

KILJI, AN UNRECORDED SPIRITUAL LANGUAGE OF EASTERN GHANA

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In this paper we discuss a language called **Kilji** by its speakers, which has not previously (to the best of our knowledge) been noted in the literature, at least in Ghana. It is the ritual language of a women's spiritual group known popularly as **Okule** or more correctly as **Oko Alija**. The spiritual system is practiced among women in several communities in Guang and Ghana-Togo Mountain areas of the Ghana-Togo border area, including in several Nawuri-speaking villages as well as farther east in Adele and Achode. It is presumably practiced in Togo as well but we have no information on that. As we will show, the language and the spiritual practices it is connected with are clearly of Yorùbá origin, and therefore most likely arrived in the area from the Ifè (Togo) Yorùbá speaking communities. Kilji is argued to be the westernmost recorded instantiation in Africa of a Yorùbá variety used in performing rituals related to the deity **Chankpana**.

Dans cet article, nous examinons une langue dénommée **Kilji** par ses locuteurs qui, (à notre connaissance) n'a jamais été consignée dans la littérature, du moins au Ghana. C'est la langue de rituel d'un groupe spirituel de femmes connues sous le nom de **Okule** ou plus correctement d' **Oko Alija**. Le système spirituel est pratiqué par des femmes dans plusieurs communautés dans les zones du Guang et de la Chaîne Montagneuse de Ghana-Tongo, y compris dans plusieurs villages de locuteurs Nawuri aussi bien plus à l'est en Adele et Achode. On le pratique également au Togo mais nous n'avons pas d'information précise à ce sujet. Comme nous allons le montrer, la langue ainsi que les pratiques spirituelles auxquelles elle est connectée sont clairement d'origine Yoruba et, c'est pourquoi elles sont arrivées dans la zone à partir des communautés locutrices du Yoruba d'Ife (Togo). Kilji est ici proposé comme la manifestation de la variété du Yoruba qui soit parlée dans la partie la plus occidentale de l'Afrique et utilisée dans les rites du spectacle liés à la divinité **Chankpana**.

0. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we discuss a language called Kilji [**kilidʒi**] by its speakers, which has not previously (to the best of our knowledge) been noted in the literature, at least in Ghana. It is the ritual language of a women's spiritual group known popularly as Okule or more correctly as Oko (or [**oɔɔo**]) Alija [**oko alidʒa**]. Okule is thought to be derived from the Yorùbá greeting **O kùulé** 'greetings to those in the house'. The name 'Kiliji' appears to be a local derivation from the name of the spiritual group, using the prefix **ki-**, which in Nawuri occurs on names of languages, as well as other kinds of nouns.

The spiritual system is practiced among women in several communities in Guang and Ghana-Togo Mountain areas of the Ghana-Togo border area, including in several Nawuri-speaking villages as well as farther east in Adele and Achode (Heine

1968, Sherwood 1982, Snider 1989, Casali 1995).¹ The material presented was collected in Balai, at the north-western end of the Nawuri-speaking area and two miles north-west of the district capital, Kpandai. In this village the religious practice and therefore the language used for it are highly endangered. Virtually all Balai women over the age of about 40 are or have been members, but no new recruits have been initiated for more than 20 years, due mainly to the spread of education for girls and of international religions, particularly Christianity. It is reported however that initiations are still being held in other communities.

The deity Chankpana [tʃàkpàná] is regarded by the initiates as the principal manifestation of the deity Oko Alija. In August 2012 he made himself manifest² in the Nawuri area for the first time in more than 20 years. One of the authors assisted by Dr. S. Ntewusu and Richard Awobomu video and audio recorded parts of the two-day celebrations, which involved pacifying the deity, driving him out of the village and its surroundings, and symbolically carrying all evil out of the village. He also tentatively identified the language as resembling the Ifè (Togo) Yorùbá variety. In 2013 the second author visited Balai on two occasions, making transcriptions and translations of spirit songs previously recorded and of prayers, extending the wordlist begun by first author, and interviewing the leading devotees. A pacification ceremony for Chankpana was also witnessed and videoed. The third author joined the project in 2014 as a linguist knowledgeable (unlike the other two) about Yorùbá. In this paper we briefly outline the nature of the spiritual group and the context in which the language is used, and then investigate salient characteristics of the language as a sacred language and as a locally endangered language, and consider its relationship to Yorùbá as spoken in the Republics of Togo (Ifè Yorùbá) and Nigeria (Standard Yorùbá).

1. THE SPIRITUAL GROUP

As mentioned, Chankpana is the main object of veneration in the spiritual group, at least the Balai version of it, and can be linked to the Yorùbá smallpox deity **Ṣòpònná**.³ The Balai devotees we spoke to did not mention smallpox, but Chankpana's prime characteristic is that he brings disease and also takes it away. However, Chankpana is said to be only one manifestation of the 'real' deity, Oko Alija. Another manifestation is Oleche [ɔlɛtʃɛ], who is explicitly associated with leprosy. Oleche is said to have only two devotees in the area, both elderly and infirm. It is worth noting here that the Yorùbá deity of leprosy is **Òrìṣà Oko** 'divinity (of the) farm', which appears to be cognate with Oko Alija (through transposition of possessed-possessor word order) in the Balai version.

An important appellation of Chankpana is **Ogũ**, that is, **Ògún**, the name of the Yorùbá divinity of iron and war. A sacred song is devoted to **Ògún** as bringer of wealth. The association is not surprising, given the close connection between **Ògún** and **Òrìṣà Oko** in the Yorùbá spiritual system (Mason 1997:131). It is also probably not coincidental that Balai is a traditional centre of iron-working. The close

¹ Nawuri is a North Guang language; see Casali (1995) and Sherwood (1982). Gichode, the language of Achode, is also North Guang (Snider 1989). Sedire, the language of the Adele, is a GTM-NA language (Heine 1968).

² How exactly he was manifested is not clear, but it presumably included one or more devotees becoming possessed. There were also omens, such as an unusual snake.

³ As will be seen, the phonetic differences do not provide an argument against the identification.

relationship between Òrìṣà Oko (Balai's Oko Alijà), Ṣòpònná (Chankpana) and Ògún in the context of Yorùbá spirituality helps us to understand why they appear as a coherent group in Okule as opposed to any other of the 401 Òrìṣà (Adewale-Somadhi 1993:2). Among the Yorùbá, Ṣòpònná, Ògún and Òrìṣà Oko are all mutually exclusive entities. Òrìṣà Oko, however is closely associated with both Ògún and Ṣòpònná. In the Yorùbá spiritual system, Òrìṣà Oko is associated with leprosy while Ṣòpònná is associated with smallpox. Both were expelled – Òrìṣà Oko to the farm and Ṣòpònná to open spaces/new country – yet both “overcame their illnesses and rose to be respected, feared, revered and deified by their people as universal saviors” (Mason 1997:131). They both, particularly Òrìṣà Oko, also have a close relationship with Ògún where Òrìṣà Oko was once “a hunter and close friend of Ògún, but abandoned the hunt to become a farmer” (Mason 1997:132). It is said in Òfún Ògúndá, the Ifá verse that:

Òrìṣà Oko was a farmer who used to till the soil with a hard-wood staff with a sharp point. Ògún on seeing him work so hard decided to help make his work go easier and forged him a staff of iron. In time Ògún improved on the staff and created the iron plow. Òrìṣà Oko found that this new tool helped to greatly increase his harvest and from then on he and Ògún have been great companions (Mason 1997:133).

Thus, in light of the fact that Oko Alijà (Yorùbá Òrìṣà Oko) is the central deity of the Okule spiritual group, it then comes as no surprise that his most closely associated òrìṣà companions would come “bundled” as we find them currently in the Balai system.

The devotees in Okule are entirely women. The only man officially associated with the organization is the drummer, the **alágbē**. The spiritual performances are accompanied by a pair of drums (**àlà** in Kiliji) and a gong. The gong player can be a man or a woman – the videos of 2012 show a woman playing the gong but in 2013 the player was generally a man. The leader, the custodian of the spiritual group's intellectual property and sacred objects, is the Olami [**ólámi**]. The Olami, who always officiates, poured libation for Chankpana using **pito** (fermented-sorghum beer) while speaking in Kiliji. When libation is being poured it is usual in the Nawuri area for both men and women to remove headgear and footwear. However, during prayers made by the Olami, including prayers to the local gods and ancestors made in Nawuri and using water instead of **pito**, in addition to removing headscarves and footwear the women knelt on the ground with their hands on the ground in front of them and head lowered, although usually not touching the ground. This posture was not observed among men in Balai or in other contexts, and it is not usual in Ghana generally. It is, however, seen commonly in Yorùbá spirituality where it is known as **ìforíbalẹ̀** ‘lit. taking one's head making contact with ground’. The context wherein the ritual gesture is made among the Yorùbá is in the presence of a deity, such as in greeting Ifá. When libation is made to Chankpana a small calabash of herbs in water is prepared, and after the prayer the participants smear a little of it on their heads and bodies as a protective medicine.

In the hierarchical structure the Onigbo [**ónígbó**] occupies the second position and the Banimafor [**bànímánfòr**] occupies the third.⁴ Each has specific ritual and political power within the group. Besides this upper hierarchy, there is the **olami**

⁴ One of the authors was told that these ranks were very specific within this initiation group, not the spiritual group as a whole.

àkpàḡà ‘Olami’s whip’, who at least in Balai is the Olami’s chief assistant. The term appears to be cognate with Yorùbá **pàṣán** [kpàṣá] ‘whip’. At one time the spiritual group celebrated its own yam festival, but it no longer does so. A description of an initiation (recorded in February 2013) suggests that it involved possession of the girls by the spirit of Chankpana, and a period spent in the bush. Generally the major function of the spiritual group seems to have been to protect the town from illness and associated evil, as demonstrated in the celebration recorded in 2012. This observation raises more questions than it answers, however, and the researchers are left to speculate about the possibility of a disease outbreak engendering the necessity for the introduction of the Yorùbá divinities into the area as a motivating factor.

Until the middle of the twentieth century,⁵ Balai girls were not initiated in Balai itself. According to Besaneh Kasta, the current Olami’s lieutenant [**olami àkpàḡà**], when she was initiated the Balai group did not go to Mbowura, as had been the custom, but her own father insisted that it be done in Balai, at his expense. Mbowura is a Nawuri-speaking village a few miles the other side of Kpandai but its inhabitants are of Chala origin.⁶ Nkwanta, another Chala settlement, is mentioned, so that the Chala may have been the immediate source of the spiritual group for Balai, although they need not have been the first to introduce it to the area. Community members report that in pre-Christian times (and in fact quite likely up to the present) they went to other places, including Achode, for ritual purposes. It was reported to us recently that among the Adele of Ghana and Togo the spiritual group is called **idzi olidza**. The members call their language **Gikpona**, the outsiders call it **Oku oku**. A female member is called **ekpona** (plural **bekpona**). We are told that Gikpona is the same as the language spoken by the Ana living in the region of Atakpame in Togo, and that Adele people who speak Gikpona always communicate freely with Ana and Ifè people of Atakpame.

It would be very difficult to study this spiritual group in any depth unless one were willing to be initiated into it in one of the communities where it is still thriving, because devotees, not only of Chankpana but in the culture area generally, are very reluctant to discuss such matters out of a ritual context, which is not entirely unexpected in the context of a largely liturgical language associated with specific spiritual practices. We were able to transcribe and translate the songs collected in 2012, and prayers could be collected because prayer performance is itself a ritual context, but even so, after a point this work could not be continued. After the field session of February 2013 Besaneh Kasta fell ill, and it was determined that Chankpana was angry with them for talking so much. He is, after all, the bringer of illness. So during the field session of August 2013 it was declared that we could continue to ask questions for two days, and then there would be a pacification ceremony, after which all discussion had to stop. Since the study of Kiliji cannot be divorced from spiritual performance, this meant that elicitation of words and interpretation of transcriptions was no longer possible.

⁵ Information on the Adele observance kindly provided by John Adinyah (p.c.).

⁶ The Chala are a highly dispersed group whose original language, now spoken by very few, is a Grusi language closely related to Deg (Kleinwillinghöfer 2007). The Balai assumption of the initiation was resisted by the Chala of Mbowura, and Dr. Ntewusu has found archival evidence that it became a court case in 1951.

1.1 THE LANGUAGE CONTEXT

Nawuri (ISO 639-3), the community language of Balai, is a relatively small language with upwards of 14,000 speakers (Lewis et. al 2015). Balai is at the north-western tip of the language area, in direct contact with Chumburung and Nanumba areas – the village is on the road from Kpandai to Salaga. It currently shows no particular signs of endangerment, although some speakers have suggested that before the recent conflicts there were more Gonja people there, including a Gonja chief, and if the wars had not fostered a kind of Nawuri nationalism there might have been a shift.

The area is extremely multilingual. The people of Balai and Kpandai have close relations with the Nanumba and Dagomba to the north, the Chumburung to the west, and the Gonja further to the west (despite the enmities of recent history). There is a considerable Bassari community in Kpandai, and there are numerous Konkomba villages and settlement areas among the Nawuri.

Not surprisingly, individuals are also polyglots. No sociolinguistic survey was carried out, but among eight persons, all over 30, interviewed in some depth in August 2013, it was found that 12 languages apart from Nawuri were spoken, to varying degrees. The eight included 3 women and 5 men (not all interviews were related to Oko Alija or Kiliji). Gonja and Konkomba were spoken by virtually all of them, and everyone at least understood Chumburung, which is closely related to Nawuri. Twi was spoken at least a little by all but one woman, as was Dagbani (which in Nawuri is called Kiwon). Perhaps surprisingly, Hausa was not widespread – just two of the eight spoke it a little. Other languages spoken by one or two were Kotokoli, Bassari, Krakyi, Gikyode, Moore, and English. Gikyode was spoken a little by two men who said they used to go to the Achode area for ritual purposes, while Moore was spoken by a man who had learned it from fellow farm workers in the Ashanti Region.

1.2 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF KILJI

As indicated earlier, Kiliji is spoken only by women, and only in a ritual context (Apronti 1968).⁷ It is said that in the past, whenever Chankpana was imminent the women devotees would speak only Kiliji for all purposes, so that men and children got to understand it to a degree, but they never spoke it – if a woman addressed one in Kiliji one responded in Nawuri. However when Chankpana appeared in 2012 the devotees did not do this. In the 20 or more years since the last manifestation they had apparently lost fluency, and only two very elderly men, one of them formerly the divine drummer, admitted to understanding any. Responding to elicitation of a wordlist⁸ and attempts at extemporaneous conversation were difficult for the speakers. Many words were half-forgotten or not known at all. At present, it is fair to say that the language is used only as the language of libation and sacred songs.

Devotees believe that possession by the deity imparts knowledge of the language. In the past, if it is true that their mothers would use the language to the

⁷ Limitation of the use of a religious language to female initiates only is not unique. In interviews conducted in Ada, on the coast of Ghana on the west bank of the mouth of Volta, with priestesses of Anana in November 1968, E. O. Apronti was informed that this religious practice had a language that only its priestesses knew or used.

⁸ (Author 1) began the wordlist using Swadesh's 200 list. (Author 2) continued with the Collected African Wordlists list devised by J. M. Stewart, but could not complete it.

family at home, girls probably knew some Kiliji before their initiation, which could be at any age. We were told that members were advised to have their daughters initiated early on. Also, in time past, if one of the recruits joined the group while pregnant, the child automatically became a member at birth, but such circumstances were rare.

Although our material contains no solid information on how the language has been learned, some details of their initiatory tradition were disclosed.⁹ The period when new members are admitted is normally in the month of August. Training can take two to three months; in this period, general information about the taboos of the group are described and the first exposure to Kiliji occurs. Recruits can then formulate expressions in Kiliji and practice the songs. Towards the end of the training period, initiation requires a short time in the bush, about a week, when recruits live in and on nature. They learn about the entities that inhabit the wild, their applications and the beliefs about them. Although women may have been exposed to Kiliji early in their life, it is likely that knowledge of the language is consolidated during this bush stay, considered as the final graduation. The end of this initiation is marked by a ritual bath in a river nearby, followed by the adornment of the recruits. They are then taken by the top hierarchy (i.e. Olami, Onigbo, and Banimafor) to the community, welcomed by drumming and songs. The community comes together to witness the graduation of the recruits and to listen to the group's taboos: old taboos are repeated, and if new ones were decided during the week in the bush, they are announced to the community. A fowl is sacrificed to mark the end of initiation.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LANGUAGE

This section investigates the characteristics of the language based on the notes we were able to gather and considers its relationship to Yorùbá, focusing primarily on Standard Yorùbá of Nigeria but with references to Ifẹ̀ Yorùbá of Togo whenever source information is available. We must warn that these field notes were produced for the most part opportunistically.

Although details on Kiliji have not been previously recorded and reported in the literature, the use of an “archaic Yorùbá, still spoken by the Ana of the middle Togo” has been identified in the New World by Pierre Fatumbi Verger (Verger 1982:211), among others. Although no linguistic information is available to us, in Brazil, for instance, such an ‘archaic Yorùbá’ is used in ritual ceremonies by devotees of the Sakpata spiritual groups. Parés (2013:232) writes that “[e]ven today the Sakpata initiates are called ‘anagonu’ and their ritual language is an archaic form of Yorùbá”. The Anagõ are one Yorùbá group of Togo. Instances of a Yorùbá-resembling ceremonial language have been reported mainly in Brazil and Cuba, but Wetering (1998) mentioned Sakpata and Yorùbá-derived deities, rituals and a spiritual language in Trinidad.

⁹ The information offered here can be found in an unpublished manuscript authored by Dr. Ntewusu (Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana) and the first author.

2.1 ADAPTATIONS, RETENTIONS AND POINTS OF CONVERGENCE BETWEEN KILIJİ AND YORÙBÁ VARIETIES

2.1.1 Phonological Correspondences

Firstly, the exercise of comparing Kiliji and Standard Yorùbá (hereafter SY) is intended to establish the recurrent sound correspondences between putative cognates. Secondly we specifically introduce Ifẹ̀ Togo Yorùbá (hereafter IY) words -- the data principally drawn from Armstrong (1965) -- to strengthen the correspondence with the Yorùbá variety to which Kiliji is believed to have the closest affinities. Nonetheless it is possible to have Kiliji words that show more resemblance to SY than IY. Data for IY are included where available and any gaps in the IY column are indicative of a paucity of sources.

Example (1) shows a set of words with a direct sound correspondence featuring [dʒ] in all three languages.

(1) **dʒ : dʒ : dʒ** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
ádʒà	adʒá	adʒá	dog
dʒé	dʒe	dʒe	eat
édʒèì	edʒe	èdʒe	seven
édʒòò	èdʒo	èdʒo	eight
adʒonukulei	adʒenaklū	àdʒànakú	elephant (praise name in SY, common name erin)

Example (2) shows a direct /g/ and /k/ sound correspondences between the three languages. IY data available shows /k/ for one item and /g/ for another item apparently involving a devoicing specific to IY not undergone in the other two language varieties.

(2) **g : g/k : g** and **k : k : k** sound correspondences

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
agugu	ekūku	egūgū	bone
gúgù	gù	gù	long (SY gígù 'long' (adj.))
ko	kò	kò	not

Example (3) shows a straightforward correspondence between Kiliji /kp/ and /kp/ in IY and SY.

(3) **kp : kp : kp/p** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
àkpàdʒà	kpaʃa	kpàʃá	whip
kpàdé	kpàḍé	kpàdé	meet (v.)
kpé	kpí	kpí	divide
kpókpa	kpa	kpa	kill (SY kpíkpa ‘act/process of killing’)
kpókpāa	kpikpa	kpukpa	red
kpokpɔ	kpikpɔ	púpɔ	plenty

Example (4) also shows a straightforward recurrent correspondence with [l] surfacing in each of the three languages for cognates.

(4) **l : l : l** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
álé	alé	alé	evening
aludʒɔ	àledʒɔ	àledʒɔ	stranger
elú	ilú	ilú	town
lɔ	lɔ	lɔ	go
lólò	lò¹⁰	lílò	grind, grinding (Kiliji, SY)

Example (5) shows a clear correspondence set with [gb].

(5) **gb : gb : gb** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
gbégbènǎǎ	gbígboná	gbígbóná	hot
gbóó	gbó	gbó	hear
gbúgbè	gbígbě	gbígbe	dry

¹⁰ The tone of this item is unclear given that the only examples available from Boëthius (1987:58) show the verb with its complement. In Yorùbá, when a low-tone verb is followed by its complement, it surfaces as mid-tone. Thus, it is unclear as to whether the verb in Ifẹ patterns the same way and is, therefore, underlyingly low tone or not.

álaagbè **alágbe** drummer (K), beggar (SY)

An important sound correspondence is Yorùbá [ʃ] and Kiliji [dʒ]. In recognizing this phonological correspondence, it is also clear that a change in word order took place from possessed-possessor to possessor-possessed in the case of **Òriṣà Oko** ‘divinity (of the) farm’ to **Oko Alijà** ‘primary divinity of Okule spiritual practice’. Word order will be discussed below in section 3.3. No direct correspondence in this paradigm was found from IY, but interestingly Boëthius (1987:63) has **ḍsèḍè** ‘idol’ which may possibly have some relation to **òriṣà**. Further research would possibly be necessary in looking for SY/IY ʃ : s correspondences.

(6) **dʒ : ʃ : ʃ** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
àkpàdʒà	kpàʃa	kpàʃá	whip
alidʒà	òriʃà	òriʃà	divinity

The next correspondence set is **tʃ : ʃ**. The sound [ʃ] in Yorùbá always corresponds to [tʃ] or [dʒ] in Kiliji. SY has no [tʃ] and Kiliji has no [ʃ]. We argue that IY probably developed [tʃ] due to areal influence of the Gbe/Guan (including Nawuri) linguistic areal continuum. Indeed, the evidence at hand supports such a hypothesis of Yorùbá /ʃ/ becoming /tʃ/ throughout Gbe lands. We follow Capo (1982:209) who reconstructs the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate */tʃ/ with no */ʃ/ for Proto-Gbe. Capo (1991) shows /ʃ/ synchronically only for Hwe, Avɔ̀no and Awlan (and Alada in a different phonological context) lects of Gbe with all other dialects having /s/, /t/ or /tʃ/. His reasoning for not reconstructing /ʃ/ is “If /ʃ/ [...] were postulated, the derivation of the affricates would seem unnatural” (Capo 1991:103). In other words, /tʃ/ is the norm in the Gbe speaking area where IY is situated. As such, it appears that the Yorùbá /ʃ/ has come into a strongly /tʃ/ area where /ʃ/, when it rarely does occur, only occurs in very narrow phonological context leading to the ultimate loss of /ʃ/ that we observe in IY.¹¹ Thus, while IY almost certainly donated a great deal of its lexical inventory to Kiliji, it may be naïve to posit that IY donated the sound [tʃ] to Nawuri speakers who likely had the sound in their phonological inventory before IY developed it due to areal contact and assimilation. In short, we see the influence going two ways, IY being influenced phonetically due to predominant phonetic areal characteristics and then Kiliji (Nawuri speakers) being influenced lexically (and in terms of spiritual practices) with large scale borrowing in the ritual context.

(7) **tʃ : tʃ : ʃ** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
ḍtʃèkpá	òtʃùkpá	òʃùkpá	moon
òtʃimáálé	otʃumare	òʃùmàrè	rainbow

¹¹ The Hwe dialect of Gbe seems to be a middle-ground geographically and linguistically and has “transitional” areal features in some ways patterning like /ʃ/-dominant Yorùbá and in some ways patterning like /tʃ/-dominant Gbe.

tʃǎkpàná	tʃakpana	ʃǎkpònná	name of divinity
otʃu	akpatʃo	oʃó	witch (SY ‘wizard, seer’ cf. ǎʃũ ‘divinity of fertility’)
atʃo	atʃɔ	aʃɔ	cloth(ing)
tʃúgbú	tʃubù	ʃubú	fall (Kiliji ‘throw’)
tʃè	tʃe	ʃe	do (Kiliji ‘do, make, be’)

Example (8) shows IY as a middle-ground between SY and Kiliji with the majority of IY items being realized as [ŋ] but with one outlier realized as [w]. This correspondence appears to be the language in the process of going from [w] to [ŋ].

(8) **ŋ : ŋ/w : w** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
ǎŋá	àwa	àwa	we, us (K), we (IY), we, us (emphatic) (SY)
ĩŋē	ĩŋe	iwĩ	deity, spirit
ɔŋǎ	àŋɔ	wʹ	they
-ŋa(a)	ŋa	àwɔ	plural marker
ólííŋé		oníwĩ	devotee of Oko Alija (K), owner of Iwin (SY)

In the following set, although we were not able to find IY data for the specific lexical items included in the table, it is worth noting that Boëthius (1987:63) has **olí** ‘owner’ in various contexts such as **olí ɛŋè** ‘owner of debt’ pointing to [l] in all contexts where standard Yorùbá would show complementary distribution between [n] (before [i]) and [l] (elsewhere, i.e. before any other vowel at the morpheme boundary).

(9) **l : r : n** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
oleina	aro	oníná	blacksmith, owner of fire
ólílú		onílùú	a Nawuri person (lit. ‘owner of town’) (SY)
ólííŋé		oníwĩ	devotee of Oko Alija, owner of iwin (SY)

Example (10) shows a correspondence between **ŋ : ŋ/r/l : r** where, again, it appears that IY is phonologically transitional between the consonantal inventory of Kiliji and more prototypically Yorùbá structures. Kiliji **tʃíŋíni** ‘small; thin; narrow; junior’, IY **tréléé** ‘narrow’ and **tʃígídí** ‘small’, and SY **túnrín** ‘thin, narrow’ are sound-alike items that require further research to substantiate them as true cognates.

(10) **ŋ : ŋ/r/l/d : r** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
aŋénè	àŋírí	ààrí	middle
ódzónùù	ojóòrù [odzú òrù?]	oòrù	sun
tʃíŋíni	tréléé, tʃígídí	túrí	small; thin; narrow

Example (11) shows a correspondence between **tʃ : tʃ/t : t** wherein, again IY seems to be a middle ground between extremes taking characteristics of both sides. Interestingly, IY seems to palatalize in front of high front vowels.

(11) **tʃ : tʃ/t : t** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
tʃó	tʃi ó	tí ó -> t’ó	who, then he (IY), who (in relative clauses, SY)
tʃíŋíni	tréléé, tʃígídí	túrí	small; thin; narrow

Kiliji also has an alveolar nasal where SY and IY have a rhotic before nasal vowels as seen in (12)

(12) **n : r/ř : r** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
áni	kõřĩ	orĩ	song (K), sing (IY), song (SY, kɔ orĩ sing song)
ménãã	méeré	méri	four
něě	řĩ, rě	řĩ	walk
nìene	rě	rírĩ	act/process of walking
ódzónùù	ojóòrù [odzú òrù?]	oòrù	sun

Example (13) is also rather straightforward with the low open vowel /a/ occurring across the three languages.

(13) **a : a : a** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
ádʒà	adʒá	adʒá	dog
̀̀ndʒà̀̀nà	edʒã	edʒa	fish (K plural)
bàdʒé	bàdʒé	bà...dʒé	poke; pierce a hole; spoil; destroy
dʒàgbàlà		dʒàgbadʒàgbà	expression of grief, unhappiness, dissatisfaction (K), untidiness, recklessness, perversity, waywardness (SY)

Finally, we see a clear patterning of the partial reduplication process where the C1 reappears with a high tone high front vowel /í/ before the stem in both SY and IY. In Kiliji, a similar process of nominalization occurs but instead of /í/ we find /ó/. It would be interesting to see whether this process is productive for Kiliji speakers although, noting challenges in gathering data at this stage of the research, we may not get answers to that question. Since the correspondence seems to occur only in reduplicants, the vowel contrasts are probably neutralized in Kiliji and the second syllable always has either a rounded vowel or a consonant with a labial feature. In Standard Yorùbá, however, this nominalization process is productive for all verbs regardless of phonological context.

(14) **ó : í : í** sound correspondence

Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
lólò		lílò	grinding
gbógbè	gbígbe	gbígbe	dry
fófò, fófòwá	fò	fífò	language, ethnic/linguistic group' (K), talk (IY), the act/process of speaking (SY)
tótó	titò	titũ, tũtũ ¹²	new

¹² All the other verbs apart from **tũ** occur as freestanding verbs. **Tũ** does not occur as a freestanding verb, but rather is always in the form **tũtũ/titũ**. The process only holds as partial reduplication of single freestanding verbs. It is likely that at one point, **tun** could occur as a nominalized form is fossilized in the name **Dọtun (di òtun)** 'become new'

(16) Word-initial		Intervocalic	
Kiliji	SY	Kiliji	SY
nōdē ‘house’	na ‘beat up’	ání ‘song’	àná ‘yesterday’
ně̀ě̀ ‘walk’	nínú ‘inside’	ɔ̀nà ‘road’	ɔ̀nà ‘road’
lélé ‘facial scar’	là ‘split’	ménǎǎ ‘four’	dànù ‘spill’
lólò ‘grinding’	lɔ ‘go’	oleina ‘blacksmith’	dʒóná ‘burn’
		àlà ‘drum (type)’	ilù ‘drum’
		elú ‘town’	ilú ‘town’
		dólò ‘stand’	kpèlú ‘with’
		èkùlé ‘excrement’	kpèlé
			‘interjection of empathy, politeness’

3.2 VOWELS: CORRESPONDENCE AND DIVERGENCE

Based on frequency and realization of length and nasalization, Kiliji is treated as a 7-vowel system like SY. We believe that the short oral vowels [ɪ], [ʊ], [i̠], and [ə] are the results of the interplay of our transcription and L1 phonotactics, e.g. vowel harmonies and vowel insertion or reduction in a specific environment.

(17) short oral **ɪ, i̠, u, ʊ, e, ə, o, ɛ, ɔ, a**

long oral **ii, uu, ee, oo, aa**

short nasal **ĩ, ũ, ɪ̃, ʊ̃, ẽ, ɔ̃, ã**

long nasal n.a.

It is possible that the vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ] are consequences of vowel harmonies operative in our consultants' first language. Nawuri is described as a 9- and 10- vowel system in Casali (1995) and Sherwood (1982) respectively.¹³ The short oral vowels [i̠] and [ə] are extremely rare in Kiliji, e.g. **ègídā** ‘tortoise’ and **àkpáŋkpèlì** ‘knee’, **ñdēgbàlú tēé** ‘grindstone’. Casali (1995:46) writes that in Nawuri that /ə/ is not ‘strong’ and hardly found in minimal contrasts. We believe that the short oral vowels [i̠] and [ə] are the results of the interplay of our transcription and L1 phonotactics, e.g. vowel insertion or reduction in a specific environment.

Long oral vowels are attested for the four -ATR vowels and [a].

¹³ It might be relevant to note that Barbara Sherwood worked in Kpandai and had a Balai informant, but Rod Casali worked in the far south of the area.

(18)	Kiliji	Gloss
	high, front	ékpû tail
		líí see
	mid, front	íwéé leaf
		tʃée and
	low	dāā cut
		íláá flesh, meat
	high, back	fúfúú white ¹⁴
		kúú die
	mid, back	èlòòbóbó hat
		kòrúkòò grass; grassland; bush

Almost all Kiliji vowels are found nasalized, but the low vowel [a] is more commonly found nasalized than other vowels. Although there may be true nasal vowels, they are typically found adjacent to a nasal consonant, or sometimes preceded by a glottal fricative. There are few exceptions however, as (19) shows.

(19)	Kiliji	Gloss
	něě	walk
	éŋwó	nose
	dʒìmìdʒí	old (be)
	ihǎ	heart; chest
	gbàwũ	divining

Example (20) shows the attested percentage of syllable type in word-initial, -medial, -final position in the current version of the compiled Kiliji lexicon (N. entries = 336).

(20)		w-initial	w-medial	w-final
	CV	126	154	258
	V	176	31	23
	CVV	13	13	48

¹⁴ While this may appear to be similar to the Akan word **fufu(o)** ‘white,’ it is certainly similar to the Yorùbá **fufú** ‘white’ as well.

Other less frequent syllables types are: CVC type which always involves a nasal in coda position, VC type which always involves a nasal in coda position, and CCV which always takes the form of the sequence **kw**, **nl**, **ɲw**, **tr**, or **kr**.

(21) CVC		VC		CCV	
Kiliji	Gloss	Kiliji	Gloss	Kiliji	Gloss
sm.ně.	hit	an.ta	seat	kwa.sa	bad (be)
tam.bo	pepper	an.tũ	monkey	nle	down; ground
a.g̃baŋ.g̃baŋ	horns			ɲwe	take
ɔ.man.se.bo	diviner			o.tra.mɔ	pot (large)
				kru.t̃ju	pig ¹⁵ (borrowed)

3.3 MORPHOLOGICAL AND SYNTACTIC CORRESPONDENCE AND DIVERGENCE

We cannot confirm that there is an association of prefixes with nominals in Kiliji such that all nouns fall into a number of classes, particularly singular-plural pairs, as they do in Nawuri. Below in (22), the number of items (N=137) is the result being filtered for singular nouns and word-initial vowel/nasal consonant, i.e. hence not necessarily a noun class in the technical sense. In other words, Kiliji has retained elements of a vestigial noun class system with discernable semantic implications in just a few limited contexts with regard to prefixation (Welmers 1973:189-90, Stahlke 1976:243-44, Fordyce 1983:264).

(22) Vowel/Nasal initial singular nouns

a-	36
e-, ɛ-	16
i-, ɪ-	18
N-	15
o-, ɔ-	52

Non-vowel/non-nasal initial singular nouns are not rare in relative terms (N=50), but not proportional and systematic compared to the vowel/nasal initial singular nouns. Some examples are **fúf** 'language', **lali** 'cow', **m̃m̃** 'breast', etc.

¹⁵ Compare also Gonja **kpuruku** 'pig' (Rytz, nd) and IY **ɲhà**.

The Gonja is clearly derived from Akan/Chumburung **prako** 'pork -> pig'

3.3.1 Adaptation: Word order (possession)

As far as the linear order of nominal compounds and possessive constructions is concerned, IY patterns the same as SY, while the expressions in Kiliji are like what we see in Nawuri (Casali 1995:102). In (23) the data shows that Kiliji is head-final and SY is head-initial (Armstrong 1965:68, Boëthius 1987:58):

(23)	Kiliji	SY	
a.	ɔ màdé	ɔmɔ rɛ̀	
	his child	child his	
	‘his child’	‘his child’	
b.	ná:tí¹⁶ gísó	etí màálù	
	cow ear	ear cow	
	‘cow’s ear’	‘cow’s ear’	
c.	oko alidzà	òrìfà oko	
	farm divinity	divinity farm	
	‘Divinity of cultivation/fertility’ ‘Divinity of cultivation/fertility’		

3.3.2 Retention/Convergence: Reduplication

The morphological process of reduplication and the meaning it can convey is common to both Yorùbá and Nawuri. It is a pervasive linguistic strategy in many West African languages, hence reduplication itself is not borrowed from a Yorùbá variety, as is argued with regard to lexemes, nor is it a case of Nawuri nativization. The only correspondence set is shown in example (24), where, unexpectedly, the simple and reduplicated forms are the same in both Nawuri and Kiliji.

(24)		Kiliji		SY		Nawuri
	simple	lálá	‘big’	ńlá	‘big’	lálá ‘big’
	reduplicated	lálálálá	‘very big’	ńláńlá	‘very big’	lálálálá ‘very big’

3.3.3 Lexical Retentions: Numerals

The numerals from one (1) to ten (10) are among the key evidence showing that Kiliji not only has abundant Yoruboid words, but that IY, the variety spoken in the Northeast Plateaux Region of Togo and central Benin is more likely to be the Yoruboid variety from which Kiliji derives. Consider the following table adapted from Fábùnmi¹⁷ (2010:35-7) (Ilé-Ifè).

¹⁶ **ná:tí** is probably a Nawuri word. cf Chumburung **naatu**

¹⁷ Based on the SY data in Fábùnmi, we relabeled the columns.

(25)	English	SY	IY	Kiliji		
		Enumerative Modifier	Enumerative Modifier			
1		ení/ḍkã	mení	ène/ḍkê	méné	ókàà
2		èḍì	méḍì	èḍì	méèḍì	médzì
3		èta	méta	ètā	méetā	métāā
4		èrĩ	mérĩ	èrě	méerě	ménāā
5		àrú	márũ-ũ	èrú	méerú	mélòò
6		èfà	méfà	èfà	méefà	éfàà
7		èḍe	méḍe	eḍe	mééḍe	édzè
8		èḍɔ	méḍɔ	èḍɔ	mééḍɔ	édzòò
9		èsá	mésã-ã	esã	mesã	ésim
10		èwá	méwàá	maa	maja	máā
20		ogú		ogú		ókùó
100		ɔgérũ-ũ		ogòrú		òkùómāā

The Kiliji word for ‘one’ looks like one of the ways in which ‘one’ can be expressed in SY and IY. The words for ‘two’, ‘three’, ‘six’, ‘seven’ and ‘eight’ look almost the same across all Yorùbá dialects compared, ignoring the length in ‘three’ and the vowel qualities of ‘two’ and ‘seven’. The word for ‘four’ has no correspondence in the other Yorùbá varieties. Gabriel Manessy (1975:305) reconstructs Proto-Oti-Volta ***naa** for ‘four’, and in fact most Gur and Kwa languages with which Nawuri is in contact have a common root **na** for ‘four’.

The [l] in the Kiliji word for ‘five’ could be the effect of avoidance of [r] morph-initially. Casali (1995:10) has **l** and **r** both as phonemes but gives /r/ marginal status, and considers it a surface manifestation of /d/: **r** occurs only morpheme-medially but /d/ occurs morpheme-initially (Casali 1995:51).

The word for ‘nine’ ends in a short nasal vowel in all Yorùbá dialects compared; this is reflected by the final [m] in Kiliji, yet the vowel quality remains unexplained. The Kiliji word for the numeral **máā** ‘ten’ is a good indication that IY is more likely to be the Yoruboid language from which Kiliji derives, compared to other varieties. Fábùnmi (2010) reports that the number words for ‘ten’ in IY stand out by having a consonant initial syllable and not a vowel initial syllable. The number in IY ‘ten’ does not appear to bear any similarity to any other Yorùbá dialects (Fábùnmi 2010:35). The word **ókùó** ‘twenty’ is very similar to the words in the Yorùbá varieties compared. However, the word **òkùómāā** ‘hundred’, morpho-semantically analysed as 20-times-10, is not in line with the vigesimal system of Yoruboid languages. The composition of **òkùómāā** ‘hundred’ from **ókùó** (20) and **máā** (10) cannot be deduced from common adposition in the numeral systems of the area: while adposition normally can either mean addition or multiplication, here none of the results provide the right

reference to ‘hundred’. This is particularly odd given that 20-times-10 does not equal 100 but rather 200. Given the semantics of the number 100 and how it is constructed in Yorùbá, the **mǎǎ** may ultimately be derived from **má** as found in SY **márũ-ũ** ‘five’, which would yield the correct computational result.

Finally one thing that must be said about the numeral is that of the forms of 2-5 and the forms of 6-9. Kiliji appears to mix the enumerative and cardinal (modifier) systems, with 1-5 patterning after the cardinal (modifier) system while 6-10 pattern after the enumerative system. The former group seems to correspond to the forms of the ordinal numeral of Yorùbá varieties, while the latter to the cardinal numerals. Whether this is the result of a failure to convey systematic elicitation or requests on our part, or that the numerals do, in fact, lack the systematic arrangement of the other Yorùbá varieties has yet to be confirmed. It could be that two different contextual frames were used by the women in the elicitation session, i.e. the cardinal for 6-9 and the ordinal for 2-5. Another difference in the forms of the numerals is the observation that Kiliji has predominantly CVV syllables word-finally, but the Yorùbá varieties display mainly CV syllables in the same environment.

3.3.4 Lexical Retention: Plural

The only plural marker found in Kiliji is the suffix **-ɲa(a)**. Likewise, the plural in IY is made by adding **ɲa** to the end of a word. In SY the plural is formed by adding **àwǎ** as a stand-alone marker before a noun. Examples in (26) suggest, again, that this plural marking strategy does not come from Standard Yorùbá but most likely from IY **ɲa**.

(26)	Kiliji	IY	SY	Gloss
sg.	ɲèsíɲ	enyí	ejí	tooth
pl.	ɲèsí-ɲǎ	enyí ɲa	àwǎ ejí	teeth
sg.	àgùgù	ekúkú	egúgú	bone
pl.	àgùgù-ɲǎ	ekúkú ɲa	àwǎ egúgú	bones
sg.	íɲǎ	enyɛ	ejí	egg
pl.	íɲǎ-ɲǎ	enyɛ ɲa	àwǎ ejí	eggs

The transition from “pre-” marker to “post-” clitic is in line with known linguistic strategies, e.g. the analytic plural marker in Jamaican Creole (Bobyleva, 2011:40). While the similarity of Kiliji and IY morphosyntactic ordering is another confirmation of the propinquity of Kiliji and IY, the different strategies among Yorùbá varieties may be due to IY speakers moving to an area where plurals are marked by suffixation and IY, in turn, shifting to be in alignment with its areal neighbors. Despite the fact that the majority of plural markers in Nawuri are prefixes, suffixation for plurality is not alien to Nawuri speakers: the single suffix marking plural in Nawuri is the form **-ánǎ**, i.e. noun class VIII in Sherwood (1982:92).

3.3.5 Discussion

The overall picture unveiled is a language with a high degree of sound correspondence with the Ifẹ variety of Yorùbá spoken in Togo. Moreover the majority of the lexical items, as well as plural morphology and the numeral words, are similar to those found in that variety of Yorùbá. Yet, the linear order of compounds and possessive phrases suggests some influence of the Nawuri combinatoric system, i.e. the L1 of the women members. Some sound correspondences also showed innovations unique to Kiliji e.g. correspondences **l : r : r** and **l : d : d** in (15). It is difficult to confirm the exact provenance of some expressions, and whether they do have an external origin or were created spontaneously by the women, due to, perhaps, the consequence of language attrition. As indicated in Section 1, Kiliji is an endangered linguistic practice to a certain extent, occurring almost exclusively in a spiritual context. The language attrition dynamic consists of the interaction of a low number of speakers, reduced inputs and instructions, and low performance frequency. The effects must be significant, and here we provide some examples:

a) Expressions that appear to be calques (or partial calques) from Nawuri. For instance **jéjà** ‘hoe’ does not correspond to either the form of SY or IY, **roko** and **ro** respectively, yet it looks like the Nawuri form **gà-tíjà?** ‘hoe’. The sequence **-ja** is associated with tilling and digging activities in Nawuri. Another example is Kiliji **ḍkpèkpá-mààdé** (lit. moon+child; small; seed) whose rightmost lexemic part matches the **-bi** ‘child’; small; seed’ in Nawuri **gĩ-tṣíképí** ‘star’, an apparently native Nawuri word that has a morphologically complex root but whose full composition may be only partly transparent at best synchronically.¹⁸

b) Expressions that are complex lexemically but with unknown origin. For instance, Kiliji has the compound **iwekpa** (lit. ‘leaf-stick’) for ‘root’, when monolexemics **gbòngbò/egbo** in SY, **ogugu** in IY, and **ó-lín** in Nawuri exist. It is suggested that these are the products of language internal creativity, using available Kiliji material to shape a ‘signifier’ that would best match a ‘signified’, or they are borrowed, but we cannot confirm from where.

c) Borrowed items with unknown origin. For instance **agbède** ‘weaver’ does not look like IY **awáṣṣ** or SY **ahũṣu** and it is suspected to be borrowed. Interestingly enough, **àgbède** in SY translates to ‘blacksmith’ and we may, perhaps, be dealing with some type of semantic shift. Another possibility is **àgbádá** ‘large flowing men’s garment’. A more sure case is ‘pig’ of which two forms were provided on two different occasions, **olíanṣ** and **krutṣu**, the latter being very similar to the Dagbani form **kurutṣu** with the same referent (Blench 2004). Compare also Gonja **kpuruku** ‘pig’ (Rytz, nd) and IY **ḍhà**.

4. CONCLUSION

Although one can associate special knowledge and practice with the Okule spiritual group, Kiliji is not a specialized purpose language, in the sense of Lüpke and Storch (2013:104). The language does not appear to be based on a known language matrix of the area -- like Nawuri, Konkomba, or Gonja -- that is, on another language found in the women’s linguistic repertoire. In fact it was found that influences of

¹⁸ Thanks to Rod Casali for the details.

Nawuri, or any Guang languages for that matter, appear to be limited to morphosyntactic influences, so Kiliji cannot be analyzed as the survival in ritual context of an ancient original language. Vocabulary replacement is not an encrypting strategy found in Kiliji, despite the fact that it is a common strategy for alternate languages in West Africa: In Labouret (1931:428), the Lobi-speaking villages Nako and Batié each have an alternate language which contains extensive loanwords from Pougouli, a Southwestern Grusi language. In Yevegebe, an alternate language used in Ewe land, the use of Ewe, Fon, Gã, and Mina/Gen words is common (Akuetey 1998, Nyamuane 2013:108). The language used by Kpele priestesses in Accra is described as a language with a mixture of Akan, Gã, and Guan varieties (Field 1961:3,29,77,86).

The fact that very few lexical traces of Nawuri and other languages of the area are found in Kiliji suggests that not only words have been borrowed but the system seemed to have been borrowed in its entirety. Proficiency is not attained by excelling at transforming and manipulating Nawuri strings according to defined phonological rules and/or lexical replacements. Instead, women had/have to learn a new linguistic system, with a few systematic shifts such as possessed-possessor to possessor-possessed word order making Yorùbá conform with Nawuri. But since Yorùbá is **not** in the linguistic repertoire of the speakers of the area, the language can serve a cryptic function.

The path of transmission of Kiliji to the group of Balai speakers is not yet fully understood. We posited in the introduction that Balai speakers may have acquired the Kiliji language from the Chala of Mbowura. The most likely explanation is that the Nawuri women of Balai received the system of beliefs and practices, including the language, from the east, probably from the Adele and Achode area, who themselves ultimately received it from a group speaking a variety of Yorùbá (Ifè Togo) from the region of Atakpame. It is important to note that, at this stage of our research, it is only possible to present possibilities as conclusive evidence has not yet been uncovered.

What we have in Balai seems to be a non-Yorùbá group of people having been exposed to Yorùbá language via a spiritual system. In many ways this is not different from the process that happened in the new world: what we have in the Yorùbá diaspora is non-Yorùbá having been exposed to the Yorùbá language also via the spiritual system. The liturgical nature of it – the restriction to ritual context -- is on par with what we find in the many places -- Candomble in Brazil, Santeria in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, Shango in Trinidad and Orisha/Ifá in the US -- where the language of all other activities is Portuguese, Spanish, or English while Yorùbá is largely restricted to the ritual context.

Consider the following from Falola and Childs (2005):

The collapse of the Oyo Empire in the early nineteenth century and the prolonged Yorùbá wars led to the enslavement of a great many Yorùbá people and a sharp increase in the numbers of Yorùbá slaves who were transported across the Atlantic to the New World (2005:56).

[...]almost half the enslaved who left the ports of the Bight of Benin were Yorùbá, representing close to one million people” (2005:40).

As we look at variations of Yorùbá spirituality as the main conduit for the retention of the Yorùbá language (most notably in Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad and the US) it becomes clear that

1. Yorùbá was a comparatively small portion of the total number of African people who were kidnapped into enslavement and thus, the predominance of the Yorùbá spiritual system is not due to “heritage learners” retaining vestiges of their own language but rather large scale adoption by non-Yorùbá seeking to revitalize a link to Africa.
2. The preponderance of Yorùbá spirituality in the diaspora is due to the fact that they were the last major wave to come over and thus, other Africans simply gravitated towards them as legitimate and authentic Africans from an increasingly obscure concept of the homeland of Africa.

The similarity here is that, while Africans of the diaspora may have been approximating authentic “Africanness” in a broader sense, the women of Balai seem to be approximating an authentic “Yorùbáness” perceived as sacred and, thus, the similar impetus for its strict preservation in the ritual context. This should not be confused with ethnic Yorùbá authenticity but rather a spiritual authenticity in the sense that the Yorùbá language and divinities, among others are connected to the divine in the Balai context.

Also, similarly, what we have in Balai seems to be non-Yorùbá (ethnically) having been exposed to Yorùbá language via the spiritual system (the close link to language and spirituality being the impetus for its secrecy).

Despite the overt attempt to preserve authenticity, the changes in pronunciation in Kiliji (and, likely, Ifè before it) to approximate areal phonetic features seem to be on par with what’s found in other forms of Yorùbá found in the diaspora (Cuban Yorùbá’s Oyú in place of Ojú or Pwe in place of Kpe). The change in word order of possessive phrase/construction to match that of the recipient language is also something that is common in other varieties of Yorùbá (Sales 1984, Cultura 1999, Hewitt 2009).

Again, none of this is particularly unique or special but what we see for Yorùbá all over its diaspora.

It is important to separate Kiliji fluency through the use of memorized texts (e.g. songs) from creative oral production (e.g. word list elicitation exercise or extemporaneous conversation). Language acquisition and maintenance need a supportive and rich environment, and Okule activities and events are extremely rare, at least in Balai, and domain-limited, so a learner has a low and inadequate exposure. Being a non-native language with such exceptional exposure, it is not surprising to find some Nawuri linguistic strategies. It is expected that linguistic changes will match the recipient language and it was shown that some features of Kiliji are more easily associated with Nawuri than Yorùbá.

To our knowledge, the practice and language reported represent the westernmost materialization of both the religious practice and the language in Africa apart from formerly enslaved Yorùbá repatriated from Brazil in the wake of the Imalé revolt of 1835 (Reis 1995). It is regrettable that many studies reporting ‘archaic Yorùbá’ and the like do not present actual linguistic data to support their claim. It is of great relevance since, as we have shown here, it can indirectly suggest the origin of spiritual groups and rituals. In this paper we can tentatively propose a middle Togo origin based on the linguistic data; it is a matter of studying other aspects of the spiritual group in order to confirm the contention.

Given that rights and permissions are granted, Kiliji can only be heard at the events discussed in Section 1. This puts serious constraints on the collection of linguistic data. Elicitation is not possible in Balai any more, due to worries that research activities may provoke the deities, and we do not know when we will be able to access the knowledge necessary to continue the description and analysis of Kiliji.

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