Major Nigerian Languages with Dialects and Sub-dialects

Nigeria has over 520 languages, but here are the major languages organized with their dialects and sub-dialects:

1. ENGLISH (Official Language)

- **Nigerian Standard English** - Official variety used in government and education
- **Nigerian English varieties:**
  - Northern Nigerian English
  - Southern Nigerian English
  - Nigerian Pidgin English (widely spoken)

2. HAUSA (63+ million speakers)

Major Language Family: Afroasiatic (Chadic branch)

Standard Dialects:

- **Kano Hausa (Kananci)** - Standard literary form
- **Daura Hausa (Dauranchi)** - Classical standard

Regional Dialects:

- **Northern Dialects:**
  - Sokoto Hausa
  - Katsina Hausa
  - Zamfara Hausa
  - Kebbi Hausa
- **Central Dialects:**
  - Zaria Hausa
  - Kaduna Hausa
  - Plateau Hausa
- **Eastern Dialects:**
  - Bauchi Hausa
  - Gombe Hausa
  - Yobe Hausa

- **Western Dialects:**
  - Hausa of Niger Republic
  - Malian Hausa

3. YORUBA (47+ million speakers)

Major Language Family: Niger-Congo (Volta-Niger branch)

Major Dialect Regions:

The various Yoruba dialects can be classified into three major dialect regions: Northwest, Central, and Southeast

- **Northwest Yoruba:**
  - Yagba, Owe, Ikiri, Ijumu, Oworo, Gbede, Abunu, Okun
  - **Sub-dialects:**
    - Kabba dialect
    - Lokoja Yoruba
    - Kwara dialects

- **Central Yoruba (Standard):**
  - **Oyo-Ibadan cluster** (Standard Yoruba base)
    - Oyo dialect
    - Ibadan dialect
    - Ogbomoso dialect
  - **Lagos-Egba cluster:**
    - Lagos Yoruba
    - Egba dialect
    - Ijebu dialect
    - Remo dialect

- **Southeast Yoruba:**
  - Igbomina, Ijesha, Ifẹ, Ekiti (including Akurẹ), Ẹfọn, Western Akoko
  - **Sub-dialects:**
    - **Ekiti group:**
      - Ado-Ekiti dialect
      - Ikere dialect

- Efon dialect

  - **Ijesha group:**
    - Ilesa dialect
    - Ijebu-Jesa dialect

  - **Ife group:**
    - Classical Ife dialect
    - Modakeke dialect

4. IGBO (31+ million speakers)

Major Language Family: Niger-Congo (Volta-Niger branch)

The core Igbo cluster is generally thought to be one language but there is limited mutual intelligibility between the different groupings (north, west, south and east)

Major Dialect Groups:

Northern Igbo:

- **Onitsha-Anambra cluster:**
  - Onitsha dialect
  - Anambra dialect
  - Awka dialect
  - Nsukka dialect

Western Igbo (Anioma):

The western Igbo (Ndi Anioma, as they like to call themselves)

- **Enuani dialects:**
  - Asaba dialect
  - Ibusa dialect
  - Ogwashi-Uku dialect
- **Ika dialects:**
  - Agbor dialect
  - Ika Northeast dialects

Southern Igbo (Owerri):

The southern or Owerri Igbo are divided into the Isu-Ama of Okigwe, Orlu, and Owerri; the Oratta-Ikwerri of Owerri and Ahoada; the Ohuhu-Ngwa of Aba and Bende; and the Isu-Item of Bende and Okigwe

- **Owerri cluster:**
  - Central Owerri dialect
  - Orlu dialect
  - Okigwe dialect

- **Ngwa-Ohuhu cluster:**
  - Ngwa dialect
  - Ohuhu dialect
  - Bende dialect

- **Oratta-Ikwerre cluster:**
  - Oratta dialect
  - Ikwerre dialect

Eastern Igbo:

- **Enugu cluster:**
  - Enugu dialect
  - Nike dialect

- **Afikpo cluster:**
  - Afikpo dialect
  - Edda dialect

Some Igbo dialects include Owerri, Umuahia, Onitsha (pronounced "Onicha"), Ngwa, Enugu, Anambra, and Ebonyi

5. FULFULDE/FULANI (13 million speakers)

Major Language Family: Niger-Congo (Atlantic branch)

Nigerian Fulfulde Dialects:

- **Sokoto Fulfulde** - Western Nigeria
- **Gombe Fulfulde** - Northeastern Nigeria
- **Adamawa Fulfulde** - Central/Eastern Nigeria
- **Bororo Fulfulde** - Nomadic variety

- **Mbororo dialects** - Various pastoral sub-dialects

6. KANURI (7.6 million speakers)

Major Language Family: Nilo-Saharan (Saharan branch)

Kanuri Dialects:

- **Central Kanuri** - Maiduguri area
- **Manga Kanuri** - Niger border region
- **Tumari** - Northeastern dialects
- **Bilma** - Chad border dialects

7. IBIBIO (10+ million speakers)

Major Language Family: Niger-Congo (Cross River)

Ibibio Dialects:

- **Central Ibibio** - Standard variety
- **Eastern Ibibio** - Cross River dialects
- **Western Ibibio** - Akwa Ibom dialects
- **Efik** - Calabar variety (sometimes considered separate)

8. IJAW/IZON (5+ million speakers)

Major Language Family: Niger-Congo (Ijoid)

Ijaw Dialect Clusters:

- **Central Ijaw (Izon):**
  - Kolokuma dialect
  - Gbaramatu dialect
- **Eastern Ijaw:**
  - Kalabari dialect
  - Okrika dialect
  - Ibani dialect
- **Western Ijaw:**
  - Apoi dialect
  - Arogbo dialect

- **Southeastern Ijaw:**
  - Nembe dialect
  - Brass dialect

9. TIV (5 million speakers)

Major Language Family: Niger-Congo (Bantoid)

Tiv Dialects:

- **Central Tiv** - Standard variety
- **Northern Tiv** - Katsina-Ala dialects
- **Southern Tiv** - Konshisha dialects
- **Eastern Tiv** - Ushongo dialects

10. EDO (3 million speakers)

Major Language Family: Niger-Congo (Edoid)

Edo Dialects:

- **Benin Edo** - Standard variety
- **Esan** - Northern Edo dialects
- **Etsako** - Northwestern dialects
- **Owan** - Eastern dialects

11. IGALA (3 million speakers)

Major Language Family: Niger-Congo (Yoruboid)

Igala Dialects:

- **Central Igala** - Idah variety
- **Northern Igala** - Bassa dialects
- **Southern Igala** - Ankpa dialects
- **Eastern Igala** - Ofu dialects

12. NUPE (2-3 million speakers)

Major Language Family: Niger-Congo (Nupoid)

Nupe Dialects:

- **Central Nupe (Bida)** - Standard
- **Northern Nupe** - Kontagora area
- **Southern Nupe** - Pategi area
- **Eastern Nupe** - Lafiagi dialects

REGIONAL MINOR LANGUAGES (100+ languages)

Each of the following represents language clusters with multiple dialects:

Middle Belt Languages:

- **Berom** - Plateau languages cluster
- **Goemai** - Various Plateau dialects
- **Kagoma** - Hill languages
- **Hyam** - Central plateau varieties

Cross River Languages:

- **Efik** - Calabar cluster
- **Ejagham** - Border languages
- **Bekwarra** - Highland dialects

Adamawa Languages:

- **Mumuye** - Taraba cluster
- **Kutep** - River languages
- **Jukun** - Multiple sub-groups

Niger Delta Languages:

- **Isoko** - Delta varieties
- **Urhobo** - Multiple dialects
- **Itsekiri** - Warri cluster

NOTES:

- **Standard Languages:** Most major languages have adopted standard written forms based on central dialects

- **Mutual Intelligibility:** Varies significantly within language groups

- **Regional Variations:** Many dialects show influence from neighboring languages

- **Literary Forms:** Standard Yoruba, Central Igbo, and Kano Hausa serve as literary standards

- **Continuum:** Many "dialects" could be classified as separate languages depending on criteria used