumed the status of towns with the creation of the Abi L.G.A. These varieties are named after the towns where they are spoken. However, some of these towns have different Leggbo names from the names others call them. For

instance, Itigidi is known by the Aggbo people as Ibam, and Adadama Gheta. All the varieties have the prefix *le-*² attached to the names of the towns to indicate the language.

Lebamma refers to the variety spoken in Ibam. While Ibam is the Leggbo name for the town, its official name is Itigidi. Itigidi is the capital of Abi L.G.A. It is derived from Ibam, the Leggbo name for the town, and the people from this town are known as Abamma, i.e. people from Ibam. The word *ibam* is derived from the verb *bamma* which means 'settle'. Oral tradition has it that the people who lived in this town were quite restless, and they had to be admonished by the others in the group at some point to try and settle down where they now inhabit.

Letatama refers to the variety spoken in Gheta i.e. Adadama. Adadama is in Abi L.G.A. It is derived from Eta or Gheta, which is the Leggbo name for the town. (Gh)eta is an adjective which means 'old', 'big', 'original', 'something that exists as first'. This is apparent in words such as (gh)etakkpon (literally 'big mountain') meaning 'world', (gh)etawadum meaning 'old man', (gh)etame meaning 'aging', etc. Although the history of this tribe is not our focus here, this etymological information is worthy of note. The people from this town are referred to as Atatama, and Etatama refers to one person.

Lekuleku refers to the variety spoken in Ekuleku i.e. Ekureku. Ekuleku is also in Abi L.G.A. It is derived from Ekuleku, the Leggbo name for Ekureku. The people from Ekuleku are called Akuleku, and Ekuleku for singular.

Lemmabana refers to the variety spoken in Immabana i.e. Iggb-Immabana. Iggb-Immabana is in Abi L.G.A. It is derived from Immabana, which is incidentally both the Leggbo name and other people's name for them. The people from Immabana are called Ammabana, and Emmabana refers to one person. Even though this is an Aggbo town, it is on the other side of the Cross River, very close to Ekorì, a Yakurr town.

Lenyima refers to the variety spoken in Inyima i.e. Inyima. Inyima is in Yakurr L.G.A. It is derived from Inyima, and the people from here are called Anyima, and Enyima is the singular form.

Leyigha refers to the variety spoken in Assigha i.e. Assigha. Although they are Aggbo-speaking, they are, like the Assigha, in Yakurr L.G.A. The people, like the language are called Assigha, and one person is called Essigha.

All of these varieties are highly mutually intelligible and their relationship is neither in doubt nor in dispute. If we stick strictly to Leggbo linguistic data we will classify them as dialect clusters. But linguistic matters are often tied down to ethnic matters which have a lot of political undertones. With the creation of Yakurr L.G.A, it would appear that the varieties spoken in Inyima and Assigha are Lokə because these towns are in Yakurr L.G.A; but they are not. Their co-existence with Lokə-speaking people naturally makes these Aggbo communities to speak Lokə fluently, as Lokə is the lingua franca in the area. By virtue of contact with Lokə and Mbembe in the south and south-east, the Leggbo varieties on this side of the Cross River, viz, Lemmabana, Lenyima and Leyigha are gradually

getting more divergent from their counterparts on the other side of the river, Lebamma, Letatama and Lekuleku. Even on this other side, the north and north-west, the Ekureku are more in contact with the Igbos with whom they also share a common boundary, and their variety is also getting more divergent because of this contact.

However, these communities do not need an interpreter to communicate with each other. In fact, as I was collecting the data, my discussion with each of the groups was done in Leggbo.

3.2 Varieties of Leggbo and their distribution

The six towns presented here make up the Aggbo towns. Each town is made up pockets of villages closely knit together. In some cases, a few villages are far away from the what may be regarded as some kind of 'township'. All of such villages that make up one town speak a common variety. The details of the villages and their distribution is given in the table below.

| | Varieties | Towns | | Villages | Number of speakers ³ | L.G.A. |
|---|-----------|-------------|-------------------|---|---------------------------------|--------|
| | | Leggbo name | Official name | | | |
| 1 | Lebamma | Ibam | Itigidi | Levachel Lekpochel Ikkamina Aggba Emin Ebbo | 8,628 | Abi |
| 2 | Letatama | Gheta | Adadama | Ekkpon Ivonne Ettani Imina Ibalebbo Eminkwo Isonginyang Ibendda | 7495 | Abi |
| 3 | Lekuleku | Ekuleku | Iggbo- Ekureku | Ittigheve Emin Ekkpon Akpoha Ekureku-Be Akarafor Akara-Ezeke Ezeke-Anong Mbalake- Anong Likpo-Anong Anong-Letafor Egboronyi Ngarabe Agara- | 21,592 | Abi |

| | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------|----------|--------------------|---|--|--------|
| | | | | Ekureku | | |
| 4 | Lemmabana ⁴ | Immabana | Iggbo- Immabana | Ikpalegwa Mboti Itakano Iggbo- Lehagha Ebo | | Abi |
| 5 | Lenyima | Inyima | Inyima | Inyima Ekpenti | | Yakurr |
| 6 | Leyigha | Assigha | Assigha | Letafong Afrekpe | | Yakurr |

4.0 The Data

The data in 4.1 were collected from the speakers of the different varieties of Leggbo. Twenty lexical items were used and each speaker gave his dialect's version of the gloss presented in English. These items were made up of some numbers and core vocabulary. The lexical items were compared and proto-forms reconstructed. These proto-forms were then compared with the versions of the two varieties in question.

Our aim is basically to formally begin to establish that these varieties are dialects, especially Lenyima and Leyigha which have consistently been listed as separate languages from Leggbo (Faraclas 1989, Crozier/Blench 1992). The segmental resemblances in these data point towards correspondences whose regularity is currently being investigated. The results of this investigation will be presented at a later date.

| | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| 4.1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | one | two | three | four | five |
| Lebamma | wòní | àfǒŋ | àtàn | ànán | àtǐén |
| Letatama | wòní | àfǒŋ | àtán | ànán | àzén |
| Lemmabana | wòní | àfǒ | àtá | ànà | àtǐén |
| Leyigha | wòné | àfǒŋ/mǐfǒn | àtàn | ànàn | àsén |
| Lenyima | wòné | àfǒŋ | àtá | ànà | àsé |
| Lekuleku | wòní | àfǒ | àtá | ànà | àté |
| PL | *wòní | *àfǒŋ | *àtán | *ànàn | *àsén |
| | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| | six | seven | eight | nine | ten |
| Lebamma | àtǐén à wòní | àtǐé àfǒŋ | àtǐé àtán | àtǐé ànán | zǒ |
| Letatama | àzén à wòní | àzé àfǒŋ | àzé àtán | àzé ànán | zǒ |
| Lemmabana | àtén à wòní | àté káfǒŋ | àté katán | àté kánán | zǒ |
| Leyigha | àsén à ní | àsén àfǒŋ | àsén àtá | àsén ànà | dzǒ |
| Lenyima | àsén à wòní | àsé àfǒŋ | àsén àtá | àsén ànà | zǒ |

| | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|------------|------------|--------------------|---------|
| Lekuleku | àtén à wòní | àtén àfò | lènàṅàlàṅà | èmòbòsò | zò |
| PL | *àsén à wòní | àsén kàfóṅ | àsén kàtàn | àsén kànáj | *zò |
| | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| | head | mouth | eye | leg | stomach |
| Lebamma | lètól | èmà | dèn | gèvè | lívól |
| Letatama | lètól | èmà | dèn | gèvè | lívól |
| Lemmabana | lètól | èmà | dè | gèvè | kèhó |
| Leyigha | lètól | èmà | džèn | dòfè | ìfó |
| Lenyima | lètó | èmà | dè | géfè | lífól |
| Lekuleku | lètò | èmà | dè | kèw ^h è | kèhó |
| PL | *lètól | *èmà | *dèn | *gèvè | *lífól |
| | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| | hand | finger | teeth | ear | nose |
| Lebamma | gèvo | nònónṅ | lèsàl | gítón | ̀̀zúnṅ |
| Letatama | gèbo | nònónṅ | lèsàl | lító | ̀̀zúnṅ |
| Lemmabana | kèbó | ènòno | lèza | kètó | ̀̀hú |
| Leyigha | gèbó | nòno | àgà | lítóṅ | wú |
| Lenyima | gòbó | ènònónṅ | téhà | lító | ̀̀wú |
| Lekuleku | kèbó | ènòno | lèsà | kètò | ̀̀hu |
| PL | *gèbó | *ènònónṅ | *lèsàl | *lítóṅ | *̀̀wúnṅ |

The data show striking phonological similarities between the varieties. Lexically, some words are exactly the same as in 4.1(8). Majority of other lexical items however are almost the same with differences only in one or two segments as in 4.1(1, 10, 12). Deletion seems to have accounted for most of the variations as segment loss especially in initial and final positions appears widespread as in 4.1(2, 4, 7, 13, 16) etc. The compounding mode shown in the counting pattern is the same in all the varieties (see 4.1(6-9)). Apart from Lekuleku whose items 4.1 (8,9) are totally different, all others are very alike.

There are obvious correspondences like :

| | | |
|-----|----------------|--------------------|
| 4.2 | t : tʃ : s : z | as in 4.1(5, 6 7) |
| | d : dʒ | as in 4.1(13) |
| | g : d : k | as in 4.1(14, 16) |
| | l : k | as in 4.1(15) |
| | s : z : g : h | as in 4.1(18) etc. |

The regularity of these correspondences cannot be tested on the data which is quite inadequate for such a test. However, the results will be presented at a later date as has been mentioned.

5.0 Comparison with the Proto-forms

One way of recovering a ‘common source’ is reconstruction, based on consistent similarities. The comparative technique is best used to reconstruct aspects of a proto-language already understood to be related. On the basis of this assumption and evidence of the data, we reconstructed in 4.1 the proto-forms of the Leggbo data based on regular segmental phonological resemblances. The assumption here is that we have captured the relics, as it were, of the original Leggbo language. In 5.1 and 5.2, we present the comparison of the Proto-Leggbo (PL) forms with both Leyigha and Lenyima versions.

| | | | | | |
|---------|--------------|--------------|------------|------------|--------|
| 5.1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Leyigha | wònè | àfɔ̃ŋ/mɛfɔ̃ŋ | àtàn | ànàŋ | àsèn |
| PL | *wòní | *àfɔ̃ŋ | *àtán | *ànàŋ | *àsén |
| | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Leyigha | àsén à ní | àsén àfɔ̃ŋ | àsén àtà | àsén ànà | dʒó |
| PL | *àsén à wòní | àsén kàfɔ̃ŋ | àsén kàtàn | àsén kànàŋ | *zó |
| | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| Leyigha | lètól | èmà | dʒèn | dòfè | ìfó |
| PL | *lètól | *èmà | *dèn | *gèvè | *lìfól |
| | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| Leyigha | gèbó | nònò | àgà | lítóŋ | wũ |
| PL | *gèbó | *ènònòŋ | *lèsàl | *lítóŋ | *n̄wúŋ |

The Leyigha versions are very similar to the Leggbo proto-forms. Of all twenty lexical items, only one appears really different from the proto-form, (5.1.(18)). Most of them are exactly the same segmentally, as in 5.1(2, 4, 11, 12, 16). Even when there are slight variations, such variations border on the deletion of the final or initial consonants, as in 5.1(8, 15, 17, 20). There are also variations in the tones, as in 5.1(2).

| | | | | | |
|---------|--------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------|
| 5.2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Lenyima | wònè | àfɔ̃ŋ | àtá | ànà | àsé |
| PL | *wòní | *àfɔ̃ŋ | *àtán | *ànàŋ | *àsén |
| | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Lenyima | àsén à wòní | àsé àfɔ̃ŋ | àsén àtà | àsén ànà | zó |
| PL | *àsén à wòní | àsén kàfɔ̃ŋ | àsén kàtàn | àsén kànàŋ | *zó |

| | | | | | |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|-------|--------|
| | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| Lenyima | lètó | èmà | dè | géfè | lífól |
| PL | *lètól | *èmà | *dèn | *gèvè | *lífól |
| | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| Lenyima | gòbó | ènònón | téhà | lító | ñwũ |
| PL | *gèbó | *ènònòn | *lèsàl | *lító | *ñwún |

The Lenyima versions also vary along similar lines as Leyigha. Again 5.2(18) is the only item whose form differs from the PL. Deletion of final consonants also accounts for most of the variations between the Lenyima versions and the PL forms, as in 5.2(3, 4, 5, 11, 13, 19, 20).

On the basis of the evidence from the data we can tentatively make two claims.

1. Leyigha and Lenyima may be so close that they should not be classified as two separate languages.
2. Leyigha and Lenyima may be so close to Leggbo that they should be classified as dialects of Leggbo.

6.0 Conclusion

Examination of the data shows striking resemblances between the six varieties under investigation. They may indeed be closely related versions of one parent language. The correspondences between them show variations only along closely related parameters. For instance, with regard to the consonants, the differences centre around voicing, place of articulation and loss of some of the segments in certain environments, particularly in initial and final positions. Segment by segment similarity and semantic likeness as mentioned earlier are pointers to regular correspondences. Although similarity is not enough proof for cognacy, it strongly suggests that there may be true and regular correspondences.

More importantly, the reconstructed Leggbo proto-forms are very similar to the Leyigha and Lenyima versions. If we follow the assumptions that reconstructed forms are relics of an earlier version, then these two varieties are very closely related to Leggbo.

The variations that exist however, do not hamper intelligibility and speakers of these varieties have no problem with the name of the language they speak, which is Leggbo. Therefore, Leyigha, Lenyima, Lekuleku, Lemmabana, Letatama and Lebamma should be tentatively classified as dialects of Leggbo.

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¹ *Bahumono* here refers to the ethnic group/language which has been erroneously, but consistently referred to as *Kohumono* in the literature. It is the Anglicised form of *Ohomono*. *Akomolo* (i.e. the people), and *Ekomolo* (i.e. the towns, specifically Ediba or a native), are actually only Leggbo names for these people and their language.

² This prefix marks languages. It is also attached to other surrounding towns to indicate the languages these communities speak. For instance, Lememe refers to Lokɛ, spoken in Imɛ (Ugep); Lekoli refers to the variety of Lokɛ spoken in Ekoli (Ekori), Lekomolo refers to the Bahumono language spoken in Ekomolo (Ediba), etc.

³ These figures are taken from the 1996 projection of the 1991 census figures published by the National Population Commission of Cross River State of Nigeria.

⁴ There were no population figures for Imabana, Inyima and Asigha. However, a rough estimate would put the population of all the Agbo communities at about 60,000.

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