

Lesson 1A:

Alphabet

(continued)

by

Ejike Eze, Ph.D.

In lesson 1, we discussed the 36 letters of the Igbo alphabet (mkpuru abiji or mkpuru edemede). In this lesson, we will take a closer look at these letters of the alphabet and classify them into three broad terms: Vowels (udaume), Semi-vowels (oyiriudaume) and Consonants (mgbochiume).

Vowels (Udaume)

There are eight (8) vowels in Standard Igbo (Igbo Izugbe). They are:
i, e, u, o, ì, a, ù, ọ

As you can see, the vowels ì, ù and ọ have dots under them, distinguishing them from the vowels i, u and o. All Igbo vowels are syllabic, i.e. they bear tones.

When we discuss vowel harmony, we will see how these eight vowels of Igbo Izugbe are further divided into two sets.

The following illustrate the use of each vowel:

I as in íke (strength)

E as in éwu (goat)

U as in ùbé (pear)

O as in ógè (time)

Ì as in ìgba (drum)

A as in áka (hand)

Ù as in ùlò (house)

Ọ as in ọgwù (medicine)

Semi-Vowels (oyiriudaume)

Semi-vowels are so classified in Igbo because like vowels, they are tone bearing. When the semi-vowel bears a tone, it is referred to as syllabic nasal. The two semi-vowels of Igbo are as follows:

M as in m̀gbá (wrestling)

N as in ǹnà

Consonants (Mgbochiume)

Igbo consonants are not syllabic, i.e. they do not bear tone. The following are the consonants of standard Igbo:

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