

LESSON II
(IHE OMUMU NKE ABUO)

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Welcome to Lesson II (íhe òmumụ ñkẹ́ ábụọ). The alphabets we looked at in our introductory lesson are the building blocks of Igbo. Igbo speakers, at home and abroad, combine them in different ways to create different categories or classes of words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.) which, in turn, are further combined in numerous other ways to form sentences that express their ideas and needs. For example, the combinations allow them to talk about everything under the sun – the weather, the country the live in, the ups and downs of life, the creation of the universe, complex human relationships, the dreams of their lives, and much more. In the first half of this lesson, we will look at two groups of words so created – Igbo names for the different parts of the human body and Igbo cardinal numbers.

2.1 Parts of the human body

Memorizing the Igbo names for parts of the human body is a good starting point for the absolute beginner, since there is nothing we can think of that he or she is more likely to better identify with than parts of his or her own body. So, please, ask your parents, brothers, sisters, friends or any other Igbo speaker that you know to pronounce the Igbo words listed below for you. An illustration of the parts will follow soon. Also, arrangements are underway to make our lessons interactive so that you can see and hear the instructor pronounce similar words by just clicking a button on your computer.

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|-------------------------------|--|
| (1) íshi (head) | (15) ñtùtụ íshì (hair) |
| (2) íhu (face) | (16) ánya (eyes) |
| (3) ọ̀nụ (mouth) | (17) ími (nose) |
| (4) íre (tongue) | (18) égbìgbére ọ̀nụ (lip) |
| (5) áfọ (belly, stomach) | (19) ìvo óbì (chest) |
| (6) àpata (thigh) | (20) ́m̀vọ́ ákà (finger nail) |
| (7) ñti (cheek) | (21) ñtị (ear) |
| (8) ólu (neck) | (22) ̀m̀kpálávù (armpit) |
| (9) áka (hand) | (23) íshimvu ákà (shoulder) |
| (10) ọ̀bà ákà (palm) | (24) íkpèrè (knee) |
| (11) áfọ ̀úkwù (calf) | (25) ìchírì ̀úkwù (heel) |
| (12) ñgụgụ (flank) | (26) ọ̀kìrị́ àzụ (the vetebral column) |
| (13) ̀m̀bùbára ányà (eyelash) | (27) ákpù ótùwé (navel) |
| (14) ñku ákà (elbow) | (28) égedege íhu (forehead) |

The list, as you can see, is not exhaustive because we do not want to overwhelm you with more materials than you can comfortably handle at this time. Just learn the above for now. We will come back to them in Lesson III and examine how you can make reference to the different parts of your own body or to those of someone else.

2.2 Table of Numbers

Igbo speakers have two different systems of counting that differ slightly from one another. The older and most popular system is based on the number 20. And the recently-created decimal system is based on the number 10. The latter, a slight modification of the former, was created in an attempt to make Igbo counting less cumbersome by bringing it in line with recent developments in science and mathematics. And although it has been in use for several years now, the older generation of Igbo speakers and some of the younger generation of speakers are still having problems understanding and using it. Here is what they look like:

2.3 Cardinal Numbers

Name	Symbol	Decimal System
óroghoro	0	óroghoro
ótù	1	ótù
àbúọ	2	àbúọ
àtọ	3	àtọ
ànọ	4	ànọ
ìsé	5	ìsé
ìshíì	6	ìshíì
àsáà	7	àsáà
àsátọ	8	àsátọ
ìtéghite (or tógholu)	9	ìtéghite/tógholu
ìrí	10	ìrí
ìrí nà ótù	11	ìrí nà ótù
ìrí nà àbúọ	12	ìrí nà àbúọ
ìrí nà àtọ	13	ìrí nà àtọ
ìrí nà ànọ	14	ìrí nà ànọ
ìrí nà ìsé	15	ìrí nà ìsé
ìrí nà ìshíì	16	ìrí nà ìshíì
ìrí nà àsáà	17	ìrí nà àsáà
ìrí nà àsátọ	18	ìrí nà àsátọ
ìrí nà ìtéghite/tógholu	19	ìrí nà ìtéghite/tógholu

óhu	20	ìrí ábụọ (=10 x 2)
óhu nà ótù	21	ìrí ábụọ nà ótù
óhu nà àbụọ	22	ìrí ábụọ nà àbụọ
óhu nà àtọ	23	ìrí ábụọ nà àtọ
óhu nà ànọ	24	ìrí ábụọ nà ànọ
óhu nà ìsé	25	ìrí ábụọ nà ìsé
óhu nà ìshíì	26	ìrí ábụọ nà ìshíì
óhu nà àsáà	27	ìrí ábụọ nà àsáà
óhu nà àsátọ	28	ìrí ábụọ nà àsátọ
óhu nà ìtéghite/tóolu	29	ìrí ábụọ nà ìtéghite/tógholu
óhu nà ìrí	30	ìrí átọ (=10 x 3)
óhu nà ìrí nà ótù	31	ìrí átọ nà ótù
óhu nà ìrí nà àbụọ	32	ìrí átọ nà àbụọ
óhu ábụọ (= 20 x 2)	40	ìrí ánọ (=10 x 4)
óhu ábụọ nà ótù	41	ìrí ánọ nà ótù
óhu ábụọ nà àbụọ	42	ìrí ánọ nà àbụọ
óhu ábụọ nà ìrí	50	ìrí íse (=10 x 5)
óhu ábụọ nà ìrí nà ótù	51	ìrí íse nà ótù
óhu ábụọ nà ìrí nà àbụọ	52	ìrí íse nà àbụọ
óhu átọ (= 20 x 3)	60	ìrí íshíì (=10 x 6)
óhu átọ nà ótù	61	ìrí íshíì nà ótù
óhu átọ nà àbụọ	62	ìrí íshíì nà àbụọ
óhu átọ nà ìrí	70	ìrí ásaà (= 10 x 7)
óhu átọ nà ìrí nà ótù	71	ìrí ásaà nà ótù
óhu átọ nà ìrí nà àbụọ	72	ìrí ásaà nà àbụọ
óhu ánọ (= 20 x 4)	80	ìrí ásatọ (= 10 x 8)
óhu ánọ nà ótù	81	ìrí ásatọ nà ótù
óhu ánọ nà àbụọ	82	ìrí ásatọ nà àbụọ
óhu ánọ nà ìrí	90	ìrí íteghite/tógholu (=10 x 9)
óhu ánọ nà ìrí nà ótù	91	ìrí íteghite (tógholu) nà ótù
óhu ánọ nà ìrí nà àbụọ	92	ìrí íteghite (tógholu) nà àbụọ
óhu íse (= 20 x 5)	100	nàrị

As you can see, the first nineteen numbers are the same in both systems. After that, the basis of counting changes from multiples of twenty in the so-called “old system” to multiples of ten in the new or decimal system. Both of them, however, are in use and will continue to be in use for years to come. The major problem with the twenty-based system is that it becomes too long and cumbersome as the numbers increase. That is why Igbos are jokingly said to give up after 400. To them, whatever comes after that is simply “ínụ kwúru ínụ” (= multiples of 400) or “ágụtachaghị n’ọgụ” (= infinity or uncountable). In our subsequent lessons, we will look at the numbers between one

hundred and one thousand, between one thousand and one million, and between one million and one billion in both systems of counting.

2.4 A glance at the Igbo Verb:

A verb, as we were taught in elementary school, is a telling word. It is characteristically the grammatical centre of a sentence (ọwọ ọkwu). You may also, if you so desire, look at it metaphorically as a bridge that joins two parts of a city separated by a river. In Igbo, the verbs are divided on the basis of their physiognomy into two convenient groups, namely “**i-dot verbs**” and “**i-dotless verbs**”. The “**i-dotless verbs**” are also referred to as Group I verbs; the “**i-dot verbs**,” as Group II verbs. This means that every Igbo verb, without exception, must belong to one of the two groups. Here are some examples:

Group I Verbs

íwèrè íhè (to take something)
 íde íhè (to write sth)
 íhi úr̄a (to sleep)
 íbè ákwá (to cry)
 íri íhè (to eat food/sth)
 íte égwu (to dance)
 íchu mmiri (to fetch water)
 ízù íkè (to take a rest)
 íchè échìche (to think)
 ísè íhè (to draw sth)
 íkèwa íhè (to divide sth)
 írè áh̄ia (to sell sth)
 ímè íhè (to do sth)

Group II Verbs

ígba ọsọ (to run)
 íla mmiri (to leak)
 ísọ óyi (to be disgusting)
 íchụ ọh̄ia (to hunt for game)
 ízụ íhè (to buy sth)
 ímù íhè (to study/learn)
 ísa àh̄ụ (to bath)
 ígụ ákwụkwọ (to read)
 ígụ ọgụ (to count)
 ítụ égwù (to fear)
 íhụ áh̄ụh̄ụ (to suffer)
 ír̄ah̄ụ úr̄a (to sleep)
 ígba ọbara (to bleed)

We call the dot and dotless “**i**” and “**I**” that you find at the beginning of the above groups **infinitive markers** because they remind us that the verbs are at rest, or standing alone, as opposed to taking part in an unfolding event. That is also why they are listed as such in most dictionaries.

If you have a little knowledge of French, Spanish or German, you will have noticed two peculiarities of the Igbo language that emerge from the above list:

- (a) That in these languages, the infinitive markers occur at the end of the verbs rather than at the beginning. In English, the infinitive marker is “to”, as the above examples show.
- (b) That Igbo verbs, as our lexicographic research has shown, can and should be listed exhaustively in Igbo dictionaries under the letters **i** and **ị** depending, of

course, on the infinitive marker they carry. We will have a lot more to say about that in the coming lessons.

The verb proper in each of the above examples is the word before the brackets. The word within the brackets is the complement of the verb that enables us to interpret it by focusing our attention on the context or the intended meaning. In other words, an Igbo verb is not interpretable until we know what its complement is at any given time, and in a given context. Why is that so, you may ask? The reason is very simple: a given Igbo verb can take as many as ten, twenty or thirty different complements in ten, twenty or thirty different contexts to give us ten, twenty, or thirty different meanings, as the following examples show:

Verb	Complement	Meaning
ígba	(òsọ)	to run
ígba	(ńkwà)	to dance
ígba	(àkwụla)	to prostitute
ígba	(ńkpe)	to mourn sth/s.o.
ígba	(áka)	to be empty handed
ígba	(ùtù)	to rot
ígba	égbè)	to fire a gun
ígbọ	(ùfúfù)	to foam
íwa	(ọjị)	to break cola
íwa	(íshi)	to cause headache
íwa	(ánya)	to be fearless
íri	(íhe/ńri)	to eat food
íri	(ọnụma)	to take shit
íta	(íhe)	to chew sth.
íta	(mmiri)	to dry up (cooking pot)
íta	(àhú)	to loose weight
íhụshì	(ánya)	to suffer a lot
íwàra	(ánya)	to be vigilant

The Igbo verb and its complement are always in a lock and key relationship, just like apo-enzymes and co-enzymes. They are, as we say in Igbo, "ágawa ághàghị" (something you cannot leave home without). If you have a knowledge of Biology, you can further look at the relationship between the two parts of the Igbo verb in terms of the binomial system of classification postulated by the Swedish biologist, Carl von Linné, better known under the Latinized form of his name Carolus Linnaeus. The verb proper, in that case, will be the generic term while the complement that actualizes one of the competitive meanings will be the specific term.

We will have a lot more to say about the structure of Igbo verbs in due course. For now, if someone asks you to tell him or her the meaning of an Igbo verb like "ígba", "íri",

“*íta*”, “*izu*”, etc. without providing you with its complement, ask him or her “*ígba gínì?* (*ígba* what?), “*íri gínì?* (*íri* what?), “*íta gínì?* (*íta* what?), “*izu gínì?* (*izu* what?) and wait for his or her answer to your question or questions. You will find that unless you have a crystal ball to enable you read the mind of your interlocutor, you will not be able to respond to his or her question correctly until you know what the respective complements of the verbs in question are.

2.5 Assignment

1. If you are an absolute beginner, how would you say the following in Igbo, using the two counting systems?

- (a) 34 (b) 45 (c) 56 (d) 67 (e) 78 (f) 89

2. If you are a native speaker of Igbo, how would you distinguish the following numbers in Igbo, using the so-called old system?

- (a) 201 from 220 (b) 211 from 221 (c) 212 from 240

3. Complete each of the blank spaces with the appropriate complement of the verb, taking into consideration the supplied English translation:

- (1) *ígwù* (.....) = to swim (7) *ílewuwe* (.....) = to be observant
 (2) *írùgharị* (.....) = to hover around (8) *íshì* (.....) = to stink
 (3) *ímụba* (.....) = to multiply (9) *ítamụ* (.....) = to grumble
 (4) *ígbọ* (.....) = to vomit (10) *íchègharị* (.....) = to repent
 (5) *íkpopịa* (.....) = to burst into tears (11) *ígba* (.....) = to run helter-skelter
 (6) *ínyụ* (.....) = to urinate (12) *ígwunyò* (.....) = to fool around

4. Supply the English equivalent of each of the following Igbo verbs:

- (1) *ígbarịwa ánya*..... (7) *íkikègharị ánya*
 (2) *íhaji chí*..... (8) *ířahụmị ụřa*
 (3) *ínwò únwòro* (9) *íkpelelị ọsọ*
 (4) *ífe ébùbére* (10) *íri òsọdara*
 (5) *ítokò shị* (11) *ígwù àkịka*
 (6) *íkpa ìnyangá* (12) *íma kwúkwụkwụ*

If you have questions regarding the assignment or the materials presented in this lesson, you can e-mail them to the instructor. Needless to say, your comments, observations, or feedbacks always get our personal attention. Please remember to visit our website again for the next lesson and to join us at the Igbo Language Forum – your forum.

