

OUTLINES OF THE PHONOLOGY OF THE GOKANA DIALECT OF OSONI

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1. Gokana is one of the main dialects of the language spoken by the people usually termed Osoni. This name, they believe, was originally given to them by the Kalabari people further to the south, but has been adopted both by the tribe itself and its neighbours.

The Osoni live almost completely in Osoni Division of Port Harcourt Province, Eastern Nigeria, in an area between, approximately, latitudes 4° 05' and 4° 20' North and longitudes 7° 10' and 7° 30' East. The divisional headquarters is the town of Bori, some 25 miles east-south-east of Port Harcourt. At the last census, the population of the whole Division was 156,717. Allowing for the presence of small numbers of different tribes, one may estimate the Osoni people as numbering something of the order of 130,000.

The three dialects, or probably groups of dialects, among the Osoni are Kana, spoken to the north and east of Bori, Tai, the smallest group, spoken to the north-west of Bori, and Gokana, spoken to the south. The dialect described in this paper was elicited from two informants from the village of Bodo (bóóḁḁ), some 8 miles to the south-east of Bori, and in the Gokana area.¹

2. The phonemes of Gokana are consonants, vowels, and a nasal resonant. There is a further element, as yet of indeterminate status but provisionally classed as a juncture. The consonants are voiceless and voiced plosives of five orders, voiceless and voiced fricatives of three orders, voiced nasals of two orders, and one order of voiced liquid.

3. The voiceless plosives are p, t, c, k, kp. All are realised by unaspirated, moderately fortis allophones.

p is bilabial: pfi 'silence', peɛ 'jump', pó 'wing', púm 'brain',

t is alveolar: taa 'three', té 'tree', tɔ 'house', tù 'take'.

c is palatal. Considerable individual variation appears to exist. One informant uses a palatalised [k] regularly in all positions; the other ranges between this and a dorso-palatal [c] with a slightly affricated release, the latter regularly before front vowels and occasionally before back vowels. Examples: cáá 'stranger', cě 'grieve', cò 'spoil', cúú 'testicle'.

k is velar: kà 'mother', ké 'egg', kò 'cockroach', koḁ 'horn', kú 'tree-trunk'.

kp is labiovelar: kpá 'shout', kpé 'metal, bicycle', kpò 'cut'.

The voiced plosives are b, d, ɟ, g, gb. In pre-vocalic position, all are realised by voiced, unaspirated, moderately fortis allophones. In post-vocalic word-final position, the allophones of b, g are characterised by non-release of the occlusion and by rapid decrescendo voicing.

b is bilabial: bá 'hand', boo 'rain', bùrà 'think', pòbkà 'big', ðib 'hit', òb 'ten'.

d is alveolar: dáá 'sleep', dee 'day', dí 'dirty', dodoo 'red flower'.

¹ My informants were Mr A. T. Badey and Mr C. K. Deage, to both of whom are due my best thanks for their services and for their patience. I am also grateful to former colleagues, Peter Ladefoged and John Spencer, for several helpful comments and suggestions on an early draft of this paper.

