

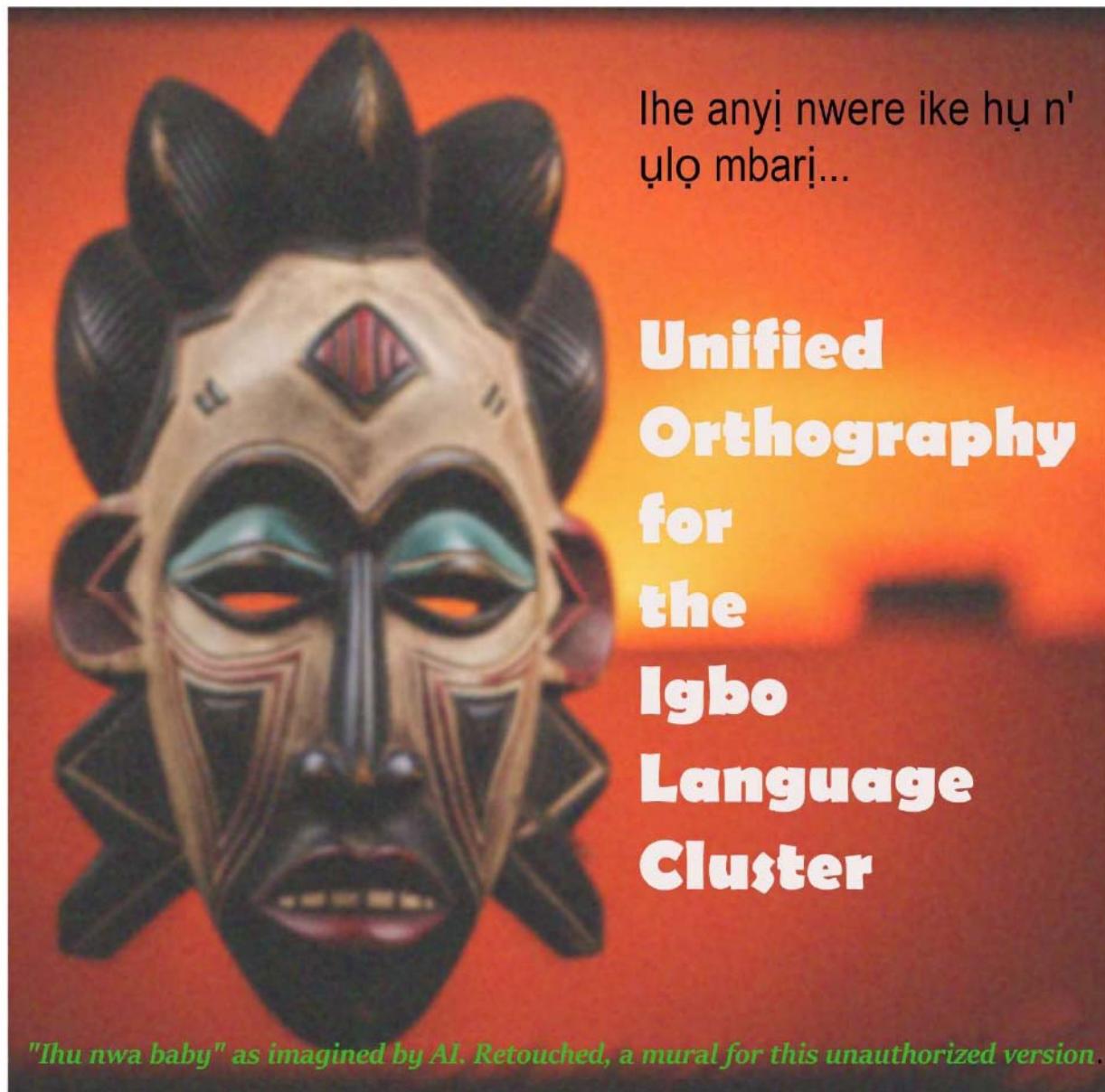
# The Unified Standard Orthography for the Igbo Language Cluster.

An unorthodox copy.

Monograph Series No. 242 <sup>(and a half)</sup>

(Nigeria)

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Ihe anyị nwere ike hụ n'  
ụlọ mbarị...

**Unified  
Orthography  
for  
the  
Igbo  
Language  
Cluster**

*"Ihu nwa baby" as imagined by Al. Retouched, a mural for this unauthorized version.*

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First Published 2011

ISBN. 978-1-920287-13-9

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This publication was jointly produced by The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS) & The Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), Printed and bound by SED Printing Solutions Capte Town (021) 701 1192.

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## Preface

The CASAS Africa-wide harmonization and standardization of African languages Project, continues to make progress . This text is the latest installment of the work that is being done. The harmonization of the Igbo cluster forms part of the Nigerian component of the Africa-wide work.

The Igbo technical orthographic team consisted of the following people: E. Nolue Emenanjo, Ozo-Mkuri Ndimele, Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche, Justina ogbonna, Anthony C. Onwumah, Ndidi Aimenwaluu, Charles Ujah, Roseline Alerechi, C. Eme and Franca Okumo.

This text is the result of the labours of the above team. The Resource Person was Dr Anderson Chebanne.

We would like to thank the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa/OSISA, Norad and the Nigerian government for their support for this work.

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4<sup>th</sup> April 2011

## **Harmonization and Standardization of Orthographies of the Igbo Language cluster of Nigeria.**

### Acknowledgements

The producers of this unified standard orthography for the Igbo language cluster are grateful to the Center for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) and the Centre for Advanced Study of African Societies (CASAS).

The import of this development means that various stake holders: education, researchers, teachers, writers, publishers, etc. will have an orthography resource for their various activities.

We wish to express many thanks to those who took part in the workshop that was held in Abuja between 26th and 27th October, 2010. These include linguists: Prof. E. Nolue Emenanjo, Prof. Ozo-Mekuri Ndimele, Prof. Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche and Miss Justina Ogbonna, as well as Mr. Anthony C. Onwumah (PhD), Director CBAAC, Lagos, Mrs Ndidi Aimenwauu, Deputy Director CBAAC, Lagos and Dr. Charles Ujah of African language Centre, Lagos.

At a subsequent workshop held at the University of Port Harcourt on 11 November, 2010, the following linguists also participated: Dr (Mrs.) Roseline Alerechi, Dr. (Mrs.) C.Eme and Ms. Franca Okumo.

We would also like to acknowledge other researchers whose materials have inspired our work, notably publications on orthographies of Nigerian languages from the National Language Centre, Federal Ministry of Education and the manuscript of “Comparative Igboid” by Prof. Kay Williamson and Prof. C. Ohiri-

Aniche, from which a list of sounds from various speech forms of the cluster has been sourced.

## **Introduction and Background**

The speech varieties being considered here under the term “Igbo Cluster” are numerous and have varying degrees of intelligibility among themselves. This has, in the past, led to claims of separate languages by some of the varieties. The term “Igboid” was introduced by Manfredi (1982) who used it to refer to the Igbo dialect cluster, plus other lects that speak closely related forms. The -old suffix is, however, not considered appropriate here since it refers to relationship between languages of around 40% on a standard lexicostatistics list (see Williamson 1989: 18). The speech varieties being dealt with here have relationship of upwards of 70% among themselves, thereby qualifying as Igbo cluster, rather than Igboid. The term ‘Igbo Cluster’ was first used in print by Egbokhare et al (2001: 40).

The Igbo cluster is found in the five South-Eastern states: Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and also in parts of Delta, Rivers, Edo, Benue and Akwa Ibom. It is spoken as first or second language by at least 35 million people.

Historically, people of the Igbo cluster have been traveling(sic) round the world and are found in the diaspora not only in different part of Nigeria but in Africa, Europe, America, Asia, etc.

The Igbo cluster is one of the first Nigerian languages to be reduced to writing by missionaries, travelers (sic), and colonial administrators. The Igbo cluster is a well-researched language and has a good collection of literature. It is also used in the media and it is one of the three

Nigerian languages recommended in the Nigerian Constitution for use in the national legislature alongside English. It is also one of the three Nigerian languages recommended in the National Policy on Education to be taught both as first and second languages in the secondary school system. Furthermore, it is available as a language of study in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria and outside Nigeria. It is also one of the three Nigerian languages for which *Microsoft Corporation* (*italics are this copyist's note*) is developing necessary Information Technology (IT) software.

In view of the population of the speakers, the national status of the language as spelt out in the Nigerian Constitution, the National Policy on Education, the Cultural Policy for Nigeria and its influence in the Diaspora and in academic situations, it is important that the Igbo cluster orthographies should be harmonized.

This harmonization does not entail proscribing varieties and any speech form that people currently speak; rather it provides a writing resource for these related varieties  
It also seeks to provide an orthography for those varieties that hitherto have not been reduced to writing. This is essentially a reference material for teachers, writers, publishers, researchers and all others who need it for whatever purpose including dialect study, oral literature, historical research, etc.

(Underlines are by this copyist's hand, meaning: not underlined in the text)

## **General Unified Spelling rules**

1. Write grammatical categories as independent units, verbs, nouns, adjectives, ideophones, etc.
2. When writing ideophone(s), use up to 3 reduplications for capturing all the subtle semantic entailments of the ideophone.
3. Mark low and step tones and leave high tones unmarked.

4. Write personal, place and country names and loan words as nativized or phonologized (*pronounced?*) in the Igbo cluster; otherwise, write them as in their source languages.
5. Write compounds and reduplications separately and without hyphens.
6. The Igbo cluster has 10 vowels which fall into two harmony groups. Vowels of one harmony set are written with a (sub-dot) while the vowels of the second harmony set are written without a (sub-dot).
7. Write consonants with letters that are readily accessible in a modern word processor rather than phonetic symbols.
8. Aspiration is marked by ‘h’.
9. Nasalization is marked by writing ‘n’ between the consonant and the following vowel.
10. Breathiness is represented by ‘h’ followed by ‘n’ since breathiness does not co-occur with aspiration in the same speech varieties.

## 1. VOWELS

### 1.1 Sub-dotted and non Sub-dotted Vowels

Most Igbo cluster varieties have eight vowels which fall within two harmony sets. Vowels of one set co-occur in a simple word and are written with a sub-dot while vowels of the second set also co-occur in a simple word and are not sub-dotted.

**Example:**

**Set I Vowels (wide or [+ATR] )**

i [i] ìse ‘five’

e [e] eku ‘ladle’

o [o] onye ‘person’

u [u] uri ‘song’

**Set II Vowels (narrow or [- ATR])**

ị [ɪ] ịsā ‘to wash’

a [a] àkù ‘wealth’

ọ [ɔ] ọchị ‘laughter’

ụ [ʊ] ụlò ‘house’

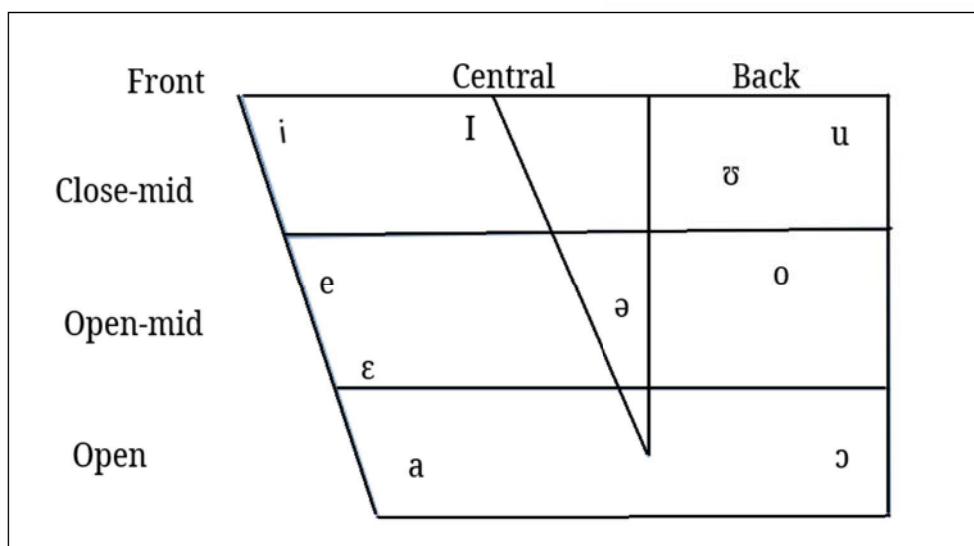
Two other vowels are found in some varieties within the cluster.

**Example: Nsukka**

ɛ [ɛ] ɛka ‘hand’

a [ə] anà ‘meat’

### 1. 2 Vowel Chart of the Igbo Cluster



## 2. CONSONANTS

### 2.1 Consonant

The following twenty-eight consonants are found in most varieties of the Igbo cluster.

b	[b]	ube	'pear'
ch	[tʃ]	oche	'seat'
d	[d]	ude	'cream'
f	[f]	ofe	'soup'
g	[g]	ogè	'time'
gb	[g]	ugbø	'boat/vehicle'
gh	[ɣ]	agha	'war'
gw	[gʷ]	agwø	'snake'
h	[h]	ahà	'name'
j	[dʒ]	ajā	'sand'
k	[k]	aka	'hand'
kp	[ɸ]	àkpà	'bag'
kw	[kʷ]	akwà	'cloth'
l	[l]	ulò	'house'
m	[m]	mmà	'knife'
n	[n]	nnu	'salt'
ñ	[ŋ]	añū	'honey/bee'
nw	[ŋʷ]	onwa	'moon'
ny	[n̩]	anya	'eye'
p	[p]	ìmpè	'smallness'
r	[r]	ire	'tongue'
s	[s]	isi	'head'
sh	[ʃ]	ìsha	'crayfish'
t	[t]	ute	'mat'
v	[v]	mvø	'nail'
w	[w]	ewu	'goat'

y	[j]	myo`	'sieve'
z	[z]	azù	'fish'

Many other consonants occur in some varieties of the Igbo language cluster. These have other features such as nasalization, aspiration, labialization, breathiness, double articulation, retroflex sounds, clicks, labio-velar nasal, labio-velar thrills, bilabial fricatives and bilabial affricates.

## 2.2 *Palatal Plosives*

Palatal plosives [c] and [tʃ] occur in some varieties, Orthographically, these are written as tch and dj

### **Example: Nenwe**

ötcha [ɔca] ‘whiteness’; ndjo [nɸɔ] ‘ugliness’

## 2.3 *Nasalization*

Nasalization occurs in some varieties of the Igbo cluster.

### **Example: Owerri**

ara [ara] = madness; arna [ařa] = breast

### **Example: Echie**

ahnà [ ahã` ] = name; ahà [ahà] = instrument

Nasalised consonants are represented by an ‘n’ between the consonant and the following vowel. This is because nasalization spreads to both the previous consonant and the following vowel.

## 2.4 Aspiration

Aspiraiton is marked by 'h', which is normally attached to plosives, as in the following examples

### Example: Ohuhu

ıbā [Ib!a] = to be rich,	ıbhā [Ibh!a]	=	to scold
ıpiā [IpI!a] = to fold;	iphīā [Ip <sup>h</sup> I!a]	=	to flog
ıgū [Ig!u] = to pick out (from liquid);	ighū [Ig <sup>h</sup> !u]	=	to read

## 2.5 Palatalization

Palatalization occurs in all varieties of the cluster.

### Example:

ipiō [ipy!o] = 'to enter';	ıbiā [Iby!a]	=	'to come'
----------------------------	--------------	---	-----------

Palatalization is marked by i/ɨ depending on vowel harmony.

## 2.6 Labialization

Labialized segments occur in most varieties of the cluster; they include the following [kw, gw, nw].

### Example:

igwū [ig<sup>w</sup>!u] 'to dig' ikwū [ik<sup>w</sup>!u] 'to say' inwū. [In<sup>w</sup>!u] 'to die'

In some other varieties, the following labialized segments also ooccur (tw, dw, lw, rw, hw).

### Example: Ebırıba

ùtwò [òt<sup>w</sup>ò] 'sweetness'

ùdwò [òt<sup>w</sup>ò] 'rope'

ùlwò [òl<sup>w</sup>ò] 'house'

### **Example: Arondizuogu**

ahwɔ [ah<sup>w</sup>ɔ] ‘stomach’

### **Example: Ikwerre**

rwe [r<sup>w</sup>e] ‘swallow’

Labialization is represented with ‘w’ after the symbol for the labialized sound.

## **2.7 Breathiness**

Breathiness occurs in some varieties giving rise to the following segments [bh, dh, gh, jh, gwh]. Breathiness is represented as bh dh, gh, jh and gwh followed by ‘n’, since breathiness does not co-occur with aspiration in the same speech varieties.

### **Example: Mbieri**

ibà [Ibà] ‘to soak in water’;	ibhnà [Ibñà] ‘to enter’
ídū [Id!ú] ‘to reach’;	ídhnū [Idñ!ú] ‘to sew’
igā [Ig!a] ‘to go’;	ighnā [Igh!ã] ‘to separate’

## **2.8 Implosives**

Most speech varieties of the cluster have implosives, which are represented as kp [β] and gb [6].

### **Example: Mbieri**

òkpu [òɸu] ‘hat’                egbè [eɓè] ‘gun’

## **2.9 Double-Articulation Labial-Velars**

Some varieties have double articulation labial-velars [kɸ] and [gɓ]. This is

because the implosive and double articulation segments do not occur in the same speech varieites.

### **Example: Ụkwụani**

òkpu [òkpu] ‘hat’      egbeè [egbè] ‘gun’

### **2.10 Retroflex**

Retroflex sounds occur in some varieteies such as Owerre [ $t^<$ ] and Ekpeye [d]. These retroflex sounds are written by doubling the consonant sounds instead of using sub-dot under t in Owere or adding h to d in Ekpeye.

### **Example: Owerri**

Old use	New Use
àtọ	àttò [àt <sup>&lt;</sup> ɔ] ‘three’

### **Exmaple: Ekpeye:**

Old Use	New use
edhī	eddī [edī] ‘rope’

### **2.11 Click**

Some varieties of the Igbo cluster such as Izii and Ihitenansa have a bilabial click which is represented with ‘nm’:

### **Example: Izii**

ma [ma] ‘know’; nma [øa] ‘sow e.g yam seeding’  
mẹ [mɛ] ‘wine’; nmẹ [øɛ] ‘give a lion share’

### **2.12 Labiovelar nasal**

Some varieites such as Nkwerre and Orlu, have labial-velar nasal nm [ŋm]. This is also represented as ‘nm’ since the labiovelar nasal and

the bilabial click do not co-occur in the same speech varieties.

### **Example: Orlu:**

ọnma [ɔŋma] ‘good’; umù [uŋmò] ‘children’

### **2.13 Labiovelar Trills**

Some varieties such as Ohaozara and Ezza have labiovelar trills [ $K^B$ ] and [ $G^B$ ]. These are written as krp and grb respectively.

### **Example: Ohaozara**

grbu [ $G^b u$ ] ‘kill’

### **Example: Ezza**

ùkrpo [ $u K^B o$ ] ‘twenty’

### **2.14 Bilabial Fricatives**

These also exist in some varieties such as [ $\phi$ ] in Izii and [ $\beta$ ] in Awka.

Orthographically [ $\phi$ ] is represented as /pfh/ while [ $\beta$ ] is represented as /bvh/ in order to eliminate confusion with the aspiration of [ $p^h$ ] and [ $b^h$ ].

### **Example: Izii**

Pfhe [ $\phi e$ ] ‘fly’

### **Example: Awka**

obvhe [ $o \beta e$ ] ‘soup’

### **2.15 Voiced Alveolar Fricative**

Some other varieties have the voiced alveolar fricative [ʒ], which is written as zh.

### **Example: Nenwe**

ozhī [oʒi] ‘stealing’

### **Example: Mbieri**

ezhnì [eʒi] ‘pig’

## **2.16 Affricates**

Some varieties have affricates such as pf, bv, tf, dv, ts, dz, kf and gv. These are written as pf, bv, tf, dv, ts, dz, kf and gv, respectively.

### **Example: Izii**

üpfü [üpfv] ‘leg’;                           ubvu [ubvu] ‘hill’

### **Example: Àkù**

tfe [tfe] ‘grow’;                           dvè [dvè] ‘rain’ (verb)

### **Example: Ogidi**

itsi [itsi] ‘head’;                           üdzò [üdzɔ] ‘door’

### **Example: Ebiriba**

èkfnà [èkfñà] ‘egg’                           ugvnu [ugvñu] ‘hill’

Stop	Labial Velar	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Labio-Dental Alveolar	Alveolar	Palato-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labialized Velar	Glottal
Plosive		p b			t d		c ɟ	k g	k <sup>w</sup> g <sup>w</sup>	
Asp/breathy Voiced		p <sup>h</sup> b <sup>h</sup>			t <sup>h</sup> d <sup>h</sup>			k <sup>h</sup> g <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>wh</sup> g <sup>wh</sup>	
Double Articulation	k <sup>kp</sup> g <sup>gb</sup>									
Affricate		pf bv		tf dv	ts dz	tʃ dʒ			kf gv	
Asp/Breathy						tʃ <sup>h</sup> dʒ <sup>h</sup>				
Implosive		β ɓ								
Retroflex					t<sup>ळ</sup>d					
Fricative		ɸ β	f v		s z	ʃ ʒ		v		h
Asp/Breathy Voiced					s <sup>h</sup> z <sup>h</sup>	ʃ <sup>h</sup> ʒ <sup>h</sup>				
Rhotics: roll					r					

Stop	Labial Velar	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Labio-Dental Alveolar	Alveolar	Palato-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labialized Velar	Glottal
trill								K <sup>B</sup> G <sup>B</sup>		
Lateral					l					
Nasal	n̪m	m			n		n̪	n̪	n̪w	
Click		θ								
Approximant							Y		w	

### 3 TONE

Tone is grammatically important in all varieties of Igbo cluster as it makes lexical, morphological and argument structures distinctive. However, for mother-tongue speakers, the context provides sufficient information to minimize the use of tone. Tone is usually marked above the vowel or the syllabic nasal.

Generally, low tones and down steps are marked while high tone is left unmarked.

#### **Example:**

Isi ‘head’;                isì ‘smell’;    ìsì        ‘blindness’;    isi ‘to cook’  
ntụ ‘ash’;                ntụ ‘a lie’;    mba ‘scolding’;    mbà ‘town’  
nwam̄ba ‘pussycat’

There are varieties in the cluster that have falling and rising tones. These are marked as they are used in the varieties.

#### **Example: Ukwuani**

ụkwụ ‘waist’                ụkwụ ‘leg’  
onyaà ‘trap’                onya ‘wound’

#### **Example: Ikwerre**

òmù ‘to bear a child’    òmù ‘to study’

Tones can also distinguish phrases and sentences.

#### **Example:**

uló` ató` ‘three houses’;   uló̄ átó ‘the third house’

Ọ nà-àbịa ‘He/She is coming’;   Ọ nà-àbịa? ‘Is he/she coming?’

## 4. WORD DIVISION

The grammar of the varieties in the Igbo cluster determine the syntactic relation of words. Write the following grammatical categories: verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, ideophones, prepositions, separately. Note however, that in some morpho-phonological contexts, certain categories may be written together.

### 4.1 Verbs

The Igbo sentence has subject which could be a noun or a pronoun, a verb and its own object.

#### 4.1.1 Auxillary Verbs

Auxillary verbs are written with a hyphen before the main verb

Example

I	na-	eje	Anyi	na-	eje
You (sg)	Aux	going	We	Aux	going
'You	are	going'	'We	are	going'

Q	na-	eje	Ha	na-	eje
He/she (sg)	Aux	going	They	Aux	going
'He/She is going'			'They are going'		

John	na-	abia	John	ga-	abia
John	aux	coming	John	Aux	coming
'John is coming'			'John will come'		

The exception is when the subject is the first person singular which has the split form A ... m. The auxilliary verb is then attached to the A of the split form and is written without a hyphen:

## **Example:**

Ana m eje ahja  
Aux I going market  
'I am going to the market'

Aga m eri nri  
Aux I eating food  
'I shall eat food'

### **4.1.2 Negative Markers**

Negative statements are realized by attaching the negative suffix-  
ghi/-ghị to the Aux. Example:

Anaghi m eri  
Aux + neg I eating  
'I am not eating'

I naghi eri  
You (sg) Aux+Neg eating  
You are not eating

John anaghi eri  
John Aux +Neg eating  
'John is not eating'

Q gaghi eri  
he/she Aux+Neg eating  
'He/She will not eat'

Note that in other varieties, the Aux 'na-' can be realized as 'la-' 'je-':  
ra-', etc. For negative statement, some varieties have the suffixes: - gi/gi; hu/hụ as in:

Alagi m eje 'I am not going'  
Anahụ m eje 'I am not going'.

Some others have the following as negative statements:

o ribeee  
He/she eat neg  
He/she has not eaten

Here the neagtive marker is '-bee' which is attached to the main verb.

### **4.1.3 Tense and Aspect Markers**

In varieties of the Igbo cluster, it is time duration (Aspect) that is emphasized, rather than absolute time reference (Tense). The tense and aspect markers are attached to the verbs.

#### **Example:**

Ada màrà mmā ‘Ada is beautiful’ Ada amaghị mmā ‘Ada is not beautiful’

Chike sirī àsi ‘Chike told lies’ Chike asighi asị ‘Chike did not tell lies’

Anyị nà-arụ ụlo ‘We build/are(were) building a house’

Anyị anāghị àrụ ụlò ‘We are (were) not building a house’

## **4.2 Nouns**

Nouns as (a) grammatical category stand alone; however nouns that are products of morphological derivations stay together; these morphological derivations are done with verbs.

#### **Example:**

Ma	‘know’	-ghe ‘yawn’	ughere	‘yawning’
amamihe		-de ‘write’	‘edemedede’	‘writing’, ‘text’
know something	‘knowledge’	– gụ	‘read’	aụmagu
Ihụnaya				‘reading’ ‘literature’
To see in (the) eye	‘love’			

Compound	Reduplication
A + B	A + A
onye + nkuzi ‘teacher’	ngwa + ngwa ‘quickly’
ụlo + akwukwọ ‘school’	ọsọ + ọsọ ‘quickly’
ndị + Igbo ‘Igbo people’	ozigbo + ozigbo ‘at once / immediately’

Note that compound (A + B) words should be separated because they are phrasal in nature. However, when it is a personal name or a technical term, it is written together, for example

Ohaneze	-name of a social-cultural group;	'crowd'
Ekwueme	'name of a person';	èkwu ème 'man of his words'
èzi na ulò	'family';	ikwu na ibe 'relatives'
ogba mgba	'wrestler';	òkà mmùta 'scholar'
umù akwukwo	'students/pupils' ;	ndi nkuzi 'teachers'

Reduplicated (A+A) words should also be separated.

#### 4.3 Pronouns

There are true pronouns and subject markers.

a e i o are examples of subject markers while m ha, ya, unu, anyi, gi etc. Are true pronouns. True pronouns can co-occur in conjunctive constructions; write them separately.

**Example:**

mụ na ya	'I and him'
mụ na gi	'I and you'
mụ na ha	'I and they'
mụ na Obi, etc.	'I and Obi', etc.

#### 4.4 Demonstratives

The demonstratives are written separately in the varieties of the cluster.

**Example:**

ebe a 'this place';      ebe ahú 'that place'

Some varieties such as Enuani have

ebe wọo 'the place under reference';      ebe nii 'that place'

#### **4.5 Preposition**

There is only one preposition in Igbo: **na**. It is written in full before words beginning with a consonant.

##### **Example:**

na Bende, ‘at Bende’;	na Lōōkpa ‘at Lōōkpa’
na tebulu ‘on table’ (sic)	na skuulu ‘at school’

But if the word begins with a vowel, the vowel sound in the preposition is elided.

##### **Example:**

n’ulø ‘in the house’	n’ahia ‘in the market’
----------------------	------------------------

#### **4.6 Adjectives**

In the Igbo cluster, adjectives are written separately.

##### **Example:**

akwà ọcha; cloth white; ‘white cloth’;	ajø mmadù bad person ‘wicked person’
--	--

Adjectivals exist as (a) grammatical category, for instance in adjectival expressions where nominals function as adjectives as in:

##### **Example:**

nwata	nwoke
child	man
‘a small boy’	

Any other grammatical category that qualifies a noun becomes adjectival, e.g

akpa	akwukwó
bag	book
	'school bag'

#### 4.7 *Adverbials*

There are categories that qualify verb actions. They should be written separately from the verbs. They are termed adverbials because they come from other categories. They are repeated for emphasis.

#### **Example:**

ngwa ngwa	'quickly'
ogologo ogologo	'straight'
osø osø	'quickly'

#### 4.8 *Conjunctions*

Conjunctive elements such as **nà**, 'and' **mà** 'but', **tupu** 'before', etc, should not be attached to any word but be written as a separate word.

Ji <b>na</b> ede;	Okoro di òcha <b>mà</b> chike dì òji
yam and cocoyam,	Okoro is fair (skinned) but Chike is dark (skinned).
O riri nri <b>tupu</b> ya jee ahia.	He / she ate food before he/she went to market.

#### 4.9 *Ideophones*

Ideophones are written as one word rather than as separate words or separated with hyphens. For example

tùmtùm	'sound of motorcycle'
niganiga	'having quality of emaciation' (also compare girigiri, gburu gburu).
gbimì (!)	'sound of heaviness of falling object'

#### **4.10 Holophrases**

Holophrases are written separately with an exclamation mark.

##### **Example:**

Exclamations:	Chei!	‘Good God’
Greetings:	Daalụ!	‘Thank you’
Oath-words:	Tufia!	‘God forbid’

#### **4.11 Borrowed Words**

Loanwords are nativized.

##### **Example:**

<b>English</b>	<b>Igbo</b>
attack	àtaàki`
almanac	alúmanakí
bread	bùredí
pot	ìtèpotù
school	skuùl/sùkulù
computer	kòmputà

#### **4.12 Place names**

All geographical place names, as well as names of languages are written as currently spelt. For example: Abuja, Nigeria, Lagos, England, America, Yoruba, Hausa. However, certain geographical place names which have been nativized and phonologized should remain as such, example: Naijiria = Nigeria.

#### **4.14 Acronyms**

Acronyms are written as currently spelt.

AU - AU ‘African Union’

ECOWAS - ECOWAS ‘Economic Community of West African States.

ILO – ILO ‘International Labour Organization’

UNESCO – UNESCO ‘United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

## 5. SAMPLE TEXT

### Etu Mbè Sìrà Bùrù Eze Ùmù Anùmànù

O rùrù otu ogè n'obòdò ụmụ anùmànù, ha niile kwekorita na onye ga-ebu uzò súchaa ajō ohia di ‘obòdò ha ma kòò ya ihe, nà ọ bù ya ka ha ga-echì ezè. Agu na Mbè wée püta ịzō ya bụ ọkwa ezè. Umù anùmànù wée kèrè Agu na Mbè ọhia ahù n'uzò àbụo. N'isi ụtutù, Agu kpotor ndị be ya niile jawa ọrụ n'ubi; Mbe kpotor kwàrà ndị nkè ya jawa ọrụ n'ubi. Mà, mgbe ha pùrù n'uzò, Mbe kpoputàrà ụmu ya ato ka ya nà ha jee otù ozi dī mkpà. O wée sị ndị ọzo gáwa ọrụ n'ubi e kenyérè ha.

Mbè na ụmụ ya ato wée gaa n'azụ ubì ebe agu nà ndị bē ya na-akò ubì, wée gụwa egwu di ụtọ nke na-etò Agu, ma na-akụkwa nkwà. N'otù n'otù, Agu na ndị bē ya malitèrè tewa egwū, mà tògbọ mmà na ọgụ ha. Ha tègidère egwu nke mbe na ụmụ ya nà-àguru ha, ruo mgbè chi jìri. Ndị bē Mbè jere orụ ubì wee buru uzò ruchaa ọrụ e kenyérè ha. Tupu agu amata ihe na-eme, ụmụ anùmànù echielia Mbè ezè ha.

## **6. TRANSLATION**

### **How the Tortoise Became King of Animals**

Once in a town of animals, all the animals agreed that whoever was the first to clear a bad bush in the town and cultivate it, would be crowned king. The ~~tiger~~ (leopard) and the tortoise came forth to vie for the crown. The animals divided the bad bush into two, between the ~~tiger~~ (leopard) and the tortoise. Early in the morning, the ~~tiger~~ (leopard) collected members of his household and they went to work on their portion; the tortoise also summoned members of his household to go to their own portion. But, on their way, the tortoise stopped and asked three of his children to accompany him on a special errand. He asked the remaining members of his household to continue to the farm.

The tortoise and his three children then went behind the farm where the ~~tiger~~ (leopard) and his household were working. They started singing sweet songs, praising the ~~tiger~~ (leopard), while also beating drums. One by one the ~~tiger~~ (leopard) and members of his household started dancing, laying down their knives and hoes. They continued dancing to the music being played by the tortoise and his children, until evening time. Members of the household of tortoise who had gone on to their own farm then became the first to complete the work assigned them.

Before the ~~tiger~~ (leopard) realized what was happening, the animals had crowned the tortoise their king.

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# Afterword

The Unified Standard Orthography for the Igbo Language Cluster (USOILC for short) is a 2011 work delivered by some of the best linguists and scholars of the Igbo language up till that time. It was researched and duly published but became orphaned shortly after it was delivered. Orphaned, because its adoption was not guided, guarded or shepherded by the great intellects behind it. Two of its would-be influencers became deceased each within ten years of its promulgation: N Emenanjo by 2017 and C Ohiri-Aniche by 2018. Both these professors, who made the teaching, learning, development and projection of Igbo language development their lives' work could not nurture their brain child to maturity. N Emenanjo mentioned the new metalanguage 'standard' in his last great textbook: *A grammar of Comparative Igbo* (2015) and C.Aniche-Ohiri also in her text, *Igbo Speech Varieties* (2013) but the standard would have gained more projection and promotion had both these principals lived longer.

There are a few reasons why some more projection was due. Igbo itself as a spoken and written language of more than 35 million people on the planet has enjoyed some good success already; its phased development had already evolved a standard (Standard Igbo or SI) with which most boys and girls of school age are conversant with, in Nigeria. SI, as popularly dubbed by its adherents (all of us) was taught in secondary and tertiary institutions.

Graduates had been produced and the scholarship was generally good but, the desired explosion of popular works in literature had not yet occurred and literacy in the language when measured by and in native speakers, was not high. Literacy figures were not always easily found. A couple of reports were produced meanwhile flagging up the frightful spectre of looming language loss affecting Igbo language speakers (not by native speakers on the mainland but definitely reported in diaspora residents and itinerary groups of speakers) whose children and offspring were failing to succeed at masterful speech and fluency within a single generation. This, despite being parented by native speakers. Among this demographic, language loss was already part of a lived experience. Some attributed endangered species status to the language.

## Why a 'new' standard?

Looming language loss by itself would have not been the only reason for the promotion of a new standard. A solution was to be crafted in answer to the 'dearth of literature' situation. There weren't many books becoming published in good Igbo. Those Igbo who have published books in Igbo swear by the adequacy and sufficiency of SI to carry all the hopes and aspirations of Igbo people. Yet, SI has always been the preserve of academics and scholarly people. That it was used in scholastic learning at secondary schools and in universities was not accidental, it was deliberately crafted for such use in the exams curricula and to join the languages 'arms race' that sort of developed soon as independence was granted (and Nigeria was to self-govern) but, where was the language of artists, chancers, dramatists, comics and pure geniuses in the language? Popular musicians had emerged meanwhile, rappers, Flavour, Phyno, Zoro, Raw, Iyke Onka, to mention a few. These were added to legends of the past: Ejiagha, Warrior, Oliver De Coque, and

more ... but, books of lyrics for some of these greats are practically non-existent. The performances would be rendered in the Igbo in which the performers are fluent, likely to be a dialect or a variety.

Chinua Achebe, one of Igbo country's greatest writers, (not in Igbo but in English) and generally, famously appeared to deride 'Standard Igbo' at his Odenigbo lecture of 1999.

It didn't sufficiently cater to his Ogidi dialect or accent, he felt. And this is part of what insightful people felt about the Standard Igbo, it was Igbo, but it did not include all of the Igbo. It did not represent all of the sounds it was possible to make in the language. Whole speakers' speaking and writing were missing.

Uzoma Nwaekpe, a scholarly head hails from Isiala Ngwa (one of the biggest Igbo groupings, by population) complains that his speech is not represented - their poems, their songs and dances cannot be rendered for posterity. And he was not the only one. The dialect clusters were under-represented in Standard Igbo.

SI had a phonemic deficiency—whole lects and phonemes were missing.

How do you begin to remedy a situation like this?

One answer would be to conduct science. By this I mean, define the problem and study its nature. Assign parameters, test hypotheses by conducting experiments, and then promulgate theories and conclusions. That, in a way, is what I feel our professors did with the USOILC. A few of them have published texts and the results of their research, which was done like this: speakers drawn from both the core and the periphery of Igbo were consulted, sampled and listened to. Our best linguists were tasked with distilling the results using all the tools of modern linguistics. Yet, even when you have dealt with core and periphery of the core, there are the extremes, at the places where Igbo crosses borders. The Igbo of Abiriba, Ohafia and Arọ are good examples.

But our professors were determined to try to include the dialects and harmonize their forms with existing forms drawn from SI, in order to cure its phonemic deficiency. They braved the highly scientific and gilded halls of the International Phonetics Association, running the involved gauntlets; because while Igbo is not only to be mutually intelligible (native speakers and writers must understand themselves at least), there is also an international element to Igbo's language development.

Would it be possible for others in the world to assay to learn and pick up Igbo speaking and writing? That is what the current effort represents, the USOILC not only tried to cure the phonemic deficiency that SI was born with, it better acquires Igbo to the international community. How is it that Igbo persons are able to take up other languages, English for instance and do wonderful things with it?

Chimaamanda Adiche was recently given the honorific of *Odeluwa* by her native community.

That title means '*writer for the whole world*'. ... The USOILC may mean that non-Igbo persons may choose to accomplish great things in the world using Igbo in just the same way Chimaamanda uses English.

### **Today's effort**

But, this USOILC is not that widely known, which brings me to this part and why I am writing this preface—in the back (an afterword). The monograph containing the form which became SI, was produced by the SPILC—*then* Society for the promotion of Igbo Language and culture. It was signed by one of its leader—Dr Onwu, whose name became attached to it. After it got produced, it was given directly to teachers and leading students for immediate use. That caused direct introduction into the speech and language community, which afforded it legs to run. By contrast the monograph for the USOILC was captured and became marooned at the halls and offices of the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society, in Cape Town. They were its publishers and soon after it became published, its principals died. This has resulted in an awkward set of circumstances.

The USOILC became international immediately without adequate localisation.

The leading teachers of Igbo and the brightest lights of the speech community today are virtually unaware of its existence. This is tragic.

When compared to Onwu's orthography the USOILC might well be a still born *revolution*.

In this digital era the USOILC monograph to the best of my knowledge has not been mass produced and cannot be bought off the shelves of *Amazon.com* for instance.

That is why I am writing this ‘preface in the back’, an afterword, if I may. And you are reading the first effort to seed the monograph of the USOILC to the speech community beginning with various outposts of that community directly on social media.

Without a primary influencer or influencers, I am hoping this USOILC can go viral and generate much talking points and excitement within the community. I am hoping that as more people get to learn its content and the intentions of the framers, that more iterations and efforts will correct its mistakes and make it better. Not that I think many mistakes were made. I feel sure however, that not all of the Igbo clusters were covered.

### **About the transcoded text**

You may find certain departures from the actual content of the monograph in this transcode,graph, but I can assure you this is not deliberate. Any errors found should be accounted mere copyist's errors. Hopefully, I can be contacted to remedy them. There are places where there have been departures, for emphases or other effect and I have used brackets and parentheses to show these.

I have kept strict parallel page order and correspondence in this transcoded effort compared to what is found in the actual monograph offline. Hopefully this ‘pagination’ is retained in future.

In the sample text passage found on page 25 of the actual monograph the story telling how Tortoise (a recognized totem animal of the Igbo) became King of Animals, the figure of ~~tiger~~ as Agu was used and I have changed it, since most Igbo might agree that Leopard is the better translation for Agu than what our professors used.

Yet you cannot always pick and choose your way in a thing done by persons better than you; I still leave tiger crossed out in the text, so that it is recognised that the text of the USOILC might embody errors, but there are no errors of the language science at all. That, you must trust fully.

It's 2023 and **Chat GPT** (an Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology) has appeared and I went along to ask the Large Language Model about the USOILC.  
This is what it 'said'.

Begin Quote.

*Q: Please what do you know about the Unified Standard Orthography for the Igbo Language Cluster*

*A: The Unified Standard Orthography for the Igbo Language Cluster (USOILC) is a standardized writing system developed to provide consistency and uniformity in the representation of the Igbo language. It was developed by a committee of Igbo language scholars and linguists to address the variations and inconsistencies in the existing orthographic systems used for Igbo.*

*The USOILC was designed to be inclusive and to accommodate the various dialects and sub-dialects within the Igbo language cluster. It provides guidelines for the representation of Igbo sounds, tones, and letters, as well as rules for punctuation, capitalization, and other aspects of writing.*

*The development of the USOILC aimed to promote literacy, education, and communication in Igbo by providing a standardized writing system that can be used across different regions and communities. By establishing consistent spelling and pronunciation rules, it facilitates the learning and teaching of the language and enables easier communication and comprehension among Igbo speakers.*

*The adoption and implementation of the USOILC are still ongoing processes, and it may take time for widespread acceptance and usage. However, the development of unified orthographic system like the USOILC is a significant step towards preserving and promoting the Igbo Language.*

End Quote.

(Optional) Verify this here: <http://bit.ly/chatgptonusoilc> or  
QR Code:



I think the AI has answered well. It is the reason why you are reading an after word here. The intervention we needed as a community has been made. It was the USOILC and I broke protocol to ensure that we got our revolution.

My name's Kelechi Isiodu and I can be reached at [kelechiisiodu@gmail.com](mailto:kelechiisiodu@gmail.com). This effort was not for profit. It may make me a bit infamous, perhaps. I commend the effort to you nonetheless.

This transcoded text was checked, proofed and corrected by Iyke Onka a USOILC scholar and general great head.

The USOILC is now in your hands, see what you can do.

The Transcode is not to be resold.



*Pushing the Igbo Experience Envelope and Risking Peculiar Igbo Trouble. IGFT™*



Igbo omoko, q' kwo i ghɔtora? @Usolic 2023. @kora odee KI.02023.  
[Transcode]