

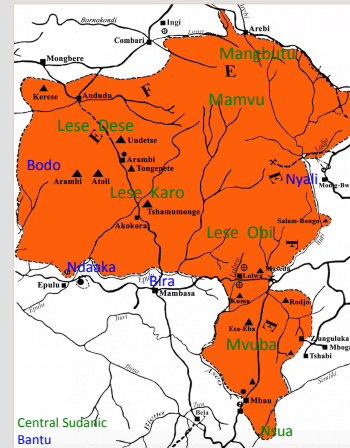
The Efe language

Efe [éφé] is the language of a group of Pygmies who live in the Ituri forest in the D.R. Congo. They are in contact with other people speaking Central Sudanic languages, belonging to the Mangbutu-Efe group : Mamvu, Lese (Dese, Karo and Obi) and Mvuba. The Efe also have relationships with the Asua and Sua Pygmy groups and Bantu people Bodo, Nyali, Bira and Ndaaka. Efe is one of the Pygmy groups often referred to by the generic term Mbuti.

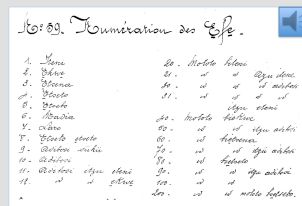
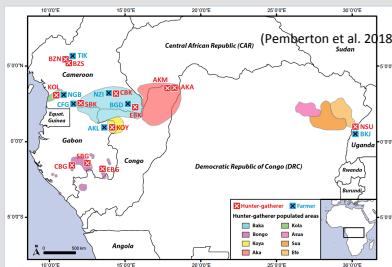
Phonetic and phonological features

- 9 vowels : [i, ɪ, e, ε, a, ɔ, o, ʊ, u]
- 34 consonants : [p, b, β, m, bv, v, φ, β, t, d, s, z, ʈ, dʷ, n, ɳ, c, ʃ, r, rj, h, j, k, g, w, ŋ, kp, gb, gβ, qβ, gβ, ʔ, x]
- 4 tones [high ´, low ` , mid ˉ , extra high ˆ]
- Rare consonants [dʷ, qβ, gβ]
- Complex tonal system

Efe territory and languages in contact



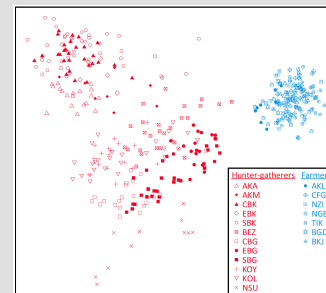
Some Pygmies groups locations in Central Africa



The first Efe sound recordings come from Edison wax rolls recorded by Hutereau, in 1910, among the Efe in contact with the Mamvu. These data include orthographically transcribed recordings of conjugated verbs, a list of numbers and imitation of sounds produced by forest animals.

The Pygmies phenotype

Genetic basis of phenotypes varying across hunter gatherers and neighboring farmers based on body size (Pemberton et al. 2018)



The Pygmies language enigma

Although they are a distinct human group, none of the Central African Pygmies have a language of their own. They always speak a variant (a dialect) of their neighbouring farmers' language.

Botanical and zoological lexical data, suggest possible traces of vocabulary not shared with other linguistic groups whether Bantu or Central Sudanic.

Plant names (Terashima & Ichikawa 2003)

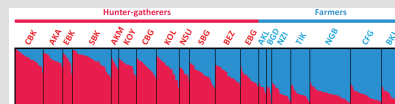
- Sua (Mbuti) & Bira (Bantu farmers) 94% similarity
- Efe & Lese (Central Sudanic farmers) 87% similarity
- Sua (Mbuti) & Efe 24 to 29% similarities*

Zoological terms (Ichikawa 1998, Carpaneto & Germi 1989)

- Sua (Mbuti) & Bira (Bantu farmers) > 75% similarity
- Efe & Lese (Central Sudanic farmers) > 70% similarity
- Sua (Mbuti) & Efe Low percentage of similarities < 20%*

Similarities between Sua and Efe plant and zoological names could be the trace of an old common vocabulary.

Main threats: war, mining (gold, coltan to make cell phones batteries!), cultural dismiss, ecological projects, bad evaluation of language status.



Genetic admixture between hunter gatherers and neighboring farmers. More Pygmies woman marry farmers than the contrary.

Cultural feature : complex vocal & instrumental polyphonic music



Luma whistles in a hoquetus polyphony