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# A comparative analysis of origins and spread of Bakor dialects of Ejagham language in the Cross River region, Nigeria

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## Abstract

*Bakor is an Ejagham language expression which also defines its speakers, widely distributed in the Cross River region and beyond. The distribution of Bakor speakers corresponds with the division of the state into the Southern, Central and Northern Senatorial districts, raising questions of origins, relationships and agencies of spread, especially as language may not be a definitive index for establishing the origins of people. Literature has linked Bakor speakers to the ancient Bantu of African history with profound insight from archaeological findings, further reinforcing a reappraisal of the cultural history of the region and their immediate neighbours. Investigation adopts a multidisciplinary approach with the qualitative historical methodology. Theories of migration combine with terminological explanations to deepen understanding of the context and wider implications of the spread of Ejagham dialects in the Cross River region. The comparative linguistic method also applied explains the lexical similarities of the variant Ejagham speakers. Thanks to Tetfund grants facilitated by the Directorate of Research, University of Calabar, during the merged 2019 – 2024 9/7 batch, which assisted field work spanning one calendar year. Findings interalia indicate strong ancestral links of Bakor speakers to the ancient Bantu and historical connections of the various speakers.*

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**Introduction**

Bakor, a term from the Ejagham language, means "to collect, or to come and take." From Nde on the Ikom-Ogoja-Mfom route to Yalla in the upper Cross River, the Northern Ejagham groupings that line the left and right sides are also referred to by this moniker. The Northern Ejagham communities, who collectively embraced the word Bakor as a unifying nomenclature and cultural identity of its speakers, are defined by their geographic, historical, and sociocultural homogeneity. They are Ekajuk, Nkim, and Nkuum in the Ogoja Local Government Area and Abanyom, Nde, Nta, Ofutop, Nselle (Njimetop), and Nnam in the Ikom Local Government Area. The Central and Northern regions of the state are home to the previously stated Ekoid Bantu groups[5]. In the southern region, the other Bakor speakers are dispersed among the municipalities of Akamkpa, Odukpani, Akpabuyo, and Calabar in the Cross River estuary.

The Bakor speakers and the ancient Bantu are strongly associated in the region's literature, which gives rise to terminology like proto-Bantu, semi-Bantu, Ekoid Bantu, and others that are defined below. According to Murdock, the early Bantu homeland in Africa was the geographical territory that is now inhabited by the Bakor and other people in the Cross River region to the Benue valley, extending to the south-west province of the Republic of Cameroun[6]. The origins of Bakor and, by extension, the Bantu, as well as the causes of their spread and linguistic commonalities, must all be considered in a comparative study of the genesis and spread of Bakor groupings as previously established. The foundation of this study will be oral testimony gathered mostly from the many communities, history, archaeology, and linguistic sources, which is further supported by anthropological data. The cultural history and dialects of the Ejagham language of the area, which is presently in risk of extinction, distortion, and adumbration due to the forces of modernity, are intended to be better understood and illuminated by these methods.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

A brief examination of Bakor origins, which are closely associated with the ancient Bantu, is reinforced by the vast spread of Bakor speakers and the ambiguity surrounding Bakor origins as articulated by the contrasting opinions of Joseph Greenberg and Harry Johnstone. This is even more pressing than Bakor's historical history, because aside from the anthropological sketches made by colonial officials and the linguistic classification of African languages by foreign-born linguists, their different dialects of Ejagham have not gotten much scholarly attention up to this point.
According to certain writings, the Ejagham historical past was reconstructed with an emphasis on the colonial experience and the procedures that led to the

[5]Crabbot, D. W. (1965), *Ekoid Bantu Languages of Ogoja,* Part 1, London: O.U.P
[6]Murdock, George P. (1959). *Africa: Its People and Their Culture*. London McGraw-Hill Book Company.


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foundation of their state. Majuk has recently attempted to investigate the historical development of Bakor ethnic identity in the upper Cross River region of Nigeria[7]. Thus, a comparative study of the emergence and dissemination of Bakor dialects of Ejagham in the Cross River area will not only advance Ejagham studies but also fill in gaps in the previously mentioned literature and encourage more research into the rich cultural heritage of the great Ejagham people. The following issues are the focus of this study: The history of the Bakor; What causes the Bakor-speaking communities to expand out from their birthplace?

The relationship between ethnic origins and identity, and linguistic similarities or mutual intelligibility; To investigate Bakor speakers' historical movements and cultural contacts.This article discusses the relationship between Bakor and the ancient Bantu. There is a significant linguistic resemblance among Bakor speakers. Examine how the results may affect our comprehension of the Ekoid Bantu dialects of Ejagham. Addressing these and further concerns will shape perspectives and understanding of the Bakor speakers, especially as ambiguities arising from Bakor origins and spread are resolved. Furthermore, as Bakor dialects are endangered by forces of modernity, a comparative study of these dialects hopes to rebuild kinship ties based on shared historical experiences of the varied Bakor speakers. It also hopes to build support that can tackle common challenges of development and preservation of cultural legacies.

**Clarification of Terminologies used**

To help with understanding, the following terms, Ejagham, Bakor, Bantu, Semi-Bantu, and Ekoid-Bantu, need to be clarified. Lake Ijagham is the source of Ejagham, which got its name from the people's ejak, or excitement, when they discovered a body of water while migrating[8]. Over time, the phrase has come to refer to communities that can trace their origins to regions along the Nigeria-Cameroon border. Geographically, the Ejagham groups are found in the Northern, Central, and Southern estuaries of the Cross River region, as well as in the southwest province of the Republic of Cameroun (Manyu division). From Ofutop on the left bank of the Cross River to Nde in the Ikom Local Government Area, which flanks the right and left side of the Ikom-Ogoja-Mfon motorway to Yalla in the upper Cross River, Bakor, whose name means "come and take," is a socio-cultural group of Northern Ejagham configuration that geographically occupies the Central and Northern Cross River State. "Bakor" was chosen as a uniting nomenclature because of the people's shared historical experiences and sociocultural homogeneity, which united them into a sociocultural union.

The Kongo people on the Atlantic Ocean speak Bantu, which is a plural version of Bakor that means "person." Its single form is "muntu"[9]. Because of the word's closeness among speakers from the Bight of Biafra to the original language, linguists dubbed these sets of languages proto-Bantu. The Indian Ocean,

[7]Majuk, Simon E. (2017). *The Bakor in Historical Perspective*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.
[8]Onor, Sandy O. (1994). *Ejagham Nation in the Cross River Region of Nigeria, Ibadan*: Kraft Books
[9]Curtin, Philip (et al) (1978). *African History*: London Longman.


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located near the Kenya-Somali border, was significant during a time when Proto-Bantu was used to designate people.

**Semi-Bantu**, a term probably first used by Harry Johnstone, loosely refers to the disparate groups in the Cross River region[10]. This term has,however, been rejected by Joseph Greenberg,who preferred the term "Benue-Congo" encompassing Bantu language groups[11]. **Ekoid-Bantu**is a term said to have been coined by the Efik in reference to their Ejaghamneighbours when they came in contact with them in the 16th century[12].

**Methodology of the Research and Theoretical Basis of the Focal Study**

This study adopts the historical and qualitative method with a multi-disciplinary approach. It also adopted comparative linguistics to explain the lexical similarities of Bakor speakers. Archaeological insights, historical-linguistic, ethnographic, and anthropological results contributed deeper insights into the past of Bakor. Field work spanned two Semester holidays involving field trips to the Bakor speakers in the Cross River region. Interviews conducted were both individual and group, as preferred by some elders who offered to invite more knowledgeable informants on issues of origins, migration, routes and identities. It was interesting listening to their excitement about Bakor's cultural homogeneity and historical experiences during their sojourns on land now settled by other nationalities. Elders in the geographical spread mutually understand the variance in their lexicology.

A field notebook, a smartphone and a writing pen were used to collect data from informants. All recording was done in English. Fortunately, the lead researcher speaks and understands one variant of the Bakor (Nta), and could easily flow with the people throughout the interview process. Other field requirements, like the ethnographic fee for each group of informants, palm wine and local gin, endeared and facilitated the interviews. Informants were usually consulted to seek their free time for enabling discussions. They were equally appreciated with a token at the end of each interview. Data collected from the groups were compiled into an Oral Historical Text, which served as footnotes for references and corroboration with published literature.

Published literature and general works on the region were also reviewed. These included historical accounts on the people of the Cross River region and their migrations, archaeological findings by foreign and indigenous scholars, linguistic classification of languages of the region by foreign and a few indigenous scholars, and ethnographic and anthropological studies of the area, all of which provided useful and interesting information that enriched this study. Some of the aforementioned works have been referenced in the section on literature review.

[10]Johnstone, Harry H. (1919). *A Comparative Study of the Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages*, London: OUP.
[11]Greenberg, Joseph (1959). *Essays in Linguistics*. Chicago: UAC Press.
[12]Majuk, Simon E. (2017). *The Bakor in Historical Perspective*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.


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It was also extremely important to situate a study of this nature on functional theories that explain group migrations and state formation processes. These theories enabled a clear understanding of the state formation of pre-European societies of Africa, which expressed accommodation, association and successive amalgamation of kingroups who shared a common historical experience. This sharply contrasts with the foundation of the Nigerian state, which was undertaken by British imperialists for purely economic concerns at the expense of the diverse opinions and differences of the nationalities that constitute the Nigerian state. Indeed, Bakor ethnicity was built on a solid fulcrum of the people's common historical experiences, migrations, and "foreign" sojourns, all of which were fostered by a common language and territory that formed the basis of the Bakor cultural union, an association born in 1963[13].

**Theoretical Foundation of this Study**

A couple of theories defines the narrative of focal study, viz the diffusionist theory postulated by Grafton E Smith and James Perry in the early 20th century, the push-pull theory by Everett S. Lee in 1966, the Hamitic hypothesis by Carl Merinhof, a German Linguist in 1912, and later Seligman C. G. Seligman who expanded the hypothesis in 1930, and the Sudanese State hypotheses furthered by Oliver and Fage in 1970. A brief analysis of these formulations may be necessary to anchor migrations of people and cultures. The diffusionist theory opines that cultural traits spread from a common centre (Egypt) to other parts of the world. According to this viewpoint, ideas of arts, social systems, and organisations emanated from Egypt and were transported by culture carriers through migrations and contacts to other areas of the global space[14].

Following closely with diffusionism is the Hamitic hypothesis postulated by Carl Meinhof and popularisedin 1930 by Seligman. The theory posits that states in Africa were the products of some civilised outside invaders. Notably, Africans were not ingenious inany remarkable inventions. This theory attributed early African achievements to the invading migrants of a superior race, who conquered indigenous people and imposed state formation on them[15].Accordingly, therefore, the Hamites were a great civilising force of black Africa from a relatively early period. At variance with the above school of thought is the Sudanese state system, which claims that the state system and organisation spread from the Sudanese kingdoms into the forest region and from there to the rest of Africa. Following the Sudanese state hypothesis, though the state in Africa was externally induced, the architects were still of African origin from the Egyptian-Meroitic centre. This renewed Hamitic hypothesis was refuted by Curtin and Boahen. Historians of African descent in the 1960s reviewed the aforementioned postulations with evidence derived from independent developments in Africa. Boahen, for instance, contended that states derived from lucrative economic activities werelargely shaped by local forces. It was contended that state formation was effected through indigenous

[13]Majuk, Simon E. (2017). *The Bakor in Historical Perspective*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.
[14]Smith, Grafton E. (1933). *The Diffusion of Culture*. London Watts & Co.
[15]Seligman, C. G. (1930). *The Races of Africa*,London: Thornton Butteworth


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principles of social organisations, otherwise referred to as African independent development[16].

Indeed, the merits and demerits of the aforementioned theories and hypotheses are not the focus of this analysis. Glaringly, and as critics have also pointed out, the racist undertones of some of the theories as mentioned undermine the ingenuity of the African continent. Africa was not a passive continent at a time when other climeswere initiating one form of development or another. The continent, through independent developments, is credited with a number of achievements, some of which have been captured here and elsewhere. The theories chosen for this narrative fit in squarely with the various accounts of origins, migrations and state formation processes and language distribution, as the literature of the region will subsequently elucidate. The push-pull theory of Lee accommodates the *raison d'tre* for movements and migrations of the Bantu and, by extension, Bakor, the focus of this study[17].

**Review of Related Literature**

The review of related literature is thematic, reflecting related disciplines of oral history, history, linguistics, archaeology, ethnography and social anthropology. This approach hopes to present a comprehensive narrative of the people and their neighbours,contacts,and borrowings, and above all, the cultural tapestry of the Bakor people. Thus, origins, migrations, language spread and related issues of the Bantu and Bakor will constitute the themes under review.

**On the Origins and Migrations of Bakor and Bantu**

Issues of Origins, migration and spread of the Ejagham people and cultures have been interestingly examined and documented by indigenous scholars whose views corroborate Ejagham elders across their spread. The unanimity of views leaves no doubt that the Bakor, a variant of the Ejagham, are Bantoid, whose origins aretraced to the general area of the Nigeria-Cameroun border (Nsan – aragati), the cradle of the original Bantu of African history[18]. These accounts find expressions in Seminar works of Erim Odey, Sandy Onor, Frank Enor, Simon Majuk, all indigenous scholars of the region, amongst other references and inferences in general works and from foreign scholars[19]. Little variations which exist in oral testimonies concerning routes and places of sojourn during migrations, however, do not obscure the unanimity of the place of origin. Similarly, as was explicated in some theories of migrations and state formation, while some groups trace their original homeland to places outside their present abode, other traditions speak of independent or autochthonous origins in their current abode. These traditions have been captured by Frank Enor and Simon Majuk in some Bakor groups[20].

[16]Boahem, Adu A. (1983). *State Formation in Lower Guinea and the Chad-Niger Basin Presence*in Africa.
[17]Lee, Everest S. (1966), *A Theory of Migration Demography*: Population Association of America Vol. 3. No.1, pp. 47-57.
[18]Greenberg, Joseph (1959). *Essays in Linguistics*. Chicago: UAC Press.
[19]Majuk, Simon E. (2017). *The Bakor in Historical Perspective*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.
[20]Majuk, Simon E. (2017). *The Bakor in Historical Perspective*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.

It is important to point out that the controversy surrounding Bantu origins and migrations has also coloured the perspectives of Bakor informants, a few of whom vary between the Nigeria-Cameroun border and East Africa as their original homeland before migrations. These arguments, which are based on the various research of two notable linguists, shall be discussed in extenso under language. Suffice to state that George P. Murdock, relying on Joseph Greenberg's linguistic evidence, opines that the Bantu could not have originated from anywhere else than the Nigerian-Cameroonian border. He noted:

> The original homeland of the Bantu must have lain immediately adjacent to the territory of the speakers of other Macro-Bantu languages, i.e., in the Cameroun highlands and a thin lowland strip connecting later with the coast opposite the Island of Fernando Po.[21].

On the migration of Bantu ancestors, south and east, Murdock opines that expansion was made possible with the borrowing of Malaysian banana, taro and yams from Southeast Asia. In the absence of historical and archaeological dates, Murdock relied on two methods: inferences and linguistic evidence in arriving at an approximate date for the beginning of Bantu spread. Accordingly, "close genetic relationship among the various Bantu languages indicates the relative recency of their differentiation from a single ancestral speech"; this he established by gloto-chronology. The second method depended on inferences from known historical facts – the diffusion of Malaysian food across the continent to the Nigerian-Cameroun border, a process spanned over 600-900 years, thereby enabling Bantu migrations south-eastward in the 1st century AD.

Christopher Wrigley objected to Murdock's Malaysian food crops as the basis for Bantu expansion. His objection is anchored on reasons so well-articulated by Simon Majuk (2017) which do not need to detain this focus. Wrigley rather argued that knowledge of iron working tools enabled the Bantu political and military organisations, which in turn paved the way for their exploits from the rainforest of the equatorial to the grassland of the South. Whatever may have been the situation, the literature mentioned above has shed light on the early history of the Bantu and their Bakor descendants as a basis for understanding the origins and linguistic relationship of Bakor speakers.

**On the Bakor Language and Spread**

The Bakor language and its spread have not received commensurate attention from indigenous scholars as the history of their origins and migrations. Until recently, what appears as a classification of African languages and a linguistic map of Africa can be ascribed to Talbot, Crabbot, Johnstone, and Greenberg, all foreign scholars and experts in their field. Their perception of Ejagham and Bakor, their variant, gave vent to such descriptions as Ekoid Bantu, Semi-Bantu, Benue Congo, as the case may be[22]. A common denominator in their description

[21]Murdock, George P. (1959). *Africa: Its People and Their Culture.* London McGraw-Hill Book Company.
[22]Talbot, P. Amaury (1912). *In the shadow of the Bush*. London: MCMXII William Heinemann.


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is the undeniable fact that the language is in the Bantu Cluster, which is a larger family in the Niger-Congo.

Recently, the "unspoken fear concerning our fast-disappearing linguistic identity, cultural values and heritage, has induced the production of two remarkable documents: A compendium of Cross River State languages and the Ejagham Language Codification compiled by the Ejagham Language Codification Committee (ELCC). From the latter, emerged the Ejagham language orthography "for use in learning institutions domiciled in Ejagham lands in Nigeria and Cameroon. The lexical content of these texts corroborates the various materials gathered from fieldworkby this team of researchers on the Bakor dialects of Ejagham.

Of particular interest in the context of this study are the opposing viewpoints of Harry Johnstone and Joseph Greenberg, whose linguistic works devoted considerable time to studying African languages, of which Bantu is a member. There is a general agreement amongst these linguists that the Bantu languages form an organic whole from which a common origin can be ascribed. The "common origin" of the Bantu speakers has, however, raised several questions whose answer is polarised between the "great lake theory"(East Africa) of Johnstone and the Nigeria–Cameroon border region of Greenberg. These opposing viewpoints, as deposed earlier, added another perspective to traditions of Bakor and other groups which swayed between the Nigerian–Cameroon border and the East – Central Africa. Greenberg's analysis, however, won currency with wide acceptance. His analysis of the basic vocabulary of the Bantu was persuasive. Out of '50' Bantu nouns, 43 were found in the so-called Semi-Bantu region, ruling out the possibility that its speakers may have borrowed these words from elsewhere.

J. P. Sterk's linguistic model also lends credence to Greenberg. In his bid to shed light on the upper Cross River languages, he traces the ancestors to the Nigeria–Cameroon border as the aboriginal homeland before their primary migration. Earlier, it has been mentioned that Murdock had relied on linguistic evidence derived from Greenberg to ascribe the Nigeria–Cameroon border region as the ancestral homeland of the Bantu, corroborating traditions from many Cross River groups and beyond.

The archaeology of our focal study is infantile. However, in the modern Bakor settlements of the central and upper Cross River region, an impressive array of stone works by their ancestors is found. On the stones are several decorations, including the ancient ideographic writing, which was earlier found among the Cameroun highlanders. This writing, locally referred to as *Nsibidi,* became popular with the *Ekpe* and other cult groups who mastered the arts for their special usage in the region. Studies by Bassey Andah and Olalekan Akinade have also indicated that the general area within Obudu, Ogoja, Ikom and parts of Cameroun could well be the cradle of the Bantu civilisation[23].

[23]Andah, Bassey (1990). Prehistory of the Upper Cross River Region in Jaja, S. O. (et al), History & Culture of the Upper Cross River Enugu: Harris Publishers.


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Butressing the above further, Ekpo Eyo remarked that movement of people from a region or habitat to another was induced by factors such as "poor soil quality or insufficient water supply, natural disasters, inter-group feuds, invasion from stronger groups or even when young families decide to become independent by establishing a new homestead[24]. The above literature has undeniably drawn convincing historical, linguistic and cultural evidence of common origins of the Bakor speakers, equally adducing reasons for their expansion from their primary homeland. However, as language may not be a definitive factor for determining ethnic origins, this study further attempts to show how the related Bakor dialects of the Ejagham language are used to establish ethnicity. Effiong Aye attempted a rigorous and logical explanation that linguistic similarity is not a definitive index of the common origins of people. Using the Efik and Ibibio languages, Aye demonstrated that the mutual intelligibility of the Efik and Ibibio languages is not enough to confer a common origin of the two groups[25]. This study applies the technique of lexicostatistics to determine genetic relationships. This is done by comparing a set of commonly used vocabulary. The dialects that have the highest percentage of this common vocabulary are said to be closely related or derived from a common ancestor. About 50 common words from nine sub-ethnic groups of Bakor speakers were collected for analysis.

**Socio-Cultural Institutions**

The social and cultural institutions of Bakor groups reinforce evidence of common origin. From birth, burials and marriage rituals to chieftaincy, age-grade systems and ancestral reverence, warrior and sacred societies, the Bakor have replicated semblance practices with very little variation. Enor, Majuk and others have captured this cultural homogeneity with social and warrior clubs such as Ekpe, Mgbe, Ebiabu, Atam and so on, playing similar roles in the varying groups[2627].

**Bakor variants of Ejagham (Ekoid Bantu) language**

[24]Ekpo, Eyo & Slogar Christopher (2008), *The Terracottas of Calabar: Selections from Archaeological Collections of the Old Residency Museum*, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. External Preservation Fund.
[25]Aye, Efiong U (1990) *Efik Origins and Migrations Revisited: The Oriental View* in S. O. Jaja (et al) Old Calabar Revisited. Enugu: Harris Publishers.
[26]Enor, Frank N. (2007)Nta and Their Neighbours: Inter-group Relations in the Cross River Region of Nigeria. Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers
[27]Majuk, Simon E. (2017). *The Bakor in Historical Perspective*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.


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| S/N | ENGLISH | ABANYOM | NDE | NTA | NNAM | EKAJUK | NKIM | NKUUM | OFUTOP | AKIN (QUA) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Age | Okol | Nkpak-enghe | Okogo | Ekol | Ekul | Nda | Ndah | Nla | Nyah |
| 2. | Agree | Ntame | Tama | Tama | Etamme | Ebtamme | Ntame | Tama | Niena | Ankam |
| 3. | Animal | Nyam | Nyam | Nnyar | Nyam | Nyahm | Nyam | Nyiam | Nyam | Nyam |
| 4. | Adult | Nenkol | Mankogo | Monkogo | Nnekol | Nnekul | Nekol | Nnekol | Egamamnieh | Nimkoe |
| 5. | Anus | Mbagha-nub | Nebe-Nnab | Mbagha-nab | Ekpumnab | Nkpu-nnab | Nkatal | Ebongetele | Obin-nlap | Nfuk-Ifegip |
| 6. | Back | Njim | Njam | Njahm | Njahm | Njahm | Fegbar | Nyem | Nzam | Njim |
| 7. | Backyard | Njim-ntek | Njametek | Njahm-etek | Njahm-tahk | Njahm-tahk | Nemetak | Nihmtek | Nlap-anzu | Njim-efob |
| 8. | Bad | Ebay/Ekpabep | Ebibii | Ebibii | Ebii | Ebibii | Ibebe | Ibeb | Ebibii | Mbe |
| 9. | Beauty | Ano | Anor | Anor | Ano | Anor | Anor | Anor | Anoh | Ono |
| 10. | Bed | Egbangha | Esimi | Nonong | Egohdo | Edinong | Jiomooge | Jiom-inong | Ebubuna | Enong |
| 11. | Blood | Along | Anong | Anung | Along | Alung | Alongeg | Alongh | Alung | Awung |
| 12. | Bone | Ekap | Ekab | Ekab | Ekorp | Akap | Ikabe | Ikip | Ekab | Ekip |
| 13. | Buttock | Nnub | Nnab | Nnab | Nnap | Mbanghe-nnap | Nkatel | Itile | Nlab | Akav-gip |
| 14. | Canoe | Egbah | Egbar | Oebar | Egbang | Egbang | Impole0tot0 | Ubang | Ogbah | Okpeh |
| 15. | Cap | Ekpashi | Ekpasi | Ekpasi | Ekpashi | Ekpashi | Ikpo | Ikpo | Ekpasi | Isu |
| 16. | Chest | Ngang | Nghang | Nghang | Nghiang | Nghiang | Ikor-ronku | Ikrenku | Ngang | Mbinghi |
| 17. | Child | Mmon | Mmor | Mmor | Mmon | Mmon | Morne | Mmoni | Mmuon | Mmon |
| 18. | Children | Abon | Abor | Abor | Abon | Abonn | Abome | Abon | Abuon | Abon |
| 19. | Cock | Nnomankok | Nno-ankok | Nno-ankok | Nkiok | Nkiok | Nkoke | Nkock | Nluma-Nkwok | Nkok |
| 20. | Coconut | Ebang | Mmok-ambang | Mmok-ambang | Ebang-Nkagahra | Ebang-Nkan | Ibang | Ibangi | Mbang-Okaghara | Mbang |
| 21. | Come | Ba | Ba | Ba | Ba | Ba | Ba | Ba | Bah | Ba |


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| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 25. | Deaf | Nlak-atang | Nlagatong | Nnagatong | Nlak-atong | Alake-atung | Ntematon | Ntem-atong | Ntagha-atung | Nyah-atong |
| 26. | Debt | Mbor | Mbor | Mbor | Mbong | Mbong | Ikone | Ikon | Mbuoh | Adim |
| 27. | Defecate | Nvii-abing | Nnyi-abing | Nvii-abing | Nvii-abeng | Nvii | Nveabeng | Nvii | Nuvi | Ye-abang |
| 28. | Die | Kpor | Kpor | Kpor | Kpor | Kpo | Poro | Kpor | Kpor | Kpor |
| 29. | Ear | Otong | Etong | Otong | Etong | Etung | Uton | Utong | Otung | Otung |
| 30. | Egg | Eji | Eji | Eji | Eiee | Eiee | Agi-Nkogi | Iji | Ezin Kwok | Eji-nkok |
| 31. | Elephant | Niok | Niok | Niok | Niog | Niok | Yamikol | Niog | Nzok | Nvok |
| 32. | Forget | Yehna | Tantet | Yini | Yini | Yini | Yaidi | Yedi | Yina | Iyina |
| 33. | Fruit | Nkap-Oteh | Nkab-eteh | Nkab-eteh | Nkab-ete | Nkab-eti | Amog | Mnung | Nsum-eti | Nkab-ete |
| 34. | Girl | Mon-Okal/Mgbima | Mmo-anka | Mmo-ankar | Mmonmo-Nkal | Mnon-ankal | Nnekal | Mmoni-annenkal | Mmounienkan | Mnon-Nnekee |
| 35. | Goat | Mbol | Mbon | Mbohn | Mbol | Mbuul | Mbol | Mbol | Mbun | Mboe |
| 36. | God | Osowo | Esowo | Osorwor | Eshowo | Eshowo | Ishor | Ishowor | Osuowor | Asi |
| 37. | Grind | Gork | Gork | Gog | Gog | Gog | Gogi | Gorgi | Guog | Gog |
| 38. | Head | Eshi | Esi | Isii | Eshi | Eshi | Ishi | Ishi | Esih | Esi |
| 39. | Heart | Litham | Netim | Neteh | Ettam | Ebtim | Item | Item | Etihon | Mbinghi |
| 40. | Horn | Ntang | Ntangha | Ntang | Ntang | Ntang | Ntang | Ntang | Ntangha | Amiek |
| 41. | Horse | Etek | Njo | Nju | Etek | Etek | Itek | Itab | Nzu | Nju |
| 42. | Hunger | Njal | Njan | Njan | Njal | Njal | Njali | Njali | Nzan | Njaeh |
| 43. | Me | Mme | Mme | Mme | Mme | Mme | Mme | Meh | Mme | Mme |
| 44. | Laugh | Yol-ashol | Yon-ason | Yon-ason | Wohl-ashol | Wohl-ashol | Ashol | Asholl | Nsuon | Nsoe |
| 45. | Life | Likpen | Nnekphine | Nnekphane | Ebkpane | Ebkpin | Ikben | Ikpen | Ekpin | Ekpen |
| 46. | Money | Akpugah | Akpugha | Akpugha | Akpogho | Akpoko | Akobo | Anyeri | Akpuga | Nnte |
| 47. | Monkey | Mbok | Mbok | Mbohk | Mbok | Mbuk | Mboghi | Mbogi | Mbuok | Mbok |
| 48. | Mine | Eiama/jiiana | Jinjha | Jjiha | Eiame | Eiame | Iiama | Iiama | Yhangha | Ama |
| 49. | Medicine | Ekam | Ekam | Ekahm | Ekehm | Ekahm | Illing | Illing | Etikpa | Mbian |
| 50. | Morning | Ofòranfo | Efurusu | Efurusu | Efonfon | Efunfu | Ufofo | Ufofo | Ofurofu | Ofo |
| 51. | Mosquito | Mbo | Mbuu | Mbuu | Mbo | Mbu | Nbo | | Mkpiekpie | Abum |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 53. | Neck | Emel | Emen | Emen | Emehl | Emehl | Imell | Imel | Emien | Ntori-Eme |
| 54. | Niddle | Ngah | Aga | Ngah | Ngah | Ngah | Inyiyerr | Ndhne | Nnyahazu | Iioe |
| 55. | New | Mfe | Nfe-mfe | Nemfe | Mfemfe | Nfemfe | Nfen-fe | Mfemfe | Efiefe | Efe |

**Source**: Field work by this team of researchers between March 11, 2025-January, and January 2026. About 50 basic vocabulary words were compared for similarities in sound and meaning. These similarities are not accidental. They have historical connections of sound and meaning. A few differences are seen as a result of years of separation and borrowing from new environments.


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**Discussion**

The Ejagham language is one of the most resilient components of Ejagham culture. The dialects are thriving today and carrying on the traditions and knowledge of the past, as native dialects and communication medium in the Cross River Region, cutting across Manyu division in the Southwest province of the Republic of Cameroun, with ancestral language form in tangible scripts and intangible spoken variety, dating back to more than 2, 000 years ago.

From the sub-ethnic groups of Etung, Nta, Nnam, Nde, Abanyom in the central region, to the Ekajuk, Nkuum and Nkim in the north, the epic Ejagham speaking groups have a direct language relationship with the Qua (Akin), ethnic language groups in the lower South region of Calabar and its environs. The Cross River, deriving its source from the Cameroun mountains and the Qua River, from very early dates, have been a significant artery of diffusion and movements through its adjoining forest as reflected in their migration traditions. The pattern of migrations from their cradle clearly illustrates long and short movements at varying times from about the first century A.D to the advent of the Portuguese on the shores of the Cross River in the 15th century. This discussion is thus driven by migration theories hitherto elaborated.

Movements of these groups and their cultures have been attributed to so many factors, including slave raiding from more powerful dynasties, family feuds, the search for more and conclusive environments and the advent of the Portuguese in the Cross River. Majuk noted that Portuguese activities in the coastal region of Cross River induced many hinterland groups to locate the orbit of trade, ostensibly, sites close to the rivers. Borrowings and exchange of cultural and trade items, including tangible and intangible materials, define the people who occupied the region, making allowances for close affinities in their lexicology, birth andburial rituals, secret clubs and warrior cult groups, the *Nsibidi* ideograms which captured the attention of Talbot and so on. While the Ejagham dialects are not well documented, the language ideograms and frescoes paintings are surviving evidence of the creative ingenuity of the Ejagham and related languages spoken in the Manyu Division of the Cameroun. The over 100 total characters design across seven horizontal rows also showed off intensely skilled craftsmanship and would have been done with advanced tools. For time speculations on their meanings, these researchers hypothesise that the writing could explain the day-to-day human activities pertaining to male and female affairs, trade currencies, figures and so on. Murdock's anthropological discovery among the Cameroun highlanders, a Bantoid sub-family, lends credence to the historical affinities and relationships of ancestors of the present Bakor (Ejagham) who recall this region in their migration history. Ejagham ancestors share with the Mum and Vai the credit of inventing a system of writing – the *Nsibidi* ideograms[28], widely in use in the Cross River region and beyond. The fact that these cultures are alien or not reported among the Great Lakes region further obscures the likelihood that the Bakor are of Eastern origin.

[28]Murdock, George P. (1959). *Africa: Its People and Their Culture.* London McGraw-Hill Book Company.


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The material culture of Bakor Monoliths (stone carvings in anthropomorphic forms), representing ancestors, priest kings and symbolic cult objects, brings Ejagham ancient stone carving works to archaeological sites of standing monolith columns with lino-relief engravings depicting the *Nsibidi* inscriptions and their embellishments, birthed the oldest West African rock inscriptions. In the Bakor landscape of the central and upper Cross River region, where the cluttered forest dwellings reveal these arts, a recent rock art project has been uncovered and invites visitors to step into a preserved past. The sites are not simply unusual sites; they are a carefully orchestrated environment that revives daily life and the cultural atmosphere of the ancient Ejagham (Bakor) people with the precision of archaeological re-enactment and the intimacy of the people's lived experience.

Indeed, as Tucker Childs rightly noted, linguistic evidence has contributed immensely to understanding Bantu expansions and contributions to African history. Their acquisition of iron technology, which the Bantu helped in spreading in their movements, enabled pottery and mixed farming techniques[29]. Historical reconstruction has been immensely enriched by linguistics, enabling language comparison and the basis on which the South West Cameroun region was depicted as the originating homeland of Bantu expansion. Oral accounts obtained from informants of the varying Bakor groups corroborate this evidence, thereby halting the East African origins of the Bantu and, by extension, Bakor.

**Findings**

This team of researchers find convincing evidence that, until further proof is unearthed, the Bakor speakers are descendants of the aboriginal Bantu of the Nigeria-Cameroon border region. Movements from that cradle at varying times from the first century AD were enabled by the acquisition of iron technology, which helped their forested exploits and agricultural propensity. The Bakor, in their sub-ethnic groupings, are from all indications off-springs of a common ancestor, as the lexical similarities have shown little differences in vocabulary resulting from years of separation from the cradle. The Bakor dialect of Ejagham, unlike other groups, testifies to the common origins of the people.

**Conclusion**

This study has attempted a comparative analysis of the origins and spread of the Bakor language spoken in Cross River, Nigeria and beyond. The comparison has been based on their historical experiences, socio-cultural institutions, and linguistic examination of their lexical structure, whose speakers spread across the entire Cross River region, to the Manyu Division of Southwest province of the Republic of Cameroon. The examination has been supported by oral historical accounts, ethnographic and anthropological works and the infantile archaeological surveys of selected spaces around the region, all of which testify to the cultural unity and historical migrations of the varying Ejagham

[29]Childs, G. Tucker (2003). *An Introduction to African Languages*. John Benjamin Publishing Company.


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descendants of the ancient Bantu from their cradle in locations around the Nigeria–Cameroon border. Ancestors of Bakor fanned out at different periods to occupy new spaces at a time when agricultural tools permitted such long and short-distance migrations. While the Ejagham Bakor moved northwest of the homeland through the Boki forest to birth the present central and northern Bakor groups, others moved southeast through Mbakang and the Cross River to birth the southern Ejagham groups. Indeed, Bakor migration is synonymous with Bantu expansions to the South, Central and Eastern Africa to constitute the Bantus of those regions.

The study reaffirms that if two people, different in geographical location and culture, speak related languages, either both have descended from a single ancestral society or the ancestor of one has at some point in the past had some intimate contact with the group thus related. The case of *Bakor* clearly provides dependable evidence of historical connections. Ethnographic distribution, physical anthropology, oral traditions, archaeology, and linguistic evidence show historical movements or cultural diffusion from the West Africa region as the cradle of the Ejagham descendants of the ancient Bantu. The underlying cultural similarities as well as diversities clearly show that the people of the forest and Savannah region originated from a common stock referred to as the Niger-Congo family, suggesting a common ancestral speech, as the lexical structure of *Bakor* speakers has been replicated. The resilience of the Ejagham language, widely spoken in the Cross River region, can be further preserved by cultural studies, deliberate government policy with the aim to promote development, cultural identities and preservation and bridge-building among groups living far apart.


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