

# Nouchi as a Distinct Language: The Morphological Evidence

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper I argue that Nouchi, a relatively young Ivoirian contact variety, is and should be treated as a full-fledged language distinct from French and its other source languages. Nouchi, an emerging language spoken in Côte d'Ivoire since that late 1970's (Ayewa 2005), has been treated in the literature as a slang vocabulary or an urban youth dialect of French. Though Nouchi began as a lingua franca among uneducated youth in urban centers, it is now the preferred language of Ivoirians in Abidjan and the surrounding areas of Côte d'Ivoire (Kube-Barth 2009). This paper focuses on morphological properties of Nouchi, which demonstrate that Nouchi is a full-fledged language with a grammar distinct from its source languages.

I begin in section two with a brief description of Nouchi's socio-historic development. In section three I describe how Nouchi has been perceived since its emergence in the 1970's, both within Côte d'Ivoire, and in the literature. Section four details morphological processes in Nouchi, demonstrating contra Ahua (2009) that Nouchi's morphology is not transparently borrowed from French. These non-French properties include 1) derivational suffixes, both those borrowed from other source languages, and those original to Nouchi, 2) lexical tone on all words in the Nouchi lexicon including monosyllabic ones, and 3) productive grammatical tone. In section five, I discuss the implications of Nouchi's productive morphological processes, claiming based on empirical evidence that Nouchi is distinct from Ivoirian French and that it should be treated as such.

## 2. Background of Nouchi

Nouchi is a contact language that emerged on the streets of urban Côte d'Ivoire between the late 1970's and early 1980's. It began as the lingua franca of uneducated, unemployed youth, though it quickly gained status as the language of Ivoirian identity (Kouadio 2005; Kube 2004; Newell 2009). Abidjan and the other urban areas of Côte d'Ivoire are centers of language contact, home to over 66 different languages. While most of the languages spoken in the area are linked with a local ethnic identity, Nouchi is not specific to a given ethnic group. Due to its ethnic neutrality and daily use, first by urban youth, Nouchi has spread rapidly (Kouadio 2005). It is the language most frequently used in the Ivoirian Zouglou style of music, and it has been promoted online through dictionaries, satirical news sites, and chat rooms.

Though Nouchi began as an urban youth language (Kiessling and Mous 2004), it is now the preferred language of 10-30 year olds in Abidjan, and is commonly spoken by Ivoirians of all ages (Ayewa 2005). This statistic is particularly significant because 66 percent of Abidjan's population is under 25 years old (Kouadio 2005). Though most children in Abidjan grow up speaking more than one language in the home, Kube-Barth (2009) and Kouadio (2005) call Nouchi the native language of the current generation of urban Ivoirians.

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The origin of the word ‘Nouchi’ is debated, but Kiessling and Mous (2004) offer two possible stories of its etymology. Since Nouchi makes frequent use of metathesis when lexifying French words—much like French *verlan* word inversion—the word ‘Nouchi’ could have its origin in the French phrase *chez nous* ‘to/at our house.’ Another possibility is that the term comes from the local Malinke language, where *nou* is the word for ‘nose’ and *chi* is the word for ‘body hair.’ In combination, the two mean ‘moustache’ and connote the respected and feared bad guy on the street. No matter its origin, the name Nouchi has stuck, and the term applies both to the language and the demographic who originally spoke it (Newell 2009).

Nouchi has been influenced both by Indo-European languages and by Niger-Congo languages. Its Indo-European source languages include primarily French, with a handful of lexical items from each of English, Spanish, and German. Côte d’Ivoire was a French colony until it gained independence in 1960, and there is still a strong French presence in the country. French is the official language, the language of government and education. The English, Spanish, and German influences on Nouchi are a result of the media, and specifically of rap and hip-hop music.

The Niger-Congo languages most commonly spoken in Abidjan and the surrounding areas come from the Kwa, Kru, Gur, and Mande branches. Bété and Baoulé, Kru and Kwa languages, respectively, have each contributed a large number of lexical items to Nouchi. Dioula is a Mande language and lingua franca, the trade language of Abidjan and the neighboring areas. Dioula has contributed a great number of lexical items to Nouchi, to the point where Kouadio (2005) claims that Nouchi is the result of French and Dioula in contact. As I demonstrate in section five, Dioula has also contributed morphological attributes to Nouchi.

Nouchi lexical items are adopted from both Indo-European and Niger-Congo sources, though there is a large number of original Nouchi lexical items as well. Ahua (2007) gives the following statistics: 35% of Nouchi’s lexicon comes from French, 31% is innovated, 16% of the lexical items are hybrids, combinations of words from more than one source language, 13% are from local Niger-Congo languages, and 5% come from other European languages—English, Spanish, and German.

The sound system of Nouchi contains Niger-Congo adopted phones such as the labiovelars [kp, gb], and Indo-European adopted phones such as the retroflex [ɻ]. For more details on Nouchi’s sound system and the interaction of features from different source languages, see Sande (in press).

### 3. Perception of Nouchi

Since its origins in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, Nouchi has been described in the literature as a dialect of Ivoirian French, while speakers of Nouchi consider it to be a full-fledged language neither mutually intelligible with standard French nor popular Ivoirian French. This section details the varying perceptions of the status of Nouchi.

#### 3.1. Treatment in the literature

There has been very little written about Nouchi, and the majority of the existing literature has a sociolinguistic focus. No thorough grammatical description of Nouchi has yet been published; though see Ahua (2009) and N’tcho (2014) for a brief look into certain aspects of the verbal morphology. The conceptions of Nouchi in the current literature are based on the socio-historic development and sociolinguistic status of the language. Within the academic world, Nouchi is often treated as synonymous to ‘Ivoirian French,’ or has been referred to as ‘slang’ (Ahua 2009; Newell 2009), ‘an urban youth language’ (Kiessling and Mous 2004; Beck 2010), a ‘variety of Ivoirian French’ (Kube-Barth 2009), or a ‘sociolect’ (Kouadio 2005). I argue that none of these terms reflects the current status of Nouchi, which has a full-fledged grammar distinct from Ivoirian French.

#### 3.2. Speaker perception

Despite its treatment in the literature as a slang or dialect of Ivoirian French, speakers perceive Nouchi as a distinct code or language. The following statements were made by Nouchi speakers between the years 2005 and 2012.

(1) “Nouchi is indeed a code in its own right, [...] a code that speakers of Popular French have to learn” (Djite and Kpli 2007).

(2) “Nouchi is much more than a code of social protest; it is growing into a full-fledged variety, covering all aspects of daily life” (Djite and Kpli 2007).

(3) “Le français, c’est pas tout le monde qui comprend le français. Alors que le nouchi, je suis convaincu que tout le monde comprend le nouchi en Côte d’Ivoire (I 21)” (Kube 2005).

Translation (mine): French, not everyone understands French. But Nouchi, I’m convinced that everyone in Côte d’Ivoire understands Nouchi.

(4) “Nouchi and popular French are totally different urban languages. Popular French has totally French in it. Nouchi is completely something different” (S. Pepe, p.c. 2012).

The quotes in (1-4) above describe Nouchi as a full-fledged code or language, and they differentiate Nouchi from French

### 3.3. *Treatment of Nouchi in this paper*

Speakers consider Nouchi to be a distinct language, while its treated in the literature as slang or a French dialect. Clearly there is a mismatch here that needs to be reevaluated. But how do we decide which label is suitable for Nouchi? What constitutes a distinct language? Scholars have answered this question in a variety of ways, including those shown in (5). This is not an exhaustive list, though these are some of the most common questions discussed when deciding what constitutes a ‘language.’<sup>1,2</sup>

(5) Language status rubric (adapted from Crystal 1987, Holmes 2008)

- a. Is it the native/first language of a population?
- b. Is it culturally and historically distinct from related languages?
- c. Is it not mutually intelligible with similar languages?
- d. Does its grammatical system differ from those of related languages?

Throughout the literature, these are common criteria for distinguishing languages from dialects. Beyond the criteria in (5), the political situation can determine the status of a ‘language’ no matter how similar or dissimilar it is to other related varieties (Holmes 2008, May 2012). Setting aside the political situation and focusing on sociolinguistic and grammatical properties, we will see that Nouchi fares quite well as a distinct language when it comes to the criteria in (5).

The question in (5a) asks whether the variety in question is the native language of a population. Kouadio (2005) addresses (5a) head-on when he states that Nouchi is the native language of the current generation of urban Ivoirians. My own consultants in Abidjan have confirmed this claim.

As far as being culturally and historically distinct from related languages, as in (5b), Nouchi’s socio-historic development is quite dissimilar from its source languages of French, English, Spanish, Dioula, Bete, and Baoulé. It is culturally distinct in that Nouchi serves as an ethnically neutral Ivoirian-identity marker.

Addressing (5c), Nouchi is not mutually intelligible with French or its other source languages. French speakers with no background in Nouchi cannot understand speakers of Nouchi, and those who speak Nouchi cannot communicate in French unless they have had prior training in or experience with speaking it. Most Nouchi speakers also speak popular Ivoirian French, though there are a number of Nouchi speakers who speak solely Nouchi. Additionally, the quotes in (1-4) represent that speakers

<sup>1</sup> Whether or not Nouchi is a ‘language’ by any particular definition, both linguists and Nouchi speakers have much to gain from documenting it and analyzing it as thoroughly as any other language. This is discussed further in section five.

<sup>2</sup> This rubric is similar to Bakker’s (2009) criteria for distinguishing a creole from a pidgin.

draw a clean line between Nouchi and other languages, claiming that Nouchi is, indeed, distinct and that it is not mutually intelligible with Ivoirian French or other local languages.

We have seen that according to the first three criteria laid out in (5) for distinguishing a variety as a ‘language,’ Nouchi has fared quite well. The final criterion, (5d), deals with the grammatical system of the variety at hand, and whether it is transparently borrowed from or identical to a single related language. Unfortunately, little work has been done on Nouchi’s grammatical system. Ahua (2009) claims that Nouchi’s grammatical system is transparently borrowed from French. However, there are few, if any, studies in the current literature to confirm or deny this claim. A thorough description of Nouchi’s grammatical properties will shed light on this issue. I address this point throughout the remainder of this paper. I demonstrate that Nouchi’s grammar, specifically its morphological system, is opaque, not transparently adopted from French or another of its source languages. Therefore, Nouchi satisfies all the criteria listed in (5) and should be considered a distinct language.

## 4. Nouchi’s morphology

Ahua (2009) claims that Nouchi’s morphology is transparently borrowed from French. In section 4.1 I give an overview of a variety of the morphological processes in Nouchi, demonstrating that many do come from French influence on the language. In section 4.2 I discuss several productive morphological processes in Nouchi that are clearly non-French, contra Ahua’s claim. In section 4.3 I discuss Nouchi’s status as a distinct language. The data throughout this paper is original unless otherwise specified, the result of two years of elicitation with two speakers in the US, plus one field trip to Côte d’Ivoire during which time I worked with with seven speakers in Abidjan.

### 4.1. French morphology adopted into Nouchi

A number of Nouchi’s morphological and grammatical processes have been adopted into the language from French. These include personal pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, determiners, and certain verbal morphemes, all of which will be discussed in this section.

#### 4.1.1. Personal Pronouns

The nominative pronoun paradigm has been adopted almost unchanged from French into Nouchi. The person distinctions, the singular/plural distinction, and the gender distinction in the third person, are all retained from French. One difference is that French first and second person plural pronouns *nous* and *vous* are quite marginal forms in Nouchi. The French impersonal pronoun *on* is more commonly used in place of *nous* and *vous* for a first or second person plural meaning. This may come from an influence of colloquial Ivoirian French on Nouchi, as *on* is quite common in the local dialect of spoken French, and in other colloquial French varieties (Coveney 2000). Other distinctions between the nominative pronoun paradigm in Nouchi versus French are phonetic. The most obvious of these is the Nouchi pronunciation of the first person singular *je*, pronounced [jə] or [je] in Nouchi but [ʒə] in French.

### (6) French nominative personal pronouns in Nouchi<sup>3</sup>

	French pronouns	Nouchi pronouns	[Nouchi pronunciation]	‘Meaning’
a.	je	je	[jə́, jé́]	‘I’
b.	tu	tu	[tú]	‘you’
c.	il/elle	il/elle	[íl, él]	‘he/she’
d.	nous	on, (nous)	[ɔ́, nú]	‘we’
e.	vous	on, (vous)	[ɔ́, vú]	‘you all’
f.	ils/elles	ils/elles	[íl, él]	‘they’

<sup>3</sup> To disambiguate tonal markings and nasal markings marked on the same vowel, I underline nasal vowels and use above-vowel tonal markings throughout this paper (as in Paster 2010, and others). Thus a nasal [a] with high tone would be written [á].

Accusative and possessive pronouns are also adopted into Nouchi nearly unchanged from French.

#### 4.1.2. Conjunctions

French conjunctions are used in Nouchi, with only slight, systematic phonological changes.

##### (7) French conjunctions in Nouchi

French	Nouchi	[Nouchi pronunciation]	‘Meaning’
a. et	et	[ē]	‘and’
b. mais	mais	[mē]	‘but’

These conjunctions are productive in Nouchi just as in French.

#### 4.1.3. Prepositions

Many French prepositions are used in Nouchi, though a few are clearly missing from the Nouchi lexicon (ex: *chez*).

##### (8) French prepositions in Nouchi

French	Nouchi	[Nouchi pronunciation]	‘Meaning’
a. pour	pour	[pū]	‘for’
b. de	de	[dā, dē]	‘of/from’
c. en	en	[ā]	‘in/to’
d. avec	avec	[āvék]	‘with’

The prepositions listed in (8), as well as a small collection of other French prepositions, have been adopted into Nouchi, where they are used just as they would be in French.

#### 4.1.4. Definite Markers

French definite determiners are used in Nouchi, not only preceding French-borrowed lexical items, but as the productive definiteness marker throughout the language. All semantically feminine words such as ‘girl, mother’ use the feminine determiner *la*, while all semantically masculine words like ‘father’ and neuter words like ‘animal, house’ use the French masculine determiner *le*. This differs from French, which has true grammatical gender, where all lexical items, regardless of whether they have a specified semantic gender, are lexically marked as either masculine or feminine.

The French plural determiner *les* often neutralizes with the masculine determiner *le* in Nouchi, and both are pronounced [lā].<sup>4</sup> Remnants of are still present in vowel-initial plural lexical items adopted into Nouchi from French. These words, such as Nouchi [zjé] ‘eyes’ from French *les yeux*, are pronounced with an initial [z] in Nouchi. There is no singular form of ‘eyes’ in Nouchi. The distinction between a singular versus plural vowel-initial word borrowed from French can be seen in (9f-g).

<sup>4</sup> If a given Nouchi speaker is also familiar with standard French, he or she is likely to have two distinct determiners, *les* for plural and *le* for masculine singular.

## (9) French (in)definite markers in Nouchi

## a. Definite marker distribution

		Feminine	Masculine	Neutral	Plural
Definite	Nouchi	[lā]	[lā̃]	[lā̃]	[lā̃, z-]
	French	[la]	[lã]	[lə/la]	[le(z)]
Indefinite	Nouchi	[ē]	[ē]	[ē]	[dē]
	French	[yn]	[Λ]	[Λ/yn]	[de(z)]

## b. Definite data

Language of Origin	[Nouchi]	‘Meaning’
a. French <i>la</i> + Nouchi <i>go</i>	[lā̃ gō]	‘the girl’
b. French <i>la</i> + Spanish <i>madre</i>	[lā̃ màdré]	‘the mother’
c. French <i>le</i> + Dioula <i>mògò</i>	[lō̃ mògò]	‘the person/man’
d. French <i>le</i> + Spanish <i>casa</i>	[lē̃ kás]	‘the house’
e. French <i>les</i> + French <i>yeux</i>	[zjé]	‘(the) eyes’
f. French <i>les</i> + French <i>animaux</i>	[zánimó]	‘(the) animals’
g. French <i>animal</i>	[ánimó]	‘animal’

As demonstrated in (9), definite markers adopted from French are used to make Nouchi nouns definite, no matter the origin of the lexical item in Nouchi.

## 4.1.5. Verbal morphology

Certain, but not all, verbal morphology in Nouchi has been adopted from French. These properties include the infinitive, future, and past perfective morphological markers.

The infinitive is formed by adding /-e/, French *-er*, to the verb stem. The surface tone of this /-e/ varies, as in (10c-d), and I have no solid evidence to claim that there is an underlying tone. This differs from other Nouchi functional morphemes such as those discussed in section 4.2.1. Most verbs, no matter their origin, form the infinitive with this /-e/ suffix. This includes novel Nouchi verbs like /gbágbóté/ ‘to walk.’<sup>5</sup> A small class of irregular novel Nouchi verbs, however, does not take the infinitive /-e/ suffix, like the word /dābā/ ‘to eat,’ exemplified in (10d).

## (10) Infinitive morphology

Origin	‘Meaning’	Present Tense	Infinitive/-er/
a. English <i>fall</i>	‘to smoke’ <sup>6</sup>	[íl fál]	[fálē]
b. French <i>chercher</i>	‘to look for’	[íl jē]	[jējē]
c. Dioula <i>gbá</i>	‘to take drugs’	[íl gbá]	[gbánē]
d. Nouchi	‘to walk/march’	[íl gbágbō]	[gbágbóté]
e. Nouchi	‘to eat’	[íl dābā]	[dābā]

The Nouchi future tense is nearly identical to the French *future proche*. In French this form denotes something that is going to happen soon, though in Nouchi it has a more general future meaning. The French verb *aller* ‘to go’ is conjugated in the present tense and precedes the infinitive form of the main verb; for example, the Nouchi verb [fálē] ‘to smoke’ is pronounced [íl vā fálē], ‘he will smoke/he is going to smoke,’ in the future tense. The verb *aller* is not productive as a main verb in Nouchi and is only used to form the future tense. Unlike French, it has only two conjugated forms in Nouchi, first person singular [vē] and non-first-person-singular [vā].

<sup>5</sup> The verb /gbágbóté/ comes from the name of the former Ivoirian president, Gbagbo. It means ‘to walk’ and especially is used to refer to someone born into a poor family who has to work to succeed. (Pepe, p.c. 2012).

<sup>6</sup> The English word ‘fall’ has been relexified in Nouchi to mean ‘to smoke.’

**(11) Future morphology**

Origin	‘Meaning’	Present Tense	Future <i>aller</i>
a. English <i>fall</i>	‘to smoke’	[íl fál]	[íl vā fálē]
b. French <i>chercher</i>	‘to look for’	[íl ʃē]	[íl vā ʃēʃē]
c. Dioula <i>gbá</i>	‘to take drugs’	[íl gbá]	[íl vā gbánē]
d. Nouchi	‘to walk/march’	[íl gbāgbō]	[íl vā gbāgbōté]
e. Nouchi	‘to eat’	[íl dābā]	[íl vā dābā]

The past perfective verb form in Nouchi uses the French verb *avoir* as an auxiliary verb preceding the verb stem with suffix /-e/, much like the French past perfective form. It is unclear, however, whether the /stem+-e/ is a participle, or whether it is the Nouchi infinitive preceded by conjugated *avoir*. This remains an unanswered question since the infinitive and post-*avoir* forms are identical in Nouchi, with no change in tonal melody.

*Avoir* only has two conjugated forms in Nouchi, [ē] for first person singular, and [ā] for all other forms, as shown in (12a). In French, *être* ‘to be’ is the past perfective auxiliary for certain verbs, though only *avoir* is used in Nouchi.

**(12) Past perfective morphology**

Origin	‘Meaning’	Present Tense	Past <i>avoir</i>
a. English <i>fall</i>	‘to smoke’	[íl fál]	[íl ā fálē]
b. French <i>chercher</i>	‘to look for’	[íl ʃē]	[íl ā ʃēʃē]
c. Dioula <i>gbá</i>	‘to take drugs’	[íl gbá]	[íl ā gbánē]
d. Nouchi	‘to walk/march’	[íl gbāgbō]	[íl ā gbāgbōté]
e. Nouchi	‘to eat’	[íl dābā]	[íl ā dābā]

Nouchi’s present tense person and number conjugation is shown in (13) with the verb [dābā] ‘to eat.’

**(13) Verb conjugation**

English Pronoun	[Nouchi Pronoun]	[Present]	[Past perfective]
I	[jǒ, jé]	[dābā]	[jǒ dābā]
You (sg)	[tú]	[dābā]	[tú ā dābā]
He	[íl]	[dābā]	[íl ā dābā]
She	[él]	[dābā]	[él ā dābā]
We	[ǒ, nú]	[dābā(sǒ)]	[ǒ ā dābā]
You (pl)	[ǒ, vú]	[dābā(sé)]	[ǒ ā dābā]
They	[íl, él]	[dābā(s)]	[íl ā dābā]

Nouchi speakers unfamiliar with standard French use the unconjugated form of the verb, [ǒ dābā] or [nú dābā], rather than [nú dābāsǒ].

**4.1.6. French morphology in Nouchi: A summary**

As discussed throughout section 4.1, Nouchi makes use of certain morphological properties adopted from French. Ahua (2009) claims that Nouchi’s morphosyntax is entirely adopted from French. Throughout section 4.1 we have seen that, indeed, much French morphology is productively used in Nouchi. In section 4.2 I demonstrate that Nouchi also makes productive use of many non-French morphological properties.

#### 4.2. Non-French morphology in Nouchi

This section describes certain of Nouchi's non-French morphological processes, including derivational suffixes borrowed from Dioula, lexical tone, and grammatical tone.

##### 4.2.1. Dioula derivational suffixes

A number of derivational suffixes in Nouchi have been adopted from Dioula, the trade language of Abidjan and the surrounding area. The suffixes in (14) have been adopted into Nouchi from Dioula and can be systematically applied throughout the Nouchi lexicon, no matter the word origin. For example, the suffixe [lí] turns a Nouchi verb into a noun, and [-tǽ] makes a noun agentive. French *Pierre* 'stone' has been relexified in Nouchi as /pjā/ 'money;' combined with suffix /-tǽ/ from Dioula, we get [pjā-tǽ] 'a rich man.'

##### (14) Dioula derivational suffixes in Nouchi (adopted from Kouadio (2005))

Origin	[Nouchi word]	'Meaning'	[Word-Affix]	'Meaning'
a. Nouchi	[gbóró]	'to wash'	[gbóró-lí]	'washing'
b. Nouchi	[dābā]	'to eat'	[dābā-lí]	'food'
c. Nouchi	[zángō]	'to dress well'	[zángō-lí]	'nice clothing'
d. Dioula	[zēgbēdē]	'to be drunk'	[zēgbēdē-jā]	'alcohol'
e. Dioula	[bābá]	'father'	[bābá-tǽ]	'president/chief'
f. French	[pjē]	'money'	[pjē-tǽ]	'a rich man'

Each of these derivational suffixes has a consistent tonal pattern, and the tone on the suffix does not interact with or affect the quality of the tone on the base word. This tonal behavior contrasts with past imperfective morphology discussed in 4.2.3.

##### 4.2.2. Lexical tone

Lexical tone is present throughout the Nouchi lexicon, no matter the language of origin of each given lexical item; all Nouchi lexical items, regardless of origin of the word, are marked with consistent lexical tone. Certain otherwise identical words are differentiated by their tonal patterns. For example, [dába] 'to hit,' is differentiated from [dāba] 'to eat' only by differing tonal patterns. The chart in (15) shows that Nouchi lexical items with varying originals are all pronounced with consistent lexical tone.

##### (15) Lexical tone in Nouchi

	Source	Borrowed Form	[Nouchi]	'Meaning'
a.	French	<i>les animeaux</i>	[zánīmó]	'animals'
b.	Spanish	<i>madre</i>	[mādré]	'mother/woman'
c.	English	<i>enjoy</i>	[āzājè]	'to like/to be happy'
d.	Bété	<i>bàpō</i>	[bàpō]	'handsome man'
e.	Baoulé	<i>bló</i>	[bló]	'to show off'
f.	Dioula	<i>mògò</i>	[mògò]	'man/friend/person'
g.	Dioula	<i>bābà</i>	[bābá]	'father'
h.	Nouchi	--	[dābā]	'to hit'
i.	Nouchi	--	[dābā]	'to eat'
j.	Nouchi	--	[dābālí]	'food'
k.	Nouchi	--	[gō]	'girl'
l.	Nouchi	--	[gbò]	'to eat'
m.	Nouchi	--	[brí]	'to bully'



The data in (15) show that Nouchi makes use of lexical tone. We will see in the following section that Nouchi also uses tone to encode verb tense and aspect.

#### 4.2.3. Grammatical tone

Grammatical tone is a regular, productive morphosyntactic process in Nouchi. One grammatical usage of tone is to distinguish the present from the past imperfective form of the verb. All verbs are realized with low tone on all syllables in the past imperfective. For those speakers who have training or experience speaking standard French, they may use the French imperfective suffix *-ais* in addition to low tone on the past imperfective: [dàbà] is equivalent to [dàbàsē].

Dioula, which has contributed both lexical items and morphology to Nouchi, makes use of grammatical tone (Braconnier 1982); however, its grammatical tone processes are unrelated to those in Nouchi, detailed here. The same is true for others of Nouchi's source languages like Bété. It would seem that this tonal system is original to Nouchi.

#### (16) Grammatical tone in Nouchi

[Present Tense]	'Meaning'	[Imperfective]	'Meaning'
a. [jɔ́ dābā]	'I eat (pres)'	b. [jɔ́ dābà(sē)]	'I used to eat'
c. [jɔ́ dábā]	'I hit (pres)'	d. [jɔ́ dābà(sē)]	'I used to hit'
e. [jɔ́ māga]	'I steal (pres)'	f. [jɔ́ màgà(sē)]	'I used to steal'
g. [jɔ́ gbò]	'I eat (pres)'	h. [jɔ́ gbò(sē)]	'I used to eat'
i. [jɔ́ lɛ́ brí]	'I bully s.o. (pres)'	j. [jɔ́ lɛ́ brì(sē)]	'I used to bully s.o.'

No matter the origin of the verb stem, the tonal melodies on Nouchi verbs are the sole marker of the past imperfective. The use of grammatical tone to distinguish verb tense/aspect is a productive process in Nouchi, no matter the syllable length or source language of the verb.

#### 4.3. A discussion of Nouchi's morphology

As described in section 4.1, many of Nouchi's morphological processes have been adopted from French. As seen in section 4.2, however, there are also several productive on-French processes in Nouchi.

In section three, I asked whether Nouchi should be considered a distinct language. The rubric in (5) represents a rubric for distinguishing a language from a dialect based on four commonly used criteria for making this distinction. According to the first three features listed in the rubric in (5), we saw that Nouchi patterns as a distinct *language*, rather than a dialect of a related language: 1) It is the native language of a growing population, 2) It is socio-historically and culturally distinct from other languages spoken in the area, 3) It is not mutually intelligible with its source languages. Throughout section four of this paper, I have demonstrated that the fourth criterion in the rubric in (5) also holds in Nouchi: it is grammatically dissimilar to its source languages in a variety of ways.

Section four has detailed certain of Nouchi's morphological properties, including those adopted from French, as well as many that are clearly non-French. These non-French properties, including lexical and grammatical tone, are productive throughout the language. This evidence shows that Nouchi's grammar is distinct from that of French, supporting the claim that Nouchi is a full-fledged language, rather than a slang or a dialect of French.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Throughout this paper, specifically in sections three and four, I demonstrate that Nouchi is a language distinct from French and its other source languages. Nouchi is the native language of the current generation of urban Ivoirians (Kouadio 2005), it is socio-historically dissimilar to its source languages, and it is not mutually intelligible with French or other languages spoken in Côte d'Ivoire (Kube 2005). In addition, Nouchi makes use of many non-French productive morphological processes.

Based on these facts, I argue that Nouchi is a distinct language, not a dialect of French as it has been treated in the literature to this point. Thus, Nouchi should be treated as a language, documented and described thoroughly early in its development. We are not often presented with the opportunity to document a language from its early years, and we should take advantage of it. This will provide data for work on language change, emerging languages, and the grammatical complexity of contact languages. It will also benefit Nouchi speakers by legitimizing their language and providing the basic documentation necessary for language resources such as dictionaries, grammars, and textbooks.

Once the decision has been made to treat Nouchi as a distinct language, we are faced with the question of how to characterize Nouchi from a typological point of view. It is certainly a contact language, though it does not seem to fall neatly into any of the major typological bins of contact varieties: pidgin, creole, mixed language. It is true that Nouchi began as a language of urban youth, so perhaps in this way it resembles other African urban youth varieties like Sheng in Kenya, Camfranglais in Cameroon, and Tsotsitaal (and its successor Iscamto) in South Africa. However, Nouchi is no longer spoken only by urban youth, and it seems likely that Nouchi will continue to spread (Aboa 2011, Kube 2004). Here I make no claim about which of these types of contact languages, if any, Nouchi resembles. This is a question for future exploration. Here my claim is only that Nouchi is a language distinct from standard French, Ivoirian French, and other Ivoirian languages.

Nouchi began as the language of urban youth, and until now has been regarded as a dialect of colloquial Ivoirian French. Since the 1980's, Nouchi has standardized and spread throughout Abidjan, the urban areas of Côte d'Ivoire, and into Burkina Faso and Mali. Based on my own experiences in a village in southwest Côte d'Ivoire, I can attest that Nouchi is making its way into the rural areas as well. It is a distinct code with a productive grammatical system that has not been transparently inherited from its source languages. Contact languages inherit select linguistic features from their source languages and can develop into autonomous, distinct languages (Aboh 2009; Uffmann 2009); thus, the continued documentation of Nouchi's grammatical processes will allow us to observe which linguistic features are inherited while others are not, offering insight into how contact languages change over time.

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