



# RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

## **M.Ed. In TESL Program Language Group Specific Informational Reports**

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program  
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

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# The Igbo Language

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# Where is Igbo spoken?

## Africa

## Nigeria

- Map of Africa



<http://www.uiowa.edu>

The olive green area is in Nigeria where Igbo is spoken



<http://www.uiowa.edu>

# Language History

- The English Language is Nigeria's official language.
- Nigeria is a multilingual country where over 400 languages are spoken.
- Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba are the three major languages (mother tongue) spoken in Nigeria.
- The Igbo first came in contact with Europeans, the Portuguese and the British, in the mid fifteenth century.
- In 1861 the British colonized Nigeria influencing some of the linguistic and cultural aspects of Igbo people.

# History continued

- A large portion of the population have a limited education and can speak very little English.
- Speaking English commands great prestige.
- Nigeria's National Policy on Education is a multilingual policy that allows for a student to learn their mother tongue and English.
- English is taught in schools beginning in the primary grades because English is the only common language in all of Nigeria

# Cross Culture Communication

- The most common greeting of the Igbo is a handshake with a warm smile. Shake hands at the beginning and ending of a meeting.
- Men place their left hand on the other person's shoulder while shaking hands.
- The Igbo wait for a women to extend a hand first.
- Smiling and showing sincere pleasure at meeting the person is important.
- It is rude to rush a meeting practice.
- It is important to address people initially by their academic, professional or honorific title or surname.
- It is not a first name culture, you should always wait to be invited to use a person's first name.
- Many Igbo employ indirect eye contact to demonstrate their respect for the other person.

# Igbo Alphabet

- The Igbo alphabet consists of eight vowels, thirty consonants, and two tones - high and low.
- The official Igbo orthography (known as Onwu) uses a Roman script.

A a	B b	Ch ch	D d	E e	F f	G g	GB gb	Gh gh	Gw gw	H h	I i
[a]	[b]	[tʃ]	[d]	[e]	[f]	[g]	[b/ḡb]	[ɣ]	[gʷ]	[h]	[i]
Ị ị	J j	K k	Kp kp	Kw kw	L l	M m	N n	Nw nw	Ny ny	Ñ ñ	O o
[ɪ]	[dʒ]	[k]	[p/kp]	[kʷ]	[l]	[m/m]	[n]	[ɲw]	[nj]	[ɲ]	[o]
Ọ ọ	P p	R r	S s	Sh sh	T t	U u	Ụ ụ	V v	W w	Y y	Z z
[ɔ]	[p]	[r]	[s]	[ʃ]	[t]	[u]	[ʊ]	[v]	[w]	[j]	[z]

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)

# Semantics

- Igbo is a contrastive tonal language, high and low.
- These tones perform semantic and grammatical functions.
- Emphasis of different tones to certain words yield different meanings, i.e. the Igbo word **isi** could have four different meanings depending where the high tone pitch is emphasized - **isi**-head, **isì**-smell, **ìsì**-blindness, **isí**-to cook
- In Igbo, two sentences with the identical words can change from asking a question to become an affirmative sentence simply by the speaker's Igbo tone.



# Igbo Phonological Acquisition

- Ending consonants and consonant clusters very rarely occur in the Igbo language.
- VCV and VCVCV word structures are more prevalent in Igbo, than is the CVCV used in English.
- The Igbo language is tonal (high and low).
- Many vowels are not differentiated in Igbo. Igbo uses mostly short vowel sounds.

# Phonology

## Vowel Use

- Igbo English language learners lengthen the vowel sounds in words, which does not change the semantics.
- Igbo learners tend to lengthen English vowel sounds. Although this assists the Igbo learner with the ease of speaking, it is not the correct English pronunciation.

i.e. English  
stew

Igbo  
situu

# Syllables

- The Igbo language has open syllables
- The English language has open and closed syllables
- The Igbo has no consonant clusters
- The English language has consonant clusters
- The basic Igbo syllable is CV: si-cook, zu-buy
- The basic English syllable is VC: am, is, on

# Phonology

- Verb use effects Igbo grammar
- Verb endings and the use of auxiliaries in the simple present and past are the cause frequent problems, i.e. he didn't came back.
- The infinitive form after: make, let, see and hear, cause problems for Igbo learners, i.e. I saw him did it.
- Mistakes are common when verb phrases are reduced after conjunctions, i.e. I didn't see anything or heard anything.

# Syntax

- Choice of an appropriate tense form causes many problems especially with certain uses of have, think, and see, i.e. I was having no money.
- The present perfect is frequently misused, or not used, i.e. I have seen him yesterday.

## Nouns and Articles

- The difference between countable and uncountable nouns is not well understood and many uncountables are wrongly classified, i.e. We had a rain this morning.
- Names of animals tend to be treated as proper nouns, i.e. This is Goat instead of This is a goat.

# Syntax continued

- The definite article is frequently used incorrectly or omitted with names and titles, i.e. do you want to speak to Minister?
- Expression of quantity are often misused, i.e. they don't have much children.
- *Little* and *few* are confused and the negative effect of omitting "a" is not understood, i.e. there are a little eggs or give me few more oranges.
- *Too* and *enough* are not fully understood, i.e. this stew is too good or the roads are bad, so there are enough accidents.

# Difficulties for Igbo English Language Learners

- The bilingual Igbo/English constantly cross-switch the two languages while speaking.
- Igbo speakers find it difficult to employ intonation in English.
- Attention needs to be given to the pronunciation of words that make up a sentence.
- Research shows that deletion of speech sounds in the English language by Igbo ELLs.  
new - nju /n/, /y/, /u/      few - fju /f/, /y/, /u/
- Igbo learners insert an additional sound segments into certain positions of a word. A consonant may be added to break up vowel clusters. A teacher needs to be aware of these insertions, i.e. school- sukulu

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