THE OFFICIAL
IGBO ORTHOGRAPHY

as recommended by
THE ONWU COMMITTEE IN 1961

NOTES
ON SCRIPT AND SPELLING
FOR TEACHERS
The Official Igbo Orthography as recommended by the Chukwu Committee in 1961.

NOTES ON SCRIPT AND SPELLING FOR TEACHERS.

The specimen stories on pp. 7 - 9 should be carefully studied in connection with these notes.

The official script uses the letters of the English (Roman) alphabet, with diacritic marks (dots) where they are necessary for the sounds of Igbo.

CONSONANTS:

b gb ch d f g gw gh h j k kw kp l m n nw ny n p r s sh t v w y z.

VOWELS:

a (iza "to sweep")

e (ide "to write")

i (isi "to cook")

i (iri "to creep")

o (ilo "to swallow")

q (ilo "to return")

u (ibu "to carry")

u (itu "to throw").

These eight vowels, all of which are needed in Igbo, can be arranged according to their pronunciation and compared with those of the old orthography and of the former "new", to make clear their use in the official script.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official</th>
<th>Old</th>
<th>Former &quot;new&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) i u</td>
<td>(1) i u</td>
<td>1 u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) i u</td>
<td>(2) i u</td>
<td>1 e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) e o</td>
<td>(3) e o</td>
<td>1 e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) a q</td>
<td>(4) a q</td>
<td>a o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The levels of the vowels are numbered for convenience, to show the vowel harmony which is so strong a characteristic
of Igbo. Thus, vowels of the uneven levels, 1 and 3, combine with each other, as in ezi, iwu, udo, ebe, isi. In the same way, vowels of the even levels also combine, as in any, ụta, ụdọ, ịkpọ, ọza.

VOWEL HARMONY AND SPELLING:

PRONOUNS:

The singular pronouns i(ɨ) and o(o) and the impersonal pronoun e(a) are written in harmony with the vowel of the verb stem which follows them.

Examples:

2nd Person Singular { I dere akwụkwọ ɡị. "You wrote your letter."}
3rd Person Singular { O bu ibu ya. "He is carrying his load."
              { O hụry m. "He saw me."

Impersonal Pronoun { E siri  jị  unu "Your yams were cooked."}
              { A kọọ  jị  ha. "Their yams were planted."

It is important to note that all the pronouns are written separately, whether they come before a verb or after it or after a noun.

THE PRONOMINAL PREFIX:

The 1st person singular and the 3rd person plural pronouns are often found in a prefixed form. This prefix e(a) is called the pronominal prefix to distinguish it clearly from the verbal vowel prefix (see below).

Examples of the pronominal prefix:

1st Person Singular { Esiri m  jị. "I cooked yam." (Esiele m  jị. "I have cooked yam").
              { Azara m  yọ. "I swept the house." (Azaala m  yọ. "I have swept the house")

3rd Person Plural { Esiri ha  jị. "They cooked yam" (Esiele ha  jị. "They have cooked yam").
              { Azara ha  yọ. "They swept the house." (Azaala ha  yọ. "They have swept the house")
Note carefully that the pronominal prefix is written joined to the verb but the pronoun, as always, is written separately. This can be seen again with the auxiliary verb.
Ex.:— Ana m esi ji. "I am cooking yam." Ana m arụ ji. "I am buying yam." Ana ha esi ji. "They are cooking yam." Ana ha arụ ji. "They are buying yam."

THE VERBAL VOWEL PREFIX:

The verbal vowel prefix e(a) harmonics with the vowel of the verb stem and is always written joined to the verb. It is thus kept quite distinct from the impersonal pronoun.

Examples of the verbal vowel prefix:

Erile nri ọchụ. "Don't eat that food."
Asala ụlọ. "Don't sweep the house."
Anyị agawala ọrụ. "We have set out to the farm."
Ha esiele ụjụ. "They have cooked yam."
Unu erighi ya. "You did not eat it."
Ha asyghị ji. "They did not buy yam."

SPECIAL POINTS TO NOTE ABOUT SPELLING:

The following words and constructions give rise to constant mistakes among Igbo writers and are therefore specially noted here.

A. The spelling of na:

i) Na Conjunction. Written in full, na.
   Ex.:— Ji na edo ọdị maka. "Yam and o coco yam are good."
   Echere m na ọ ga-ebịa echi. "I think he will come tomorrow."

ii) Na Preposition. Written n' before a vowel.
   Ex.:— Nna m nọ n'ụlọ. "My father is in the house."
   Ite ọ dị ụnọla. "The pot is on the ground."
   Uwe ọ dị ụme igbe. "The clothes are in the box."
   Nnụ na n'elu ọchị. "The bird is perching on the tree."
The preposition is written na before a consonant.  
Ex.:— Anyị na-agà na chi ogbọ.


B. The auxiliary verb:

There is a further point to note about the spelling of the auxiliary verb which causes trouble to Igbo writers. In the following sentences the auxiliary verb should in each case be written in the same way.

Examples:

Anyị na-agụ nkwa.  
"We are singing."

Anyị na-agụ nkwa ha ana-agba.  
"As we are singing they are dancing."

Onye na-agụ nkwa bụ nwaanye m.  
"The one who is singing is my sister."

Nkwa anyị na-agụ dì utọ.  
"The songs we sing are sweet."

Igbo speakers rightly realise that in the examples above we have four different types of construction, and they attempt to show the distinction by writing na-agụ in different ways. But the difference is in tone and syntax and not in spelling. The correct spelling is na-agụ in each case.

C. The spelling of compound verbs:

We have seen that vowel harmony is an important characteristic of Igbo. But there are some compound words where the vowel harmony is broken. The most important of these words are to be found among the compound verbs. A compound verb is made up of two or more single verb stems.

Ex.:— îtuba "to throw into", compounded of îtụ "to throw" and îba "to enter."

îmechi "to shut", compounded of îme "to do, make" and ichi "to block".
In both of these compound verbs the vowels of the two verb stems are in harmony. But there are many cases where this is not so.

Ex.: - ọkụfu "to kick away", compounded of ọkụ "to knock" and ifu "to lose."

Here the vowels of the two verb stems are not in harmony; ụ is an even level vowel and u is an uneven one. In speech they may be heard harmonising and one may hear kụfu, and many people make the mistake of writing them like this. But the verbal prefix shows us that this is incorrect. Ex.: - Anyị ọkụfuole ya. 'We have kicked it away.' We know from the prefix that the vowel of the first verb stem must be ụ and not u. The suffixes also help us to recognise the vowel of the second verb stem. We have o and le and we know that they harmonise with u and not with ụ. Therefore the vowel of the second verb stem must be written u and not ụ. We thus see clearly that the spelling ọkụfu is correct.

D. Suffixes:

Suffixes are joined to verbs in writing but not to other parts of speech. Thus we write, Adị mma, ma gị kwa? Here, where kwa follows a pronoun and not a verb, it is written separately. It is only to verbs that suffixes are joined. Many examples of this can be found in the story that follows, and two short passages with examples are given below -

1) Otu mgbọ n'ala Iduu na Ọcha oke ụnụ dara, nke mere na ọ dịkwaghi nri ọ bula dị; ọshị ọ nile kpọnwuchaa, miri nile takọrọ.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dara</td>
<td>ra (time) suffix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mere</td>
<td>ra (time) suffix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dịkwaghi</td>
<td>kwa and ghi suffixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bula</td>
<td>la suffix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kpọnwuchaa</td>
<td>open vowel suffix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>takọrọ</td>
<td>ra (time) suffix.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ii) Mbe sìkwa ya, "I matabeghi na ọ na-abụ madụ ghụputa anya ya abụq, taa, na ọ na-epuchikwa?" Enyị wee si na ya matabeghi.

sìkwa  

matabeghi  ta, be and ghi suffixes.

ghụputa  ta suffix.

taa  open vowel suffix.

na-epuchikwa  kwa suffix.

wee  open vowel suffix.

matabeghi  ta, be and ghi suffixes.

E. The spelling of the following words should be noted.

ma ọ bu  "or".
n'ime  "in".

otu a  "thus, in this way".

onye ọ bula  "anybody at all".
I. Ekeresimesi ruru onye no n'Oru na Onye no n'Ogwa.

E sitere n'Ekeresimesi nke G.E. Igwe dere hota ya.


Ọ na-agụ ndị nọ n'ije aṣọ ọchị ile ọgụ n'Ekeresimesi. Ndi' nọ n'ozi Bekee nwere ike ọlọru ọgụ na-alọ ma ha nwee liiv (leave). Ndi' na-enweghi ike, ndi' nwe ha nwere ike ija leta ha ma ha nọ nọ. Ogụ bi uhaanya na-agha leta ogụ ya ma o kwere ya. Ngwugwu na madu na-agaghare naghare naghare, ndi' na-agha ụgbọ ala, ndi' na-agha na moto, ndi' na-agha n'ukwu ala.

II. MBE NA AKPAPIA.

E sitere n'akukọ ife nke J.O. Iroganachi
dere họtụ ya.

Otu ubochi Mbe na nwa ya si ọrụ lọta agụ gụrụ ha nke ukwu. Mbe edunye nwa ya ka ọ ga muta ọkụ n'ama. Nwa ya apụta n'ụlọ Akpapia juọ na ọkụ ọ di kwa. Akpapia asị ya na ọkụ di. Nwa Mbe aga n'usεkwu Akpapia ebe ọkụ di ịmụrụ ọkụ.


Mbe anara ya ọkụ ahụ sọnyọ, were ukwu ya gaa n'ụlọ Akpapia ịmụrụ ọkụ. Akpapia enye ya nkwụ, ya ajụọ. Ya amụrụ ọkụ ya lawa. Mgbe ọ purụ n'ụzọ ya sọnyọ ọkụ ya, laghachi ọzọ n'ụlọ Akpapia. Akpapia enye kwa ya nkwụ, ya ajụọ. O ụtua ka o mere tutu nkwụ ahụ agwu.

Mbe ajụọ Akpapia ebe ọ na-agα ahọta ezi ọsụkwụ di otu a. Akpapia agwa ya na ọ bu n'ama mmụọ. Mbe asị na ya ga-eoro ya gaa ịhọ nkwụ n'ama mmụọ n'eci ya na-abia abịa. Akpapia asị ya Ọ dighị, na ebe ọ na-enweghi nku, olee otu ọ si efe ma ihe ọzọ mee. Mgbe Mbe kpekatara ire hụ na ọ dighị ihe mechara Akpapia ekwe ka o soro ya, ya asị Akpapia. "Ọ chọrọ ịhọju akpa ịgụ ngwa ngwa echi, were ya dọtụ n'elu ụlọ n'anyaịta taa, ka ịjiriịta ma ya pen, ma ya pegherim. Ọ gawara n'isi ụtụtụ eci, elebala anya n'akpa ịgụ. I leba ya anya, ihụ ọjọ ga-akpọ ịgụ. Ma i lebaghi ya anya, ọ ga-ahụ ihe ga-emę n'ama mmụọ echi". Akpapia ekwe.


Mgbe Akpapia ruru n'ama mmụọ ya ahọwa nkwụ ya ngwa ngwa ngwa otu mmụ mmụ na-agαghị ịpụkwute ya. Ya na-etinwe nkwụ ya n'akpa, akpa anaghị eju eju. Ya shogha nkwụ tutu ike agwu ya. Ya eleba anya nime akpa ya, ụụ Mbe ebe ọ nọ na-ajụ nkwụ ọ họtara. Iwe were ya. Ma nke ka echia iwe ya iwe bu na Mbe tapuru akpa ya, na-atụụ nkwụ na ọ jurụ ajụ. Akpapia asị ya pụta. Mbe apụta. Akpapia agwa ya ka ọ hụrụ gwa nkwụ nke ya. Mbe onweghi ike ịhọtụ nkwụ n'onwe ya n'ihị na Akpapia mere nkwụ ahụ ọgụọ, si, "Nkwụ nke m na-ahụ, ọsụkwụ, nke Mbe ọkụpụrụka!" Mgbe Mbe nọ na-agịgaghari aka, Akpapia
ahọjuo akpa ya, fere laa. Mbe nani ga nọ n’elu nkwụ tutu ụmu mmụọ apụta.

Ha ahụ ya, hygide ya, gwa ya ka ọ lọda. Elu erughi ya aka, ala erughi ya aka. Ọ dighi uzọ o si agbalaha ụmu mmụọ. Ya anọkata n’elu nkwụ tutu ike agwu ya. Ụmu mmụọ alasaa, hụputa ndị ga na-ece ya ka ọ rịda.

Mbe anọkata n’elu aka akwachapụ ya, ya esi n’elu nkwụ daa n’ala, dawasa okpukpuru ya. Ya etiere nsịkọ’na eji nọ n’oбе ahụ mkpụ sị, "Nsịkọ mkpa, eji nra!" Nsịkọ abịa kpachikọtaa okpukpuru ya. Eji ewere ire ya rakọtaa ya, ya adị ka ọ di na mбу.

Ọ bụ ya mere okpukpuru azụ mbe ji dị otu ọ dị ugbu a.