

Igbo

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The style of speech illustrated is that of many educated speakers of standard Igbo. Standard Igbo can be seen as a fusion of aspects of central Igbo and Onitsha Igbo. In its present form standard Igbo cannot be localized in any particular region or area of Igboland (Ikekeonwu 1985).

Consonants

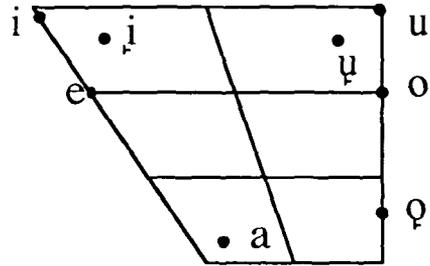
	Bilabial	Lab-dent.	Dental	Alveolar	Postalv.	Palatal	Velar	Glottal	Lab.-Vel.
Plosive	p b		t d				k g		k̠p̠ g̠b̠
Nasal	m		n			ɲ	ŋ		
Fricative		f		s z	ʃ		ɣ	ɦ	
Affricate			tʃ dʒ						
Approx- mant					ɹ	j			w
Lateral Approx.					l				

Labialized Velars: kw, gw, ŋw

p	àpà	àpà	'scar'	t	tá	tá	'chew'	k	ká	ká	'more'
b	ùbá	ùbá	'wealth'	d	dà	dà	'fall'	g	gá	gá	'go'
m	mù	mù	'me'	n	nù	nù	'hear'	ŋ	ŋù	nù	'drink'
f	fé	fé	'fly'	ɲ	ɲù	nyù	'defecate'				
				s	sá	sá	'wash'	ɣ	áɣá	ághá	'war'
				z	zà	zà	'swell'	ɦ	áfà	áhà	'name'
				ʃ	áfà	áshà	'weaver bird'				
				tʃ	tʃá	cha	'ripen'				
				dʒ	á'dʒá	ájā	'sand'				
				ɹ	í	rí	'eat'	j	ji	yí	'resemble'
				l	lí	lí	'bury'				
kw	àkwà	àkwà	'bed'					k̠p̠	àk̠p̠à	àkpà	'bag'
gw	àgwà	àgwà	'behavior'					g̠b̠	àg̠b̠à	àgbà	'fame'
ŋw	ŋwù	ŋwù	'die'					w	wá	wá	'split'

Vowels

i	ísí	ísí	'head'
ɪ	íḃò	íḃò	'dissect'
ɥ	úmù	úmù	'children'
u	émù	émù	'derision'
o	ékò	ékò	'gizzard'
e	ùkó	ùkó	'rafter, roof'
ɔ	òḡì	òḡì	'marrow'
a	ákú	ákú	'kernel'



Conventions

Both dental and alveolar plosives [t̪, d̪] and [t, d] are found in the language. The alveolar plosive allophones occur mainly in the environment of /u/ and /ɥ/. The voiced post-alveolar approximant /ɹ/ is realized as a flap [r] intervocally e.g. árá [árá] 'madness'.

The labial-velar plosives /k̠p̠, g̠b̠/ involve double articulation; the velar and labial closures are made and released simultaneously. The airstream used is pulmonic egressive. However, in some dialects, e.g. Enu-Onitsha Igbo, the voiced bilabial plosive /g̠b̠/ may be realized as a voiced bilabial implosive [β] and in the Owerri dialect /k̠p̠/ may be realized as a voiceless bilabial implosive [p̠]. Aspirated and nasalized consonants are not used in standard Igbo. They are, however, used distinctively in some Igbo dialects e.g. Umuahia and Owerri within Inland East Igbo (Inland East Igbo incorporates what was known as Central Igbo in earlier writings). A voiced labiodental fricative [v] occurs in some Igbo dialects but not in standard Igbo; the Umuahia dialect has [m̠v̠ɔ] for 'finger nail' where standard Igbo has [m̠b̠ɔ].

There is vowel harmony in Igbo. The 8 vowels fall into two sets distinguished by pharyngeal cavity size (Lindau 1975), with 'expanded' vs 'unexpanded' pharynx. The sets are shown below. Vowels from different sets do not normally co-occur in a word. This distinction is often discussed in terms of an ATR (Advanced Tongue Root) parameter, since fronting the tongue root contributes to pharyngeal expansion. One of the diacritics [̠] or [̡] can be used to distinguish one set of vowels from the other. In this illustration the unexpanded (-ATR) set are marked, except that since separate letters are used for /e/ and /a/ it is unnecessary to use a diacritic to distinguish this pair. The older tradition of using symbols that suggest the auditory height differences of the vowels, as indicated by their locations on the accompanying vowel chart, can be used as an alternative. The suggested symbols would be:

Expanded ([+ATR])

i u
e o

Unexpanded ([-ATR])

ɪ ʊ
a ɔ

Two distinctive tones are often recognized in Igbo; in addition, there is a third tone, a downstepped high. The tones may be marked as follows:

[ˊ] = high; [ˋ] = low [ˊˋ] = downstep.

In our text illustration we have left the low tone unmarked. In the orthography, however, the downstep is usually indicated with a macron [ˊ] on the affected segment. In the words used for exemplification and in the orthographic version of the passage in the Qnwu orthography (the current orthography for Igbo) we have marked all the tones.

There is the tonal phenomenon of downdrift in Igbo: each succeeding high tone is lower than the preceding one, especially when there is an intervening low tone. In a sequence H - L - H, the second high is on a lower pitch than the first. Low tones are also affected by downdrift. This phenomenon, of course, is of no phonemic significance.

Transcription of recorded passage

ikuku ỳgụmụ na áˊn̄wụ́ naaṛṛṛ́tá ỳˋkà ọ́n̄é ˋká íbè já íkè mgbè fiá
fiṛṛṛṛ otu ọ́n̄é íd̄z̄e ka ó ji uwé ỳgụmụ ja náabíá. fiá kwèk̄òṛṛṛt̄àrà na ọ́n̄é
ˋb̄w̄u ỳz̄ò méé ka ọ́n̄é íd̄z̄e áh̄ṛṛ j̄ṛṛṛ uwé ˋja ka á ga éwè d̄j̄ ka ọ́n̄é ka íbè
já íkè. ikuku ỳgụmụ wéé malíté féé, féé, féé, otu íkè ˋjá fiá; ma ka ó na
éfè ka ọ́n̄é íd̄z̄e áh̄ṛṛ na ed̄z̄íd̄ésí ˋúwé ˋjá ˋíkè na ah̄ṛṛ ˋjá. já fék̄atá fiáṛṛ.
mgbè áh̄ṛṛ aˋn̄w̄ṛ wéé t̄f̄áṛṛt̄á, t̄f̄ásíˋkè méé ka ebe nííˋlé kp̄òró ọ́k̄ṛ;
náˋát̄uf̄uȳi ógè ọ́n̄é íd̄z̄e áh̄ṛṛ j̄ṛṛṛṛ uwé ˋjá ńkè a m̄eṛe ikuku ỳgụmụ
kw̄eṛe na aˋn̄w̄ṛ ka já íkè.

Orthographic text

Ìkùkù ỳgùrù nà Ánw̄ n̄-aṛṛṛ́tá ỳkà ọ́nyé k̄á íbè yá íkè m̄gbè há h̄ṛṛṛ otù ọ́nyé
ìjè kà ó yí ùwé ỳgùrù yá n̄-àb̄j̄á. Há kwèk̄òṛṛt̄àrà nà ọ́nyé b̄ūrū ỳz̄ò méé kà ọ́nyé ìjè áh̄ṛ
ȳṛṛṛ ùwé yā kà á ḡà-éwè d̄j̄kà ọ́nyé ka íbè yá íkè. Ìkùkù ỳgùrù wéé malíté féé, féé, òtù
íkè yā hà; mà kà ó n̄-èfè kà ọ́nyé ìjè áh̄ṛ n̄-èj̄íd̄ésí ūwé yā íkè n̄ àh̄ú yā. Yá fék̄atá
h̄áṛṛ. Mgbè áh̄ṛ Ánw̄ wéé ch̄áṛṛt̄á, ch̄ásíkè, méé kà ébè nííˋlé kp̄òró ọ́k̄ṛ; ná-át̄uf̄gh̄ĩ
ógè ọ́nyé ìjè áh̄ṛ ȳṛṛṛṛ ùwé yā. Nkè à m̄èrè ìkùkù ỳgùrù kwèrè nà Ánw̄ kà yá íkè.

References

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- LINDAU, M. (1978). Vowel features. *Language*, **54**, 541-563.