DEFAKA AND ỌJỌ: A REASSESSMENT OF THE IJOID RELATIONSHIP

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A. Background

1. Introduction
- a dearth of comparative work
  - willing acceptance of hypotheses based on scant evidence
- the Ijo anomaly
  - a geographical isolate, surrounded by Benue-Congo languages
  - a structural ‘isolate’ in two striking respects:
    - SOV word order
    - sex-gender distinction in its pronominal system
2. The Ijoid Hypothesis

• Jenewari (1983): ‘Defaka: Ijo’s closest linguistic relative’
  – Ijoid replaces Ijo on the Niger-Congo classification
• the comparative evidence:
  a) substantial lexical similarity between Ijo and Defaka, even when obvious borrowings are excluded
  b) grammatical similarities:
    – SOV order
    – modifying elements precede the noun
    – tense markers follow the verb
    – sex-gender pronominal system
c) sound correspondences

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Df} &= \text{Ijọ} \\
-a- &= -e- \text{ (found in two lexical items)} \\
-s- &= -r- \text{ (two items)} \\
l- &= d' \text{ (three items)} \\
dʒ- &= d/d' \text{ (two items)}
\end{align*}
\]

Jenewari acknowledges the evidence of sound correspondences is weak, in light of the lexical similarities but that, “these lexical and grammatical similarities, taken as a whole” lead to the conclusion “that Ijọ is the closest linguistic relative of Defaka, although the relationship is a remote one” (1983: 35).
3. Further work

Since Jenewari (1983) no further comparative has been carried out to test (or bolster) the Ijoid hypothesis, yet it has become part of the accepted ‘wisdom’. Just two subsequent studies of Defaka have appeared in print, Shryock, Ladefoged & Williamson (1996/97) and Williamson (1998); in the latter, the proposal is accepted uncritically: “Jenewari’s demonstration of the Defaka/Ijo relationship is convincing” (1998: 153). The thrust of Williamson’s article is to explore some of the vocabulary found in Defaka which is not found in Ijọ and the implications it holds for our understanding of the history of the Niger Delta.
4. Defaka

- spoken in one ward of Nkọrọọ town (eastern Niger Delta region of Nigeria) and in an outlying hamlet
  - perhaps as many as 50 fluent and 100 other less fluent speakers
  - intergenerational transmission in just one or two families
- possibly the last remnant of a language group that once dominated the region from the eastern Niger Delta to the estuary of the Cross River
  - Nkọrọọ (Eastern Ijo) is the primary language of all Defaka
    - no Nkọrọọ learn to speak Defaka
    - Nkọrọọ is itself threatened
5. Documenting Defaka [AFN] and Nkọrọọ [NKX]

As part of a project to document both Defaka and Nkọrọọ we have collected considerably more data, both lexical and grammatical, than was available previously for Defaka. It is therefore possible to reconsider the classification of Defaka as a part of Ijoid, not only because the new evidence available to us requires that we test again this hypothesis, but also because we consider that a well-grounded account of the genetic relationships of a language constitute an important part of the documentation of that language.
6. Weaknesses in Jenwari’s evidence

• the lexical evidence includes a considerable number of items that are apparently unique to Defaka
• the grammatical evidence is subject to the interpretation of having been borrowed
  – e.g. its pronominal system is almost identical to that of Nkọrọ, suggestive of borrowing
  – the SOV characteristics of Defaka and Ijọ show some interesting differences
  – Defaka not as strictly SOV in its details as suggested, e.g. certain modifiers follow nouns: ʤìgà sì ‘house twenty’; ʤìgà kòkò ‘house all’
• the lack of evidence of sound correspondences (despite claims of lexical similarity), generally accepted as the *sine qua non* to establish genetic relationship.
B. New evidence bearing on the Defaka – Ijo relationship

None of the perceived weaknesses in Jenewari’s evidence show Defaka is not Ijo’s closest relative; yet our early impressions resulted in increased skepticism.

Systematic examination of the data now underway, though far from complete.

7. Lexical evidence
   • lexicostatistics: a standard 100-word Swadesh list was used, from which 89 words were available for comparison between Defaka and Proto-Ijo, using reconstructions available in Williamson (2004).
     – a cognacy rate of 41.5% was found. Cognacy rates ranging from the mid 60s to mid 90s are reported for Ijo as a whole (Lee & Williamson 1990) (no further comment at this point)
• lexical innovations
  – what constitutes ‘lexical innovations’?
  – difficulty renders them problematic as evidence for genetic affiliation
  – information about sound correspondences (cognacy) and morphological processes helps
    – identifying such evidence an ongoing process

8. Grammatical evidence
• passive marker: Defaka -mìnì; Ìzòn -më́ (analyzed as ‘process’ by Williamson, but glosses also suggest passive)
• morphemes marking stative (-ma); causative (Defaka -ma; Ìjọ -mọ)
  possibly related, may be borrowed from EI to Defaka
• other possible morphological correspondences exist, though have yet to be confirmed through identification of relevant sound correspondences
9. Sound correspondences between Proto-Ijọ and Defaka

- no further support for the sound correspondences proposed by Jenewari
  - Defaka -a- = Ijọ -e- a possible exception
- other correspondences have been found; data examined includes our own field notes (CAWL 1,700 wordlist), Jenewari (1983) and various unpublished materials of Kay Williamson, most importantly her Proto-Ijọ (P-I) reconstructions.
  - Williamson’s reconstructions are accepted for the present purposes, though with some reservations.
- transcriptions here standardized to follow IPA conventions; nasality marked below the vowel
9.1. Defaka /w/, /Ø/ = P-I */f/

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Defaka</th>
<th>Proto-Ịjọ</th>
<th>Proto-Ijoid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>co-wife</td>
<td>wàà (~ àlà)</td>
<td>*fàrà (3)</td>
<td>**wàrà</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drag</td>
<td>wùwù</td>
<td>*fọọgọ fọọgọ fọọc (3)</td>
<td>**wùnọ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leak (vi)</td>
<td>wìrè</td>
<td>*ifiri (1)</td>
<td>**ìwìrì</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eat</td>
<td>éé</td>
<td>*fìì (2)</td>
<td>**fìì</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roast</td>
<td>òò</td>
<td>*fọì/foì (1)</td>
<td>**fọì</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salt</td>
<td>óó</td>
<td>*fùù (2)</td>
<td>**fùù</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soup</td>
<td>árúá</td>
<td>*fọọ̀u (2)</td>
<td>**fọọ̀ù</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stink</td>
<td>èrù̀</td>
<td>*fùrù (3)</td>
<td>**fùrù̀</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excrement</td>
<td>ìjà</td>
<td>*afìjà (1)</td>
<td>**àfìjà</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fly (vi)</td>
<td>jèè (-ma)</td>
<td>*ifọ́i (5)</td>
<td>**ifọ́i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hot, become</td>
<td>èrò</td>
<td>*efìrì (3)</td>
<td>**èfìrì</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Proto-Ijoid (P-Ijd) reconstructions are tentative (**) 
• in the absence of a conditioning environment that would lead to a split, a 
  contrast in P-Ijd that has merged in P-I is indicated 
• instances of P-I *w are several 
  – typically involve nasality, so possibly P-Ijd **ŋʷ 
  – of the few that don’t, f ~ w is found in Ijo lects in at least one 
    word, fọjí ~ wójí ‘swell’. 
  – typically don’t have cognates in Defaka, or the Defaka from is an obvious 
    borrowing. 
• similarly, instances Defaka /f/ exist; these again are either obvious loans or 
  don’t have cognates in Ijo
9.2. Voiced labial stops

- numerous cognates between Defaka and P-I contain voiced labial stops
  - four sets of correspondences:
    - P-I *b = Defaka b
    - P-I *ɓ = Defaka b, mb, ɓ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Proto-Ijo</th>
<th>Proto-Ijoid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>back</td>
<td>òbò</td>
<td>*ɔbʊ (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pig, bush-pig</td>
<td>èbè</td>
<td>*ụbị (?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dog</td>
<td>èbèrè</td>
<td>*obiri (1)</td>
<td>**òbìrì</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goat</td>
<td>óbórí</td>
<td>*obori (2)</td>
<td>**óbórí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elephant</td>
<td>bilà</td>
<td>*bìla (1)</td>
<td>**bìlà</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vagina</td>
<td>tàbée</td>
<td>*tèbì (1)</td>
<td>**tèbé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask</td>
<td>biè, biè</td>
<td>*bìi (1)</td>
<td>**bìi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Proto-I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree, believe</td>
<td>mbìrà</td>
<td>*ɓeɓerí (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drink</td>
<td>mbú</td>
<td>*ɓου (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>order (vt)</td>
<td>mbé (~àmà)</td>
<td>*ɓe (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doctor (trad.)</td>
<td>bó‘tó-ɓáí</td>
<td>*ɓíɾi-ɓo (2)</td>
<td>**ɓútú-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ear</td>
<td>bàsì</td>
<td>*ɓeri (1)</td>
<td>**ɓèsì</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fill</td>
<td>bànà</td>
<td>*ɓeji (-ma) (2)</td>
<td>**ɓ̀</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>honey</td>
<td>bèmí</td>
<td>*ɓéµù (1)</td>
<td>**ɓèmù</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mouth</td>
<td>béé</td>
<td>*ɓíɾí (2)</td>
<td>**ɓíɾí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>head</td>
<td>tòbò</td>
<td>*tiɓì (2)</td>
<td>**tíɓí</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- P-Ijd reconstruction problematic; P-I reconstruction of *ɓ is unsafe
- a possible length contrast?
- possible indication of different periods of contact between Defaka and Ìjọ
9.3. Defaka /-t/- = P-I * -r-

- a few items suggest this correspondence; but cf Jenewari’s -s- = -r-

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<th>Proto-Ijoid</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>doctor (trad.)</td>
<td>ɓó́tó-ɓáí</td>
<td>*ɓiiri-ɓɔ 2</td>
<td>**ɓutu-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three</td>
<td>táátó</td>
<td>*taaru 2</td>
<td>**táátu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forget</td>
<td>ɓàtà(-mà)</td>
<td>*ɓara 2</td>
<td>**ɓatà</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>name</td>
<td>ítá</td>
<td>*iɾe 2</td>
<td>**iité</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9.4. Vowel correspondences

- complex set of front – back and back – front correspondences
- Defaka has six or seven vowels, no [ATR] harmony (P-I, 5 + 5)
- Defaka vowels have lowered relative to P-I, P-Ijd

9.5. Tone correspondences

- tone between Defaka and P-I is fairly stable
10. Conclusions

• the hypothesis that Defaka is Ìjọ’s closest linguistic relative receives additional support from our research; on-going investigation should continue to buttress this, and at the same time clarify some outstanding questions, e.g. regarding the extent of borrowing between Ìjọ, Defaka and neighbouring languages.

• the implications for our understanding of the history of the Niger Delta and the adjoining areas are unclear; e.g. some of Williamson’s (1998) suggestions concerning loans from Defaka (or Defakoid) are compelling, but appear incompatible with a chronology and set of migrations that link Defaka to Proto-Ìjọ.
References


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