

Idoma is an West African language of the Kwa group of the Niger-Congo family. It is spoken primarily in Nigeria by about 600,000 people (1991 UBS). There are three primary variations: Idoma Central (Otukpo, Akpoto), Idoma West, and Idoma South (Igumale, Igwaale, Ijigbam). Speakers are typically also fluent in at least one of the three major Nigerian languages (Igbo, Hausa, or Yoruba) as well as English.

The speaker in this recording is a 29 year-old man from Àsa, in the Otukpo local government area of the Benue state. He speaks the central variant of Idoma.

Central Idoma Consonant Phonemes:

Stops:	p	t		k ^(*)	k̄p̄	
	b	d		g ^(*)	ḡb̄	
Affricates:			tʃ			
			dʒ			
Fricatives:	f					h
Nasals:	m	n	ɲ	ŋ ^(*)	ŋ̄m̄	
Liquids:		l				
Glides:			j		w	

The three digraphs (/k̄p̄, ḡb̄, ŋ̄m̄/) are labio-velar coarticulations and also seem somewhat glottalized. The Western variant of Idoma has three more phonemes than the Central variant; /s, ʃ, r/. The two fricatives have neutralized with /h/ and the tap has neutralized with /l/.

Central Idoma Vowel Phonemes:

i	u
e	o
ɛ	ɔ
a	

The back phonemes generally seem lower than their cardinal values - /ɔ/ tends toward /ɒ/, and /o/ tends toward /ɔ/. Evidently vowel length is phonemic in Idoma, however, there are only a few contrastive examples and they seem to have only very subtle meaning distinctions.

Idoma Tone:

There are three contrastive tones in Idoma: High ([˥]), Mid ([˦]), and Low ([˧]).

I. Spontaneous SpeechII. Word ListsConsonants:

1.	[p]	'return'
2.		'hear'
3.		'lizard'
4.	[kp]	to gather
5.		'bridge'
6.	[t]	'to swim'
7.		'to look for (something you want)'
8.		'cricket'
9.	[tʃ]	'to get angry'
10.		'to tell a tale'
11.		'wing'
12.	[k]	'to talk'
13.		'wheel'
14.	[k*]	'take'
15.		'fatness'
16.	[b]	'to lean on'
17.		'palm nut'
18.	[gb]	'to tie'
19.		'jaw'
20.	[j]	'to bring here'
21.		'adultery'
22.	[d]	'to look for'
23.		'father'
24.	[g]	'to enter into'
25.		'axe'
26.	[g*]	'to build'
27.		'swimming'
28.	[m]	'to leave alone'
29.		'bell'
30.	[ŋm]	'kill'
31.		'painted body marks'
32.	[n]	'to go after'
33.		'fruit'
34.	[ɲ]	'quick temper'
35.		'to rub'
36.	[ŋ]	'scarcity'
37.		'rope'
38.	[ŋ*]	'to teach'
39.		'nose'
40.	[f]	'to remove'
41.		'hill'
42.	[j]	'child'
43.		'moon'

44.	[w]	'redness'
45.		'come'
46.	[h]	'answer'
47.		'waist'
48.		'to call'
49.		'walk'
50.	[l]	'lamb'
51.		'palm tree'

Vowels:

1.		'to receive' ¹
2.		'to receive'
3.		'to give'
4.		'to see'
5.		'to see (something in subject's possession)'
6.		'to finish'
7.		'finished already'
8.		'to teach'
9.		'look at something'
10.		'to eat'
11.		'to own'
12.		'there'
13.		'pasted'

Tone:

1.	[H]	'to see'
2.	[M]	'to stop'
3.	[L]	'to give birth'
4.	[M]	'to patch'
5.	[L]	'to beg'

Miscellaneous Word List:

1.		'belly'
2.		'black'
3.		'bow'
4.		'cow'
5.		'fly' (insect)
6.		'skin'
7.		'three'
8.		'to bear (a child)'
9.		'rope'
10.		'vein'

¹There is no meaning distinction between 1 & 2, and the informant belatedly decided that there was not a meaning, nor length distinction in numbers 2 & 3.

11.	'all'
12.	'back'
13.	'front'
14.	'bird'
15.	'blood'
16.	'bone'
17.	'day'
18.	'dog'
19.	'dust'
20.	'egg'
21.	'grass'
22.	'man'
23.	'night'
24.	'river'
25.	'salt'
26.	'snake'
27.	'star'
28.	'stone'
29.	'sun'
30.	'thick'
31.	'thin (person)'
32.	'hot'
33.	'water'
34.	'woman'
35.	'person'
36.	'fish'
37.	'to fly'
38.	'leaf'
39.	'head'
40.	'mother'

III. Numbers 1 - 20

IV. Maxims (2)

1. You don't wait until night to catch a black goat.
2. You can only curve / bend a fish when it's fresh.

References:

- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1963. The Languages of Africa. Bloomington: Indiana University.
- Grimes, Barbara F. 1992. Ethnologue. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics. (Information obtained via Ethnologue online database.)
- Ladefoged, Peter. 1968. A Phonetic Study of West African Languages. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.