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HANNAH SANDE

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Guébie (Côte d'Ivoire, Ivory Coast) – Language Snapshot

Hannah Sande
Georgetown University

Language Name:	Guébie
Language Family:	Kru
ISO 639-3 Code:	gie
Glottolog Code:	gabo1234
Population:	7,000
Location:	5.966667, -5.833333
Vitality rating:	Threatened

Abstract

Guébie (also known as Gabogbo) is a Kru language spoken by about 7,000 people in the Gagnoa prefecture in southwest Côte d'Ivoire. Guébie people are primarily subsistence farmers, growing cassava, rice, corn, and plantains. Many also grow cocoa and rubber for profit. In the past 20 years there has been an influx of outsiders settling in Guébie villages, new roads have been developed which lead to easier access to nearby cities, and new schools have been built where French is taught and use of Guébie is not allowed. For these reasons, among others, French and Bété, the local language of wider communication, are replacing Guébie in many domains of daily use, and Guébie is not always spoken in the home and passed on to children.

L'abstract

Guébié (aussi connu sous l'appellation *gaḃogbo*) est une langue krou qui est parlée par environ 7.000 personnes dans la prefecture de Gagnoa au sud-ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire. Les Guébiés sont pour la plupart des agriculteurs, cultivant du manioc, du riz, du maïs, et de la banane plantain. Ils cultivent également du cacao et du caoutchouc qu'ils commercialisent. Au cours des vingt dernières années, il y a eu un afflux d'étrangers qui se sont installés dans les villages guébiés, de nouvelles routes ont été tracées, ce qui facilite l'accès aux villes voisines, et des écoles ont été construites. Le français est la langue utilisée pour les enseignements dans les écoles et non le guébié. Par ailleurs, le français et le bété, la langue locale de communication plus large, remplacent le guébié dans de nombreux domaines d'usage quotidien. Aussi, le guébié n'est-il pas toujours parlé à la maison et transmis aux enfants.

1. Introduction

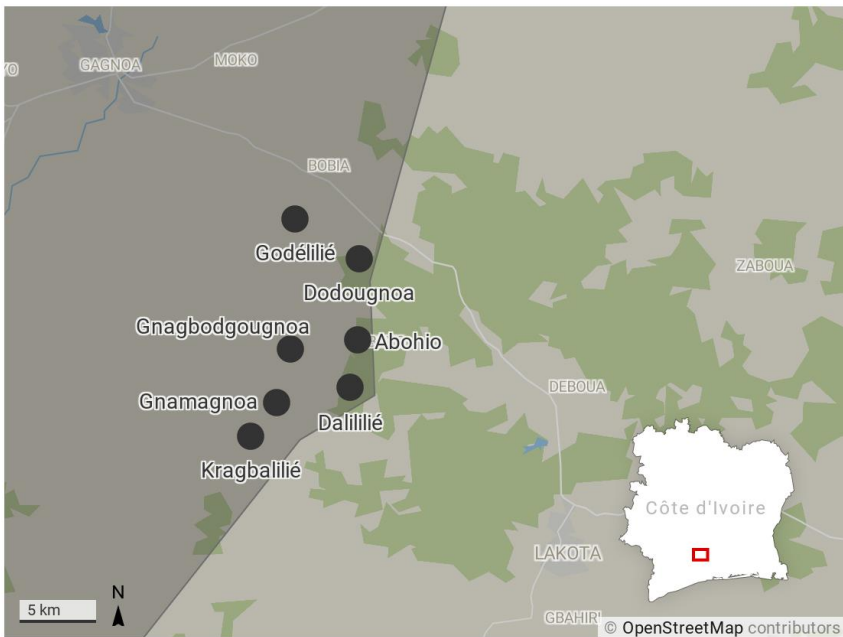
This paper presents linguistic, cultural, and demographic information about Guébie, an Eastern Kru language spoken by the Guébie people in the prefecture of Gagnoa in southwest Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). Kru is a language family with debated origins in the Niger-Congo phylum (Williamson & Blench 2000; Marchese Zogbo 2012), and composed of languages spoken in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. There are two major sub-branches of Kru, Eastern and Western (Delafosse 1904). For the most part, Eastern Kru is spoken in Côte d'Ivoire, and Western Kru is spoken in Liberia, though some Western Kru languages extend into western Côte d'Ivoire. Guébie (pronounced [ge.bi.e], and sometimes called *Gaḃogbo*) is spoken by approximately 7,000 people in seven villages in the prefecture of Gagnoa, southwest Côte d'Ivoire. There is a closely related variety of Guébie spoken in the Lakota sub-prefecture, across the border between the Gôh and Lôh-Djiboua regions (the grey line on the map in Figure 1). Among the Guébie villages within Gagnoa, based on comparing the description of Gnahore (2006) on the Guébie of Dodougnoa with my work on the Guébie of Gnagbodugnoa, there seem to be a few systematic lexical and morphophonological differences across villages, but many more similarities. Speakers claim the varieties within Gagnoa to be mutually intelligible, if not the same, and acknowledge that there are more difference between the Guébie of Gagnoa and that of Lakota.

The name Guébie comes from the phrase [ga³ bi-ə^{3.2}] *rope finish-caus*, 'the rope was caused to be finished', which refers to a specific type of rope that Guébie people use to build traditional houses. Guébie is sometimes written in French as Guébié, which more closely matches the pronunciation; however,

most speakers tend to write Guébie, without the final accent, which is the convention I follow here.

2. Geography and speaker demographics

There are seven Guébie villages in the prefecture of Gagnoa, of which Gnagbodougnoa is the largest. The map (Figure 1) shows the location of the seven Guébie villages in the Gôh region, located between the cities of Gagnoa and Lakota, where the Bété de Gagnoa and Dida-Lakota languages are spoken, respectively.



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Figure 1: Location of Gagnoa Guébie villages within Côte d'Ivoire (© 2020 Hannah Sande). Full scale version of this map is on page 44.

According to the 2014 census, the population of Gnagbodougnoa is about 3,700, about half of whom are ethnically Guébie and speak the Guébie language. Due to mass displacement during the 2010 crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, many groups from northern Côte d'Ivoire moved south and settled in communities like Gnagbodougnoa. As a result, Guébie communities have grown enormously in the past 20 years, primarily from an influx non-Guébie people. Specifically, there are now new settlements with speakers of Dioula (Mande family) and Lobi (Gur family) in traditionally Guébie areas. French is the lingua franca of the village. This was true before the influx of non-Guébie to the village, but the use of French has only increased with the number of non-Guébie community members.

Most, but not all, younger members of the community have attended elementary-level formal schooling. The first secondary school (middle school) in the Guébie region was built in 2010, and is attended by a handful of students from each of the nearby Guébie villages. For higher levels of schooling (the equivalent of high school), families occasionally send their children to the nearby city of Gagnoa, 31 kilometers from the village, if they have the resources to do so.

The Guébie language is not recognized in the Ivoirian census, thus the information on number of speakers presented here comes from my fieldwork in Côte d'Ivoire in the summers of 2014-2019, as well as from discussions with the government head of the sub-prefecture of Gnagbodougnoa, and with elders of the Guébie community.

3. Guébie language, history, and culture

Guébie people are subsistence farmers, growing rice, cassava, plantains, and corn for their families. In some cases, families also grow rubber, coffee, and most often cocoa to sell to the government for income. The most common foods eaten in the village are rice or *fufu*, *futu*, *attieke*, or *plakali* (all forms of pounded cassava or plantain mixed with water and oil). In most cases, the dishes are served with fish, chicken, or bushmeat in spicy sauce. The Guébie people do not raise large animals such as cows, though they sometimes purchase beef or goat meat from other nearby groups such as the Dioula.

Guébie people are known as courageous warriors. In 1970 a number of Guébie individuals stood up to the one-party political system in Côte d'Ivoire. Specifically, when the government banned the newly created PANA party (Parti Nationaliste), Guébie man Kragbé Gnagbé led hundreds of Guébies to the nearby city of Gagnoa to protest. In response, over 4,000 Guébie people were killed (Dagbo 2002; Diarra 1997).

Until recently, Guébie-speaking villages were isolated, with little access to the nearest city. However, in the late 1990s, a road was created from

Gnagbodougnoa to Gagnoa. Gagnoa, with more than 200,000 people, is only 31 kilometers from Gnagbodougnoa, and now Guébie speakers have easy access and make regular trips there. The primary indigenous language of Gagnoa is Bété de Gagnoa (btg), a Kru language not mutually intelligible with Guébie. Many Guébie men who frequent Gagnoa speak Bété in addition to Guébie. French is the lingua franca of the city. Since having access to Gagnoa, Guébie speakers have begun speaking more French and Bété, and less Guébie.

French is the language taught in schools, used in government, and it is the lingua franca of urban areas in the country. It is becoming normal for children in Guébie villages, in particular Gnagbodougnoa, to learn French before Guébie, thus the language is under threat and language shift is incipient. There are very few known monolingual speakers of Guébie; most tend to be at least bilingual, exposed to both French and Guébie from birth. Many also speak a second Kru language such as Dida, due to exogamy practices common in the area and regular travel between villages. Due to the fact that Guébie is not reliably being passed to new generations and the number of domains in which Guébie is spoken is rapidly decreasing, I would agree with the classification by (Eberhard et al., 2020) of the language as threatened, 6b on the EGIDS scale.

4. Prior research

Documentation and description of Kru languages have been carried out since pre-colonization of Côte d'Ivoire (in 1893) and establishment of Liberia (in 1822). Some of the earliest work includes a set of wordlists from five Western Kru languages by Koelle (1854). Also from this period are grammars of Grebo (Payne 1864) and Bassa (Crocker 1844), both Western Kru. Work on Eastern Kru did not begin until a French colonial administrator published a grammar and vocabulary of Nyo (also called Neyo, Néoulé) (Thomann 1905). Subsequently, there was little to no work published on Kru until after the independence of Côte d'Ivoire from France in 1960. In the 1960s there was a second Grebo grammar and dictionary written by Innes (1966, 1967), followed by descriptions of Vata (Vogler 1976), Krumen Tépo (Thalman 1987), Bété de Daloa (Zogbo 1981, 2005; Blé 1989), Bété de Guiberoua (Werle & Gbalehi 1976), Kouya (Saunders 2009), and Koyo (Kokora 2005). Beginning in the 1970s, Marchese has published numerous descriptions of particular Kru languages like Godié (Eastern Kru), and much comparative work across the family (Marchese 1975, 1978, 1979, 1982, 1986a, b, 1988, 1989).

Since 2013 there has been a line of theoretical linguistics work that describes and analyses of various aspects of Guébie by myself and collaborators, based on data collected in Gnagbodougnoa (Sande 2017, 2018,

2019a,b; Sande & Dawson to appear; Kramer & Sande 2020). These publications identify a number of typologically interesting properties, including:

- phonologically determined nominal concord;
- multiple types of vowel and consonant harmony;
- implosive consonants that pattern as approximants;
- four contrastive tone heights and 11 contrastive tone melodies;
- scalar tone shifts to mark grammatical categories such as aspect and case;
- alternative SVO and SAuxOV word order;
- verb doubling for verb focus;
- a large class of particle verbs;
- polar question markers that inflect for tense;
- a semantic class of collective nouns alongside mass and count nouns.

There are not yet any purely descriptive resources available on the language, neither for acquisition and maintenance, nor for academic purposes.

The extant literature on Kru languages has shown that they are of great theoretical and typological interest. Theoretical research informed by Kru language data includes Lightfoot (1974) on tone, Singler (1983, 1984) on vowels and tone, Bing (1987) on phonological agreement in Krahn, Kaye & Charette (1981) on tone in Dida, Kaye (1982) on vowel harmony, Koopman (1984) on the syntax of verbs, Koopman & Sportiche (1986) on long-distance dependencies in Vata, and Marchese (1978, 1982, 1984, 1986a,b) on auxiliaries and focus.

5. Ongoing research

I have been working with the Guébie community since 2013, spending five summers living in Gnagbodougnoa developing an audio and video corpus, much of which is accompanied by transcriptions and translations in plain text or ELAN files. Field data from the initial years of this project has been deposited in the *California Language Archive* (<https://cla.berkeley.edu>), and the full collection will soon be available.

At the time of this study, the fully transcribed portion of the online Guébie database (created using Twisted Tongues software, see Ewert 2015) consists of 7,456 utterances and 5,261 distinct morphemes, including a combination of

elicited material and naturalistic speech. Further transcription and analysis is ongoing, and I am in the process of writing the first descriptive grammar of Guébie based on the growing corpus, to be published with the Mouton Grammar Library.

Acknowledgements

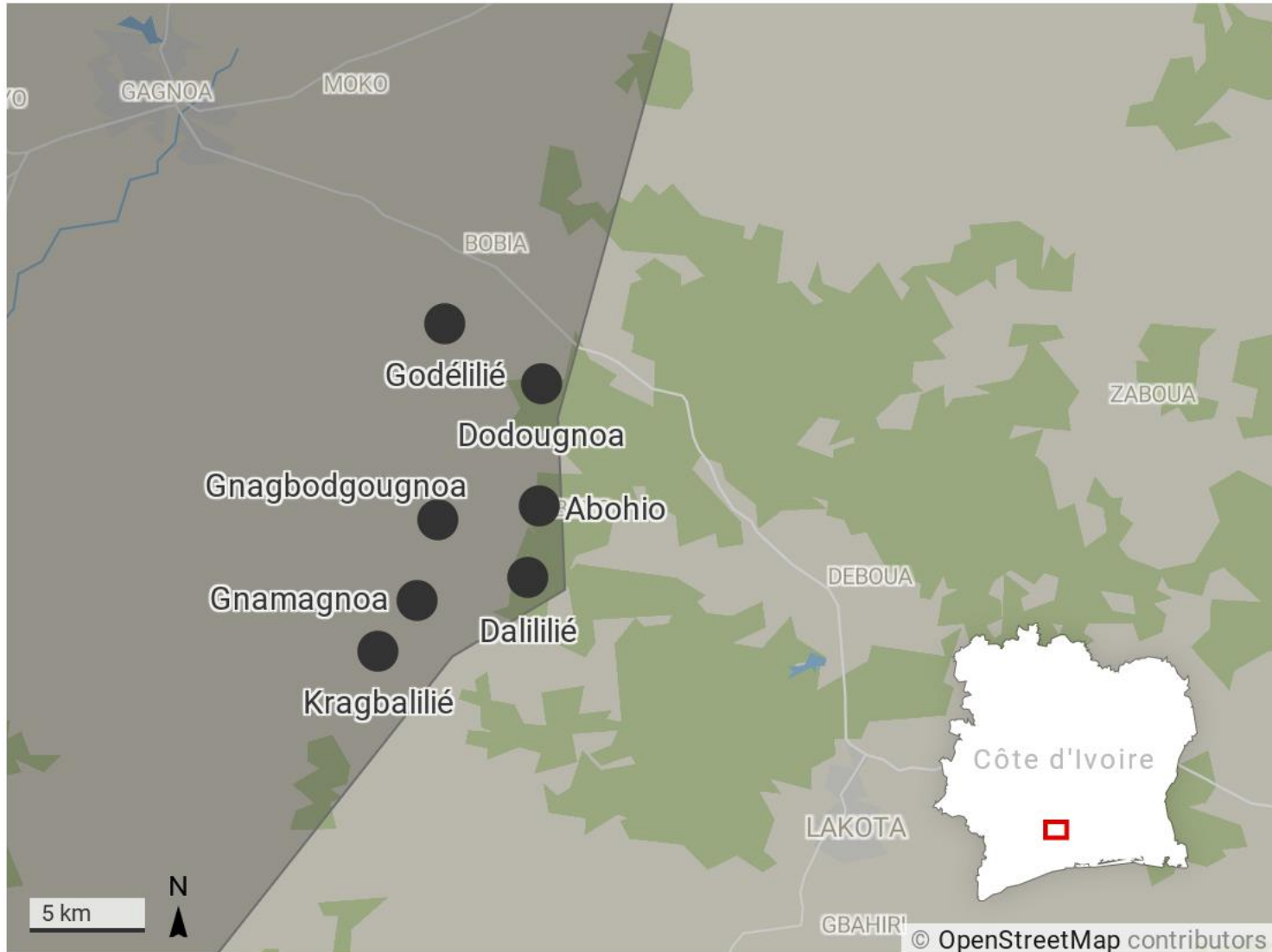
Immeasurable thanks to the Guébie community for opening their doors to me and my students and for their time in teaching us about their language and culture. Special thanks to Agodio Badiba Olivier for hosting our documentation team in Gnagbodougnoa and for his dedication to the success of the Guébie documentation project. Thanks also to Stephane Pepe who has served as a cultural guide and translator during a number of field trips, to Sylvain Bodji for introducing me to the Guébie language and language community, and to Agodio Badiba Olivier and his family for hosting me during my stays. Thanks to the subprefect of Gnagbodougnoa for taking the time to inform me about the demographics of the sub-prefecture, and to the students who have joined me on fieldtrips and helped to maintain the Guébie database for their insights and dedication to the language documentation effort. This work is partially funded by NSF-DEL award number 1760302.

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Figure 1: Location of Gagnoa Guébie villages within Côte d'Ivoire (© 2020 Hannah Sande). This is a full scale version of the map on page 37.