



Statue Yoruba, Nigéria. *National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington.*

□ Ancient Egyptian and Modern Yoruba : Phonetic Regularity

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Abstract : *This exploratory study, according to the linguistic comparative method, tries to show that large numbers of cognate lexical items are available between Egyptian pharaonic language and Modern Yoruba of Nigeria.*

Résumé : *Égyptien ancien et Yoruba moderne : régularité phonétique. Cette étude exploratrice, selon la méthode de la linguistique comparative, essaie de montrer qu'il existe une quantité suffisante de faits lexicaux hérités entre l'Égyptien pharaonique et le Yoruba moderne parlé au Nigéria.*

1. Question of method in comparative linguistics

Any language in the world does not change its tradition from its birth to its death. *Greek* language, with its many dialects, through time and space, since the Mycenaean idiom, will always remain *Greek*, and never some other language like *Phoenician* or *Latin*. Likewise, Yoruba has been always *Yoruba* since the remote past. If *Yoruba* and *Ancient Egyptian pharaonic language* show very close sound correspondences between them, it means that the two languages are genetically related.

Indeed, chance similarities between two or more languages do not obey to any system, that is, there is no regularity by mere chance or at random. Let us be more explicit.

Phonetic laws and sound correspondences have exceptions, but their help is very crucial in eliminating false etymologies and dubitable reconstructions. For example Greek *theos*, “god”, and Latin *deus*, “god”, seem to be very similar, therefore related, and developed from a common predialectal stock. To technically decide the following question must be answered : “In what context or environment, that is, in what linguistic conditions Latin *d* corresponds to Greek *th* (*thēta*) ?”

We know that there are a few pairs in which Latin *d* corresponds to Greek *th* : Latin *condere*, Greek *syn-theinai*, “to put together” ; Latin *viduos*, Greek *ēitheos*, “unmarried”. Latin *d* corresponds to Greek *th* only in the interior of a word between vowels and after *n*. Therefore , Greek *theos* and Latin *deus* cannot be cognate words from one common root.

Thus, the task of historical linguistics is basically grounded in the hypothesis of the regularity of phonetic laws and sound correspondences. A series of lexical facts is always

required in order to eliminate chance similarities. A series of lexical data gives to the comparison its systematic appearance¹.

Two or more languages from the same geographical area give a lot of problems to the linguist because regularity can be due to contamination, dialect mixture, influence, borrowing of technical terms. For example, Greek and Latin influence is shown in Oscan deities, few common nouns and in some official titles : “*The borrowed words consist mainly of Greek words in Oscan, introduce from the neighbouring Greek colonies.*”².

Ancient Egyptian pharaonic Language and Modern Yoruba language are chronologically and geographically two distant languages, however, if we find regularity in comparing them, the conviction of their common ancestry becomes more and more probable : they belong to the same linguistic tradition and community, although their historical and spatial depth is enormous.

In his classification of African languages, the great scholar Joseph H. Greenberg completely missed this crucial point of comparative method, that is, correspondences and laws of sound change. Therefore, his classificatory models are not required by the rigors of the comparative method. There is no systematic sound correspondences across African languages investigated. Greenberg’s method is simply the technique of the description of “mass comparison” without comparative method³.

2. Ethnographic linguistic data

For a scholar like Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski (1884-1942) everything from non-Western world was “primitive” : hieroglyphic script and Egyptian grammar, primitive languages of Melanesian tribes of Eastern New Guinea, grammars and vocabularies of Oceanic languages, culture and tradition of a native community in a primitive tongue, primitive conversations of natives in the Trobriand Islands, N.E. New Guinea ; tribal psychology in ceremonial life, savage psychology, the primitive mind and the nature of primitive speech, the barbarous primitive categories, Primitive Linguistics by analyzing the mind of Primitive Man⁴.

This idea of “Primitive languages”, “Primitive Linguistics”, and “Primitive Man” is simply racist and Eurocentrist. There is no science with such concepts developed since David Hume (1711-1776) and Hegel (1770-1831).

Consequently, all ethnographic linguistic data, grammars and dictionaries written in 18th – 19th and 20th centuries on African languages must be used with extreme forethought.

For example, Christian missionaries have translated the word *o-kúé* in Bantu-Mbochi (Congo) by “evil” or “devil” (demon) ; in fact, *o-kúé* , pl. *i-kúé* means “a dead who was

¹ Morris Swadesh, *The Origin and Diversification of Language*, Chicago, Aldine, 1971.

² Carl Darling Buck, *Grammar of Oscan and Umbrian*, Boston, Ginn & C°, 1904, Zürich, Georg Olms Verlag, 1995, p. 20.

³ J.H. Greenberg, *Languages of Africa*, The Hague, Mouton, 1963. Critique by I. Fodor.







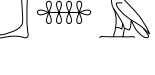

⁴ B. Malinowski, *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Language*, pp. 296-336 in the book by C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning. A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and C°, 1923, 1926, 1930, 1936, 1946.

became to be a powerful spirit in the afterlife”. The Egyptian correspondent is *akh*, “to become a spirit” of Rā in the afterlife ; *akhw*, “power” of god, etc. the concept of power, glory, mastery is the pre-eminent meaning of the word *o-kúé*.


3. Egyptian and Yoruba are cognates on the basis of regular sound correspondences

Here are some linguistic relationships between **Ancient Egyptian Pharaonic** (Lower Nile Valley) and **Yoruba** (Nigeria, West Africa) on the level of lexical frequency, and the same consonantal structure does appear focussing on initial consonant system.












3.1. Lexical correspondences by plain labial stop /b/ initial


	Ancient Egyptian	Yoruba
1.	 : <i>b3, ba</i> : “to hoe” crops (<i>b-</i>)	<i>bà</i> : “to germinate” ; agrarian world (<i>b-</i>)
2.	 : <i>bw, bu</i> : “place” (<i>b-</i>) ; “locality”	<i>i-bú, ibú</i> : “place” (<i>b-</i>) ; <i>ibi</i> Mbochi (Bantu) : <i>e-bé</i> “: place” (<i>b-</i>) Pulaar ⁵ : <i>boowal</i> : “place” (<i>boo-wal</i>) where <i>-wal</i> seems to be an additional element.
3.	 <i>bi</i> : “good deed” (<i>b-</i>)	<i>bi</i> : “to give birth to”, what is a real good deed (semantic evolution) (<i>b-</i>) Mbochi (Bantu) : <i>bii</i> : “good character” (<i>b-</i>)
4.	 : <i>bw, bu</i> : “to detest”, “to abominate” (<i>b-</i>)	<i>bú</i> : “to abuse” (same semantic category) (<i>b-</i>)
5.	 : <i>bs, bes</i> : “to initiate into” (<i>b-s</i>)	<i>bùsi</i> : “to bless” (<i>b-s</i>). Initiation is blessing.
6.	 : <i>bs</i> : “secret” (noun) (<i>b-s</i>)	<i>bósé</i> : “secretly” (<i>b-s</i>) Mbochi (Bantu) : <i>bòsò</i> , very secret initiation (<i>b-s</i>)
7.	 : <i>bs3, besa</i> : “to protect” (<i>b-s</i>)	<i>bùsà</i> : “to honor, respect” (<i>b-s</i>) : to respect implies care and protection in African civilizations. Mbochi (Bantu) ! : <i>M-Bòsà</i> , He who is honoured and respected for his protection
8.	 : <i>bdt</i> : “emmer” (corn). Coptic : <i>bote, boti</i> “barley” (<i>b-t</i>)	<i>bóti</i> : malt of Guinea corn (<i>b-t</i>)

⁵ Cf. A. M. Lam, *De l'origine égyptienne des Peuls*, Paris, Khepera/Présence Africaine, 1993, p. 394.






The consonant /b/ is regular in initial position and introduces the same elements : b-/b-, b-s/b-s, b-d/t : b-t. In hieroglyphic script the “foot” is a  unilateral phonogram with sound-value /b/.






3.2 Lexical correspondences by labial nasal /m/ initial

	Ancient Egyptian	Yoruba
1.	 : <i>m</i> : “but”, conjunctive	<i>àmá</i> : “but”
2.	 : <i>mw</i> : “water”   : <i>mi</i> : “waters” (<i>Urkunden</i> , IV, 616, 9)	<i>omi</i> : “water” Mbochi (Bantu) : <i>máá</i> : “water”
3.	   : <i>m33, maa</i> : “to see, look”	<i>mo</i> : “aware” Mbochi (Bantu) : <i>máá</i> : “awake”
4.	   : <i>m, ām</i> , : “to know, understand”. Coptic : <i>eime, emi, ini, id.</i>	<i>mò</i> : “to know, understand”
5.	 : <i>m, mi</i> : “take”, Imperative Coptic <i>mo, ma, id</i>	<i>mu</i> : “to take”. Mbochi (Bantu) : <i>má</i> : “take”, Imperative



The Egyptian sign,  an owl depicted, is a unilateral phonogram with sound-value /m/, that is, a labial nasal consonant introducing the same elements in above lexical patterns. Consonantal correspondences are very regular in the same morphological environment.

3.3 Lexical correspondences by nasal alveolar /n/ initial and by approximant labial /w/ initial

	Ancient Egyptian	Yoruba
1.	  : <i>wn (u-n), wnn(u-nn)</i> : “to be, to exist”	<i>ni</i> : “to exist” (-n-) Wolof (Senegambia) : <i>ne</i> : “to be, to exist” Commun Bantu : + <i>nì</i> , + <i>nè</i> , + <i>nà</i> , id.
2.	 <i>ini</i> : “to bring, fetch” : Coptic : <i>eine, ine, ini, ni, id.</i>	<i>òna</i> : “access” (-n-) Mbochi (Bantu) : <i>ané</i> : “path” (way of bringing)
3.	  : <i>Iwnw (Iunu)</i> : “City of the Pillar”, Greek : <i>Heliopolis</i> (City of the Sun), Bible : <i>On</i>	<i>òwòn</i> : “pillar, column” (<i>ow-on</i>) Egyptian <i>iwn</i> “pillar” and Yoruba <i>òwòn</i> “pillar” are morphologically and semantically identical.

	 : <i>Iwn</i> “pillar” (<i>Pyramid Texts</i> , 524) (<i>iw-n</i>)	
4.	 : <i>iw</i> “come”	<i>wá</i> : “come” Pulaar : <i>iw-</i> : “come from” ⁶ Mbochi (Bantu): <i>-yáá</i> : “come”. Mbochi uses approximant palatal /y/ when Egyptian and Yoruba show the approximant labial /w/, always in the initial position.
5.	 : <i>iw</i> : “is, are, was” (copula “to be”)	<i>wà</i> : “to be” (locative) Akan : <i>wɔ̀</i> : “to be” (locative)
6.	 : <i>ʒw</i> “death” (<i>Papyrus Kahun</i> , 10,6)  : <i>wi</i> : “mummy-case”	<i>kù</i> : “to die” ; <i>ikú</i> : “death” Akan : <i>wù</i> : “to die” ; <i>owú</i> “death” Pulaar : <i>aaw-</i> : “rotten” (“pourrir”) ⁷ Mbochi (Bantu) : <i>i-wa</i> : “to die”, and <i>lekú, ikú</i> : “death”. The form <i>wù, wá</i> is very old, Egyptian having <i>ʒw, aw, wi</i> .

What it is very interesting is the fact that the Mbochi language in Central Africa (Congo) shows two forms : *wa* and *iku, leku*, respectively for the verbal form and the substantive or nominal form. Yoruba has *ku* and *iku*, and Akan *wu* and *owu*, exclusively. Possibly, the Common Bantu must have two forms : **ku* “to die ; death”, and **wu/wa* “to die”.

The negative impersonal in Egyptian language is  *m* “do not” with this script variation : 

Yoruba displays the same negation with the same structure : *ma* “do not”. Akan confirms : *mma* “do not”. This is a specific grammatical feature : Egyptian *m*, Yoruba *ma*, and Akan *mma*. Possibly the Egyptian *m* was vocalized + *ma* “do not”. Modern African languages are only the languages in the world to help the vocalization of Ancient Egyptian pharaonic language. Of course, the contribution of Coptic to this thorny question of the vocalization of Ancient Egyptian remains crucial.

Experts give Proto-Bantu **-bé* “bad”, and Common Bantu **-bi* “bad”. Yoruba is *ibi* “evil”, and Akan *bɔni* “bad”. Nobody has never explained the /n/ of Akan *bɔni*, and other Atlantic African languages (*bone, bani, bōn, buon*, etc.). To clearly perceive the problem it is necessary to request Egyptian facts :






Ancient Egyptian :  *bin* : “bad”
Coptic : *bōně, boni, baně* : “bad”

⁶ Cf. A. M. Lam, *De l'origine égyptienne des Peuls*, Paris, Khepera/Présence Africaine, 1993, p. 388.

⁷ Cf. A. M. Lam, *De l'origine égyptienne des Peuls*, Paris, Khepera/Présence Africaine, 1993, p. 411.

Ancient Egyptian, Coptic, West African languages (Akan, Bamana/Bambara, Wolof, Pulaar, Dogon, Songhay, etc.) have /b/ introducing /n/ : *b-n* (*bin, bon, bōnĕ, bōni*, etc.). Proto-Bantu and Common Bantu are not able to explain the /n/ of the Akan *bōni* “bad”. So the method of presenting Common Bantu as comparative prescription can seriously blind researchers. The reconstruction **-bi/be* “bad” of Common Bantu completely misses a native fact as the term “bad” in most African languages all over the continent.

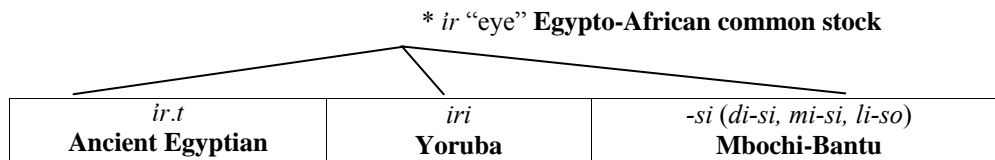
4. Lexical correspondences by alveolar liquid /r/ initial

	Ancient Egyptian	Yoruba
1.	 <i>ir.t</i> : “eye” The -t is not part of the radical Coptic : <i>ĕyĕr, yĕr</i> : “eye”	<i>iri</i> : “to see” (with eyes) Pulaar : <i>yitere</i> : “eye” ⁸ Mbochi-Bantu : <i>dī-sì</i> : “eye”, plural <i>mi-sì</i> : the word is basically -sì “eye” ; if the /r/ is no longer rhotic, then it can change into liquid /l/ and nasal /n/, or into fricative alveolar /s/ : (<i>r-/l-/n-</i>) ; (<i>r-/s-</i>). These sound changes do occur in many languages in the world.
2.	 : <i>irw, iru</i> “aspect, form, nature” (-r-)	<i>irí</i> : “aspect, form” (-r-) Pulaar : <i>yeraa</i> : “form”(size) ⁹
3.	 : <i>rꜥ, ra</i> “sun”, “day”, “time” (r-) Coptic : <i>re, ri, le</i> (r-/l-)	<i>ru</i> : “to rise” (as sun), “to spring up” (r-) <i>ri</i> “prior to this time” (r-) Mbochi-Bantu : <i>mu-ésé</i> : “heat from the sun”, plural : <i>mi-ésé</i> (-r-/s-)
4.	 : <i>rwꜣ, rwa</i> : “to consider” doing something (r-)	<i>rò</i> : “to imagine”, “to conceive” (r-)
5.	 : <i>r, rꜣ</i> , “mouth” Coptic : <i>ro, lo, id.</i>	<i>ró</i> : “to give sound” with mouth Mbochi-Bantu : <i>ṣ-nṣṣ</i> : “mouth” (r-/l-/n-) Akan : <i>anū</i> : “mouth” Common Bantu : <i>*-nùà</i> : “mouth”

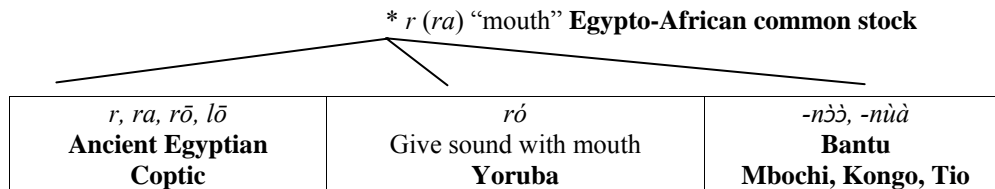
It is almost impossible for a language to borrow from another language basic words such as “eye”, “mouth”, “sun”, because they obviously belong to the basic vocabulary filter of any language in the world and these lexical items help, in addition, to reconstruct the predialectal common origin, as follows :

⁸ Cf. A. M. Lam, *De l'origine égyptienne des Peuls*, Paris, Khepera/Présence Africaine, 1993, p. 377.

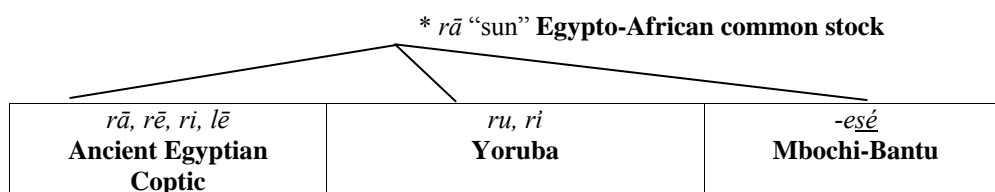
⁹ Cf. A. M. Lam, *De l'origine égyptienne des Peuls*, Paris, Khepera/Présence Africaine, 1993, p. 377.



The sound change is normal : *r/r/s*, from liquid to fricative in initial position.



The sound change is usual : *r-/l-/n-*



The sound change *r-/l-/s-* is well expected. For sure, there are no “Afro-Asiatic” cognate lexical items to be put on balance together with the linguistic reconstruction above. The so-called “**Afro-Asiatic Family**” is but an ideological and racist position. There is no scientific evidence to technically test “Afro-Asiatic” hypothesis.

Indeed, technically speaking, there is no one single scientific evidence of “Afro-Asiatic Family”, and linguistic data do not allow at all considering “Afro-Asiatic” as a linguistic possibility. The facts are plainly clear crystal as follows :




Egypto-African	Semitic	Berber
+ <i>r/rā</i> : “sun”	+ <i>šmš</i> : “sun”	+ <i>tfkt</i> : “sun”
Ancient Egyptian : <i>r^c, rā</i>	Akkadian : <i>šamaš</i>	<i>tafukt</i>
Coptic : <i>rē, rēi, ri</i>	Ugaritic : <i>špš</i>	
Sidamo (Cushitic) : <i>arrisō</i>	Hebrew : <i>šemeš</i>	
Saho-Afar (Cushitic) : <i>ayrō</i>	Arabic : <i>šams</i>	
Rendille (Kenya) : <i>orr’ah</i>		
Songhay (Niger) : <i>ra</i>		
Vai (Liberia) : <i>ra</i>		
Gbin (Atlantic) : <i>ra</i>		
Kono (Atlantic) : <i>ra</i>		
Numu (Atlantic) : <i>re</i>		
Huela : <i>re</i>		
Ligbi : <i>re</i>		
Yoruba (Nigeria) : <i>ru</i> (to rise as sun)		
Mbochi-Bantu : <i>mu-esé (r-/s-)</i>		




The **Indo-European family** also stands by itself as follows : +*sāwel*, +*sūl* “sun”, **Sanskrit** : *sūra-*, *sūrya*, **Gothic** : *sauil* (*Sunno*), **Latin** : *sōl* (**Spanish** : *sol*, **French** : *soleil, solaire*), **English** : *sun* (*solar*), **German** : *Sonne*, **Lithuanian** : *sáule*, etc.

Egypto-African		Semitic	Berber	
+ <i>r, r̄, ra</i> : “mouth”		+ <i>p</i> : “mouth”	+ <i>imi</i> : “mouth”	
Ancient Egyptian :	<i>r̄, ra</i>	Akkadian :	<i>pu</i>	Ghadamsi : <i>ami</i>
Coptic :	<i>ra, rō, ro, rě,</i> <i>la,</i>	Ugaritic :	<i>p</i>	Zenaga : <i>immi</i>
	<i>lō, lě</i>	Hebrew :	<i>pē</i>	
Isekiri (Nigeria) :	<i>arū</i>	Phoenician :	<i>p</i>	
Yoruba :	<i>ró</i>	Arabic : <i>fam</i> , pl. <i>afām</i>		
	(give sound with mouth)	Arabic (North) : <i>fū</i>		
Bozo (Atlantic) :	<i>lo</i>	Ethiopian : (Ge’ez) : <i>‘af</i>		
Kpele :	<i>la</i>			
Sarakolle (Mali) :	<i>la</i>			
Busa :	<i>le</i>			
Guro (Côte d’Ivoire) :	<i>le</i>			
Ndemli (Benue-Congo) :	<i>lu</i>			
Akan :	<i>anū</i>			
Mbochi-Bantu :	- <i>nòò, nùà</i>			

The sound change is usual : *r-/l-/n-*. “Afro-Asiatic” implies that Egyptian *rō*, Semitic *p* and Berber *imi* derive from a common predialectal stock, namely “Afro-Asiatic”, which, in good Linguistics, should be the common family, the common origin of the actual languages (Egyptian, Semitic, and Berber). How ? “Afro-Asiatic” is just Eurocentric bad lie. A. M. Lam gives the sign *loow-* in pulaar meaning “to put in the mouth”. This fits well with the sound change *r-/l-/n-*.

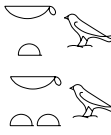


5. Lexical correspondences by unvoiced alveolar fricative /s/ initial

	Ancient Egyptian	Yoruba
1.	 : <i>s̄, sa</i> : “protection”, “amulet”  : <i>s̄w, sau (sa-u)</i> : “magician”, “medicine-man”	<i>sà</i> : “to apply medicine” (healing, protection) Akan : <i>sà</i> : “to heal” Mbochi-Bantu : <i>i-sàà</i> : “to heal” <i>(Lá sàà ǰǰni, “he/she is healing a sick person”)</i>
2.	 : <i>s̄, sa</i> : “knife”	<i>sà</i> : “to make incisions” with a (ritual) knife

3.	 : <i>s3w, sau</i> : “to cut down” trees. Not a causative verbal pattern (s-) : CV	<i>s3</i> : “to put down” Akan : <i>sué</i> : “to put down” (s-) : CV
4.	 : <i>sisi</i> “hurry” <i>(Faulkner’s Dictionary, p. 244, bottom)</i> ; (s-s) : CC	<i>isisi-jí</i> : “now” Akan : <i>sesée-jí</i> : “now” Mbochi-Bantu : <i>èsisì</i> : “suddenly” (s-s) : CC
5.	 : <i>sin</i> “to run” ; “courier” (noun) (s-n) : CC	Mbochi-Bantu : <i>o-sinà</i> : “rush”, “speed”, (s-n/s-n) : CC

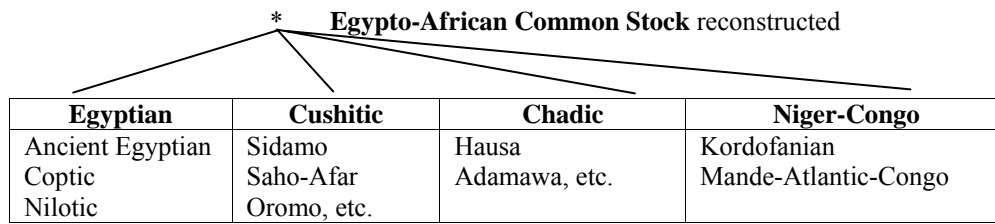
6. Another example with the velar /k/ initial

Discovering regular sound correspondences between Egyptian (Lower Nile Valley) and Yoruba (West Africa) is made obvious by all previous lexical items examined, and cognates do have similarities in both form and meaning. Here another example with the velar /k/ initial :

	Ancient Egyptian	Yoruba
1.	 : <i>kt</i> “pettiness” : <i>ktt</i> “small”	<i>kere, kékeré</i> : “small”, “little” Akan : <i>kiti-kiti</i> , duplication of <i>kiti</i> : “small” Mbochi-Bantu - <i>kié, -ké</i> : “small, little” Proto-Bantu : + <i>-ké</i> : “small” Commun Bantu + <i>- ké, +kéeke</i> RCA <i>kété, kétékété</i> , id.
2.	 : <i>kkw</i> : “darkness” (night, cloud, storm-cloud)	<i>ikuukù</i> : “cloud” Mbochi-Bantu : <i>lekùùlu</i> : “night” (darkness)
3.	 : <i>k3i, kai, k3, ka</i> “think about”	<i>kà</i> : “to read”, to count” Mbochi-Bantu : <i>ká</i> a particle to reinforce ideas, thoughts

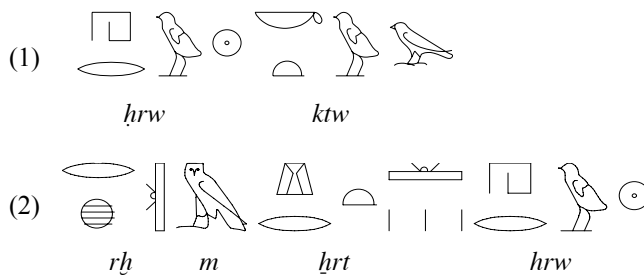
7. Global commentary and conclusion

Sound correspondences between Ancient Egyptian and Yoruba cognates are regular, and form and meaning show strong similarities. It means that Ancient Egyptian and Yoruba can be traced back to a common stock older than “Niger-Congo”, “Benue-Congo”, “Proto-Bantu”, “Common Bantu”. Thanks to the help of Ancient Egyptian, African general linguistics must go beyond these usual reconstructions in order to discover the real common stock of all African languages spoken by Black African people since Pharaonic Egypt. This is indeed the only real challenge in reconstructing one single family including Egyptian, Cushitic, Chadic, Niger-Congo (Mande-Atlantic-Congo and Kordofanian), as follows :



A new African Linguistic Paradigm is urgently needed in order to classify more adequately African languages beyond Africanist and Eurocentrist views separating Ancient Egypt or Kemet from the rest of Black Africa. African Renaissance implies a new scientific approach in order to built Modern African Humanities. This is to say that a more accurate classification of African languages on continental scale must strictly be based upon *regular sound correspondences* and predialectal reconstruction of a common basic root according to the universal principles and methods of Historical Linguistics. The job of advancing knowledge in the field of African historical linguistics is absolutely needed with good training in *Comparative Linguistics* and Egyptian Language.

Ancient scribes (intellectuals and scholars) of Kemet or Ancient Egypt use to say :



Translation : (1) The day is short,
(2) but learn daily.

In French the translation would be more dramatic :

“Bref est l’instant, cependant apprends à chaque instant !”

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