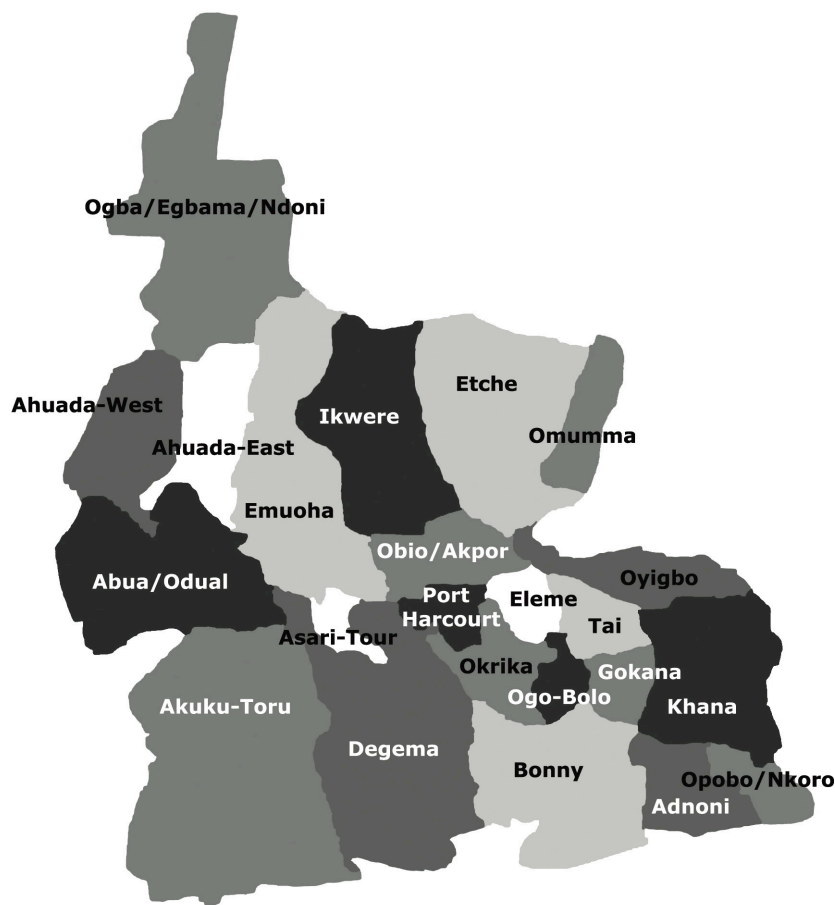




Map 1. Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Baan is classified as a member of the Ogonoid sub-group of the Cross-River branch of the Benue-Congo language family, itself in turn a member (probably) of the large Niger-Congo linguistic phylum. The traditional view of Ogonoid, recently refuted by Bond and Anderson (2005) is that there is a basic cleavage between Eleme-Baan on the one hand as West Ogonoid and the remaining three languages of the sub-group forming an East Ogonoid branch (see figure-1)

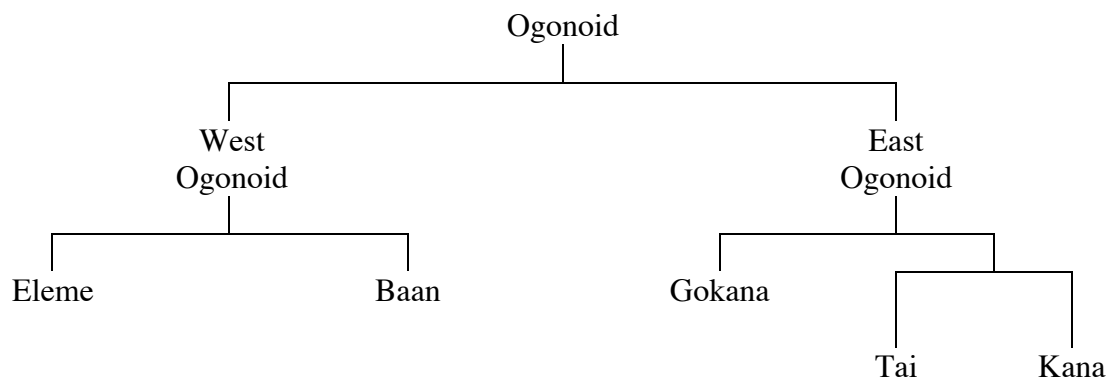


Figure 1. Classification of Ogonoid languages (Williamson and Blench 2000:33).

While indeed when comparing the few words of Baan that have ever been recorded, it does in fact seem to pattern for the most part with Eleme, with some notable exceptions. Noun class prefixes are almost entirely lacking in Baan while they are common in Eleme (compare the words meaning ‘cooking pot’, ‘child’, ‘tree’, ‘wife’, and ‘rope’ below, which have such prefixes in Eleme but not Baan, which seems rather more like the ‘East Ogonoid’ languages in this regard. Some sound changes have also occurred that distinguish it both from Eleme and the East Ogonoid languages, seen in the words meaning ‘story’ and ‘salt’ in Table-1.

	Gokana	Kana	Tai	Baan	Eleme
dance	zòb	yèb	yèb	dʒee	dʒè
pound	kǔmí	kǔm	kǔm	kũũ	kũ
sweep	kpári	kpáe ¹	kpɛɛ	kpari	kparí
story	lóg	lóó	lóó	yógi	èlóí
child	něn	něě	něě	něě	òně
cooking pot	bá	bá	bá	báá	àbá
tree	té	té	té	té	èté
wife	va	wa	wa	wa	òwa
salt	ló	ló	ló	ndó	nló
rope	má	má	má	mímá	mímá

Table 1. Cognate vocabulary in the Ogonoid languages.

Indeed, it is only nasals that appear as noun class markers in Baan, corresponding to such forms in Eleme, but vowel noun class markers are mainly lacking, see Table-2

<u>gloss</u>	<u>Eleme</u>	<u>Baan</u>	<u>Kana</u>	<u>Gokana</u>	<u>Proto-Benue-Congo</u>
‘tooth’	à-dá:	dá:	dá:	dá:	*li- (sg) *à- (pl)
‘tree’	è-té	té	té	té	*ki- (sg) *bi- (pl)
‘ashes’	ñ-tɔ̃	ñ-tɔ̃	tɔ̃	(-rù)	??
‘animal’	ñ-nã	--	nãm	nɔ̃m	*ì- (sg) í- (pl)
‘goat’	m-bó	m-bó:	--	ból	*ì- (sg) í- (pl)

(Faraclas 1986: 47, 50)

Table 3. Noun class marking in Ogonoid languages.

In addition, there are sounds found in Baan like [z] that are lacking in Eleme but found in East Ogonoid languages, while conversely other sounds are found in Eleme and East

¹ Williamson (1985:434) notes that *l is lost in this citation form from Kana, but retained as [r] in the perfect verb form è-kpár-a.

Ogonoid but lacking in Baan. See Table 3.

<u>Eleme</u>	<u>Baan (Ogoi)</u>	<u>Kana</u>	<u>Gokana</u>	<u>Tai</u>
	z	z	z	z
k ^w		k ^w		k ^w
g ^w		g ^w		g ^w
č			k ^y	ç

Table 3. Some sound correspondences in Ogonoid.

All this suggests that Baan is in fact its own language and not some mere dialect of Eleme. Although all Ogonoid languages are relatively close to one another, much like modern Turkic languages, this does not mean that they are mutually intelligible or to be considered the same language, out of some preconceived bias or administrative convenience (there are already so many languages in Rivers State and Nigeria as a whole, who needs another one, the prevailing thought is).

Although clearly a language in its own right, because of its similarity and proximity to its larger dominant sister language, Baan is quietly disappearing in a dialect continuum, giving way not to a large transnational language like English, Spanish, Russian or Chinese, all of which have been the language that has replaced or continues to replace a number of unrelated endangered languages, but rather to a locally-dominant closely related language. It will continue to gradually take on Eleme-like features until it fulfills the prophecy set out for it by the wider Eleme-speaking community, namely it will become but a regional variant of Eleme and then Eleme itself. Here the processes of language endangerment are more subtle and different than those in such regions as Bolivia, China, Russia or the United States, but the consequences are no less severe.

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