

## Standard Iẓon Orthography<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Languages are primarily spoken and produced as sound but are usually reduced to written symbols based on conventionally accepted orthographies. This is an indicator of the level of development of a language. Orthographies are important because they enhance and facilitate the discrete representation of sound and meaning in readable symbols. Indeed, research has shown that there exists a positive relationship between language orthographies and acquisition, development and enhancement of literacy. Iẓon language spoken by the central Iẓon people of the Nigerian coastline from Bayelsa State in the east to Ondo State in the west has not had a standard orthography that would facilitate the proper documentation of the language primarily due to conflicting dialectal interests. This short research paper addresses the issue of a harmonized or unified Iẓon orthography that would be applicable to and incorporate all the dialects. The study reveals that all the numerous dialects have a common orthography and recommend a thirty-one (31) letter alphabet that can be used as Standard Iẓon Orthography.

**Keywords:** *Standard orthography, Iẓon language, language development, documentation, standardization.*

### Introduction

Researchers from different countries and cultures have shown that there is a positive relationship between language orthographies and acquisition, development and enhancement of literacy (Joshi, 2010). Iẓon is a language spoken by the central Iẓon or Ijaw people of the Niger Delta basin of Nigeria. It used to be one of the five (5) languages used in national/federal media in the 1970s and early 1980s along with Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Fulfulde, but unlike some of these other languages which have become national languages in Nigeria, Iẓon has lagged behind as an underdeveloped language. Iẓon is not listed in national and international examinations such as National Examinations Council (NECO), West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the General Certificate of Education (GCE) largely due to its underdeveloped status, which itself is dependent on, or determined by, a standard orthography. The language is, therefore, in dire need of a standard orthography.

There has not been a formal, generally accepted or approved standard Iẓon orthography. Although Professor Kay Williamson produced the “Ijọ Orthography” (Ijọ and Ijaw are anglicized form of Iẓon), published in 1983 by the National Language Centre, Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos, the work took a broad (omnibus) sense to include the following:

- a) the Eastern Ijọ dialects, i.e. Kalāḅarī, Okrika, Iḅanī (Bonny) and Nkọṛọ.
- b) Nembe, to include the real Nembe dialect and the Akassa dialect.
- c) Iẓon or central Ijọ including the Southern dialects (including Olodiama), the

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Northern dialects (including Kolokuma), and the Western dialects (including Mein).

d) Biseni-Okordia, three small dialects which are a good deal different from each other and from Iẓon. Although Ijọ is often referred to as a single language with different dialects, the degree of difference between the groups is really more than dialectal. (Williamson, 1983:16).

Indeed, in the most recent grouping in Williamson and Blench (2000), the languages listed in a – d above are classified as Ijoid languages.

To prove this, Kalabari and Okrika have been approved by the National Language Centre, Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos, and the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Abuja {vide C.E.W. Jenewari, Kalabari Orthography (1985) and I.E. Ngulube, Okrika Orthography (2011)} as languages of their own in 1985 and 2011, respectively. This loudly accentuated the need to have a Standard Iẓon Orthography for the central Iẓon people.

The absence of a standard Iẓon orthography has greatly militated against the development of written materials in the language. This gap has created room for tangible variations that have continued to manifest in the spellings of words by different writers of the language. The word “piriye” (meaning gift) for example, which is commonly used as a name, is variantly spelt as “priye” and “preye”. Similarly, the words “beḷi” (language) and “ge” (to write) are also variantly spelt as “beḷi” and “geḡ”, respectively. Some of these variations may be dialectal because Iẓon language has many dialects. However, much of the variations and inconsistencies could be attributed to the absence of a standard orthography. There has also been an uneasy rivalry amongst the dialectal groups in respect of which dialect is to be considered as the standard variety that should form the basis for the standard orthography. In particular, Mein, which belongs to the Western dialect, has vehemently resisted and rejected the use of Kolokuma, the Northern dialect as the general Iẓon language. The dissent escalated to books written in Kolokuma, which were rejected by the Mein group. The table below shows the dialectal groups in four clusters,

**Table 1: The Dialects of Iẓon**

IẒON			
South Western Cluster	North Western Cluster	North Central Cluster	South Central Cluster
Idiwuni Ogulagha Oporoza Arogbo Egbema Olodiana West Furupagha	Tarakiri West Kumbo Kabo Mein Seinbiri Tuomo Operemo	Ekpetiama Gbarain Kolokuma	Apoi Bassan Olodiana East Oporoma Boma Ohiakiri Ogbein Tarakiri East Ikibiri

Adapted from Kwokwo (2012)

Orthography, Kay Williamson (1984) explains in her monograph entitled *Practical Orthography in Nigeria*, refers to “the correct spelling of words; it is the spelling system of a language; it consists of the symbols (alphabet) and the rules that are used in writing the language”. The Webster Dictionary defines orthography as the art of writing words with the proper letters according to standard usage. The most basic definition of orthography is that it is a standardized system of writing. It is the collection of rules that scholars and language users conventionally use to visually represent the spoken language. This starts with creating the symbols upon which a written language is built. Many scholars believe that the major type of orthography is alphabetic, in which the visual symbols represent individual sounds of spoken language since letters are symbols of visual representations of sounds in a language. In the case of Iẓon, the orthography largely follows and corresponds to the phonetic sounds.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As already mentioned above, there has been a controversy regarding which dialect of the Iẓon language should form the basis for the orthography of the language in general. This is as a result of a tacit intralanguage or dialectal politics among the speakers of different dialects. This competition for recognition as standard variety has been a source of stagnation in standardizing the way the sounds of Iẓon language are represented in written symbols and otherwise. Consequently, there was not yet a generally accepted standard Iẓon orthography. This study therefore sets out to formulate a common, generally acceptable standard Iẓon orthography by harmonizing existing conflicting orthographies of the language proffered in the writings of various scholars of Iẓon language.

### **Objective and Purpose of the Study**

Based on the dialectal linguistic politics that has militated against the development of a standard Iẓon orthography, this study intends to demonstrate that, although Iẓon language has not been well documented through copious writings and scholarship, and in spite of the existence of numerous dialects of the language, the orthography of Iẓon is not diverse but a unified one. The study will therefore strive to harmonize the diverse orthographies that have emanated from different scholars of Iẓon language. The objective and purpose of this study, therefore, is to prescribe a unified standard orthography for Iẓon language that would be applicable to all the twenty-six (26) dialects in central Iẓon, and which would form the basis for developing learning materials for primary and post-primary schools as well as for general literacy.

### **The Orthography of Iẓon: Existing Literature**

The orthography of Iẓon, as can be deduced from the definitions in the introduction above, therefore, consists of the symbols (alphabet) and the rules that are used in writing the language. This study relies on a number of books, monographs and pamphlets by scholars of Iẓon language to make deductions. These scholars/writers belong to different dialectal

backgrounds. The emphasis on dialectal variations is important in this study because of the controversy over which dialect should form the basis for the general orthography. The major contention, as stated earlier, tends to be between the Mein dialect, which has the largest population of speakers, and the Kolokuma dialect which has been most documented. My contention is that the dialectal differences play little part in determining the standard Iẓon orthography.

In fact, from research, it is observed that dialectal variations are mainly inflectional and lexical but not orthographical. Indeed, the orthography of Iẓon has been proffered by different Iẓon scholars in their various writings and publications. The first indication of Iẓon orthography is contained in a primer entitled *Iẓon bībī go* credited to the Iẓon Language Committee (1988). It was published under the Rivers Readers Project coordinated by late Professor Kay Williamson, a renowned linguist of the University of Port Harcourt and the (Old) Rivers State Ministry of Education. According to the authors, “this primer is the first book written in Standard Iẓon. It was compiled by the Iẓon Language Committee, which was composed of representatives of all parts of the Iẓon community”. The orthography used in this pamphlet is as follows:

**Vowels**

a e ẹ I ị o ọ u ụ

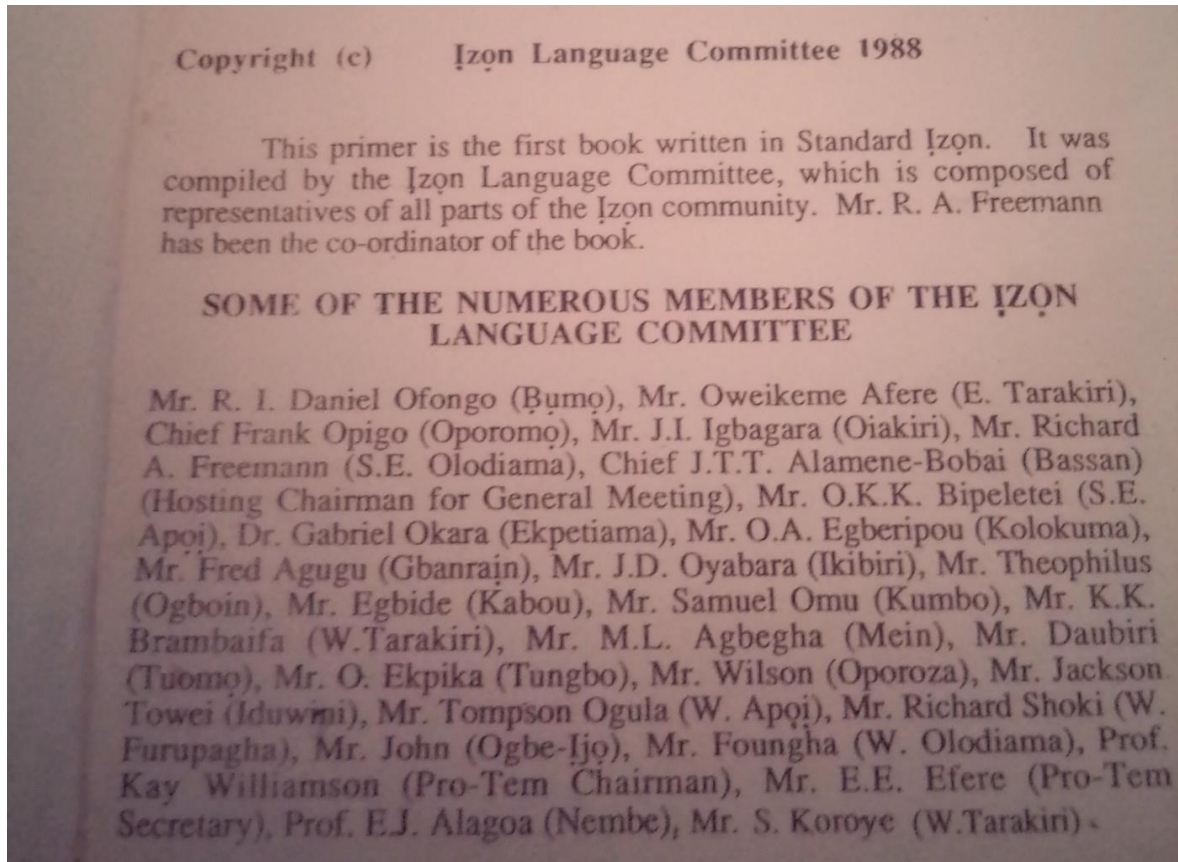
**Consonants**

b d f g k l m n p r  
s t v w y z

**Digraphs/Trigraph**

gb kp gh ngh

The credibility of the Iẓon Readers hinges on the numerous, eminent personalities that were members of the Iẓon Language Committee drawn from all dialectal groups of the Iẓon nation, which is reproduced here.



Agbegha (1996) used the following orthography in his *Izo-English Dictionary*. Agbegha speaks Mein dialect of Izo.

a	b	d	e	ɛ	f	g	h	i	ɨ	j
k	l	m	n	o	ɔ	p	r	s	t	u
ɹ	v	w	y	z						

He included the letter 'j', three (3) digraphs namely, gb, gh, and kp, and a trigraph, ngh but did not reckon with the digraph 'ng'. This is very significant in the Izo standardization process.

The Institute of Niger Delta Studies (INDS) - formerly, Centre for Niger Delta Studies (CNDS) of the Niger Delta University (NDU) has consistently used a similar orthography as the Mein (not necessarily because some other writers in Mein do not use the 'j') in writing textbooks for primary and secondary schools. The books are first written in Kolokuma dialect and translated into other languages in Bayelsa State, namely, Nembe, Epie and Ogbia as well as the Mein dialect of Izo. This is the orthography the research institute adopts as spelt out in its (2016) publication, *Izo Go Fun: Kala Sekondiri 1*.

a	b	d	e	ɛ	f	g	h	i	ɨ	j
k	l	m	n	o	ɔ	p	r	s	t	u
ɹ	v	w	y	z						

The Institute used five (5) digraphs and also included ‘j’ like Mein, which are:

gb gh kp ng ngh

Please note that the letter ‘j’ in Iẓon orthography actually comes from Arogbo, the Iẓon people close to the Yoruba in Western Nigeria.

In a pamphlet entitled *Iẓon names and their meanings*, Evilewuru (2006) used an orthography which he called “*a writing and pronunciation guide*”, which consists of twenty six (26) letters whereas Agbegha (1996) and the Institute of Niger Delta Studies (2016) used twenty seven (27) letters. Evilewuru avoided the letter ‘j’, understandably.

a	b	d	e	ẹ	f	g	h	i	ì	-
k	l	m	n	o	ọ	p	r	s	t	u
ụ	v	w	y	z						

Although credit needs to be given to Evilewuru for not just providing the alphabet but also providing the manner of writing words/names including hyphenations, he was unable to provide the digraphs. Evilewuru is a Mein speaker. Another Iẓon writer, Tamuno (2010) published a pamphlet entitled *Iẓon Beḗli Pọon mọ Tolumọngi Bara* in which he also provided an alphabet or orthography. He also avoided the letter ‘j’, understandably also, like Evilewuru but included four (4) digraphs and one trigraph. Tamuno speaks the Kolokuma dialect of Iẓon.

a	b	d	e	ẹ	f	g	gb	gh	i	ì
k	kp	l	m	n	ng	ng	o	ọ	p	r
s	t	u	ụ	v	w	y	z			(30)

Enieketin C. Enewane (2015:13, 25) provides a glimpse of his idea of the orthography of Iẓon in his work: *An Introduction to Iẓon Phonology*. He used twenty-five (25) letters and four digraphs. Enewane speaks Kumbo dialect of Iẓon, and like Tamuno he does not include ‘j’.

a	b	d	e	ẹ	f	g	gb	gh	i	ì
k	kp	l	m	n	ng	o	ọ	p	r	s
t	u	ụ	v	w	y	z				(29)

Kwokwo (2012) in his PhD Thesis entitled “A Morphosyntactic Investigation of Functional Categories in English and Iẓon” adopted Williamson (1969) and Agbegha (1996) orthographies of thirty letters.

a	b	d	e	ẹ	f	g	gb	gh	h	i	ì	k	kp	l
m	n	ng	o	ọ	p	r	s	t	u	ụ	v	w	y	z

Consonants: b d f g h k l m n p r s t v w y z

Digraphs: gb kp gh ng

Vowels:            a   e   ɛ   i   ɪ   o   ɔ   u   ʉ

Another significant contribution to the development of Iẓon orthography is contained in a (2011) monograph credited to Agbagha, Prezi, Kemeikiou and Prezi on “A Unified Standard Orthography for the Ijọ Language Cluster (Nigeria)” sponsored by The Centre for Advanced Studies of Societies (CASA) and The Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC). It contains nine vowels, seven consonants and five digraphs and one trigraph. The letters ‘j’ and ‘ng’ are not reckoned with in this orthography but the authors included ‘ngh’, and ‘dz’.

In all these orthographies, only Tamuno (2010), INDS (2016) and Agbegha *et al* included the trigraph ‘ngh’ which is observable in such words as ‘Woyenghi’ (God), ‘denghi’ (which), ‘-nghimi’ (future tense morpheme), etc. It must be noted, however, that in adopting the trigraph as part of the orthography, the Institute of Niger Delta Studies (formerly CNDS) resolved that the digraph ‘ng’ and the trigraph ‘ngh’ could be used in the same distribution interchangeably.

### **Discussion and Findings**

A careful analysis of all the orthographies reviewed above reveals that there are really no diverse orthographies in Iẓon language. The areas of divergence among various scholars have been the inclusion or non-inclusion of the letter ‘j’, ‘ng’ and ‘ngh’. ‘J’ has never been originally part of the phonetics and phonology of Iẓon language, and as such not been part of Iẓon writing symbols. Its inclusion now has been necessitated by the influence of English words and other languages including Yoruba. The Arogbọ Iẓon dialect of the South-Western cluster has been greatly influenced by the Yoruba language so much so that they now use the letter ‘j’ pervasively, which previously was approximated with ‘z’. The New Testament Bible written in Kolokuma dialect entitled *Ebi Egberi Bi* (2011) and published by the Bible Society of Nigeria and the British and Foreign Bible Society, London confirms this argument as it does not also use ‘ngh’ but only ‘ng’. The ‘dz’ which Agbegha *et al* (*ibid*) added in their orthography cannot reasonably be used because it is more or less a phonetic symbol and not an orthographical representation.

In spite of the variations, and in view of the similarities in the orthographies of the various scholars who are of different dialectal backgrounds, I argue that all the numerous dialects have a common orthography. Professor B. Okaba (2006) reiterated this view in a paper he delivered in London entitled “Use Ijaw Language and Culture or Lose it” on the occasion of the Isaac Boro Day celebration that “... luckily (sic) enough, there exists a common orthography for quite (large) number of our dialects”. Therefore, there ought not to be any controversy regarding which dialect should be used to develop orthography for Iẓon. The one the Institute of Niger Delta Studies (INDS) has developed would seem to be adequate in representing the sounds of the language in writing. Fortunately, many of the names mentioned in this paper participated in the process as members of the Institute’s Editorial Board regarding the development of textbooks in Iẓon Language. Some of them are also facilitators in the Diploma in Iẓon Language programme being run in the Institute of Niger Delta Studies of the Niger Delta University.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings that there is no substantial diversity in the Iẓon orthography, and further based on consultations with linguists, it is recommended that the following orthography should be adopted as the Standard Orthography of Iẓon Language. This orthography has a total of thirty-one letters: nine (9) pure vowels (made up of 5 wide vowels and 4 narrow vowels), seventeen (17) consonants, four (4) digraphs and one (1) trigraph. It is as follows:

a	b	d	e	ẹ	f	g	gb	gh	i	ì
j	k	kp	l	m	n	ng	ngħ	o	ọ	p
r	s	t	u	ù	v	w	y	z		

(31)

This thirty-one (31) letter orthography would hopefully be an adequate representation of the various dialects of the Iẓon language, going forward. Each letter in the orthography is shown in a word followed by a sentence in Iẓon and translated into English language in the following examples:

a =	aba	=	Aba indi ere	=	Aba is a name of a fish.
b =	buboru	=	Erein buboru ladou	=	The day is in the evening.
d =	edede	=	Edede katì nì Ì piri	=	Pluck a flower for me.
e =	eri	=	Eri boyemi	=	He is coming.
ẹ =	ẹre	=	Inè ẹre bì Tari	=	My name is Tari.
f =	fùu	=	Fùlou fùu tua	=	Put salt in the soup.
g =	geẹ	=	Ìsomu geẹ nì a yari	=	Write a letter to her.
gb =	gbanaìn	=	Kìmişẹ gbanainmì?	=	Did everybody agree?
gh =	isaghai	=	Bei opu isaghai tìn	=	This is a big cotton-tree.
i =	kime	=	Kime tìn bì fọu koromomì	=	The storm felled the tree.
ì =	igba	=	Igba bì akì finimọ kaka	=	Tie the firewood with the rope.
j =	Jonì	=	Jonì Jesu tuduo-oweì	=	John is a disciple of Jesus.
k =	kilokì	=	kilokì bọ ifie dii ni Ì piri	=	Check the time on the clock for me.
kp =	kpei	=	Warì bì kpei dou	=	The house has gathered.
l =	alala	=	Arau alalamọ suruyemi	=	She is washing the plates.
m =	moun	=	Moun naa wò korigha	=	We are not hungry yet.
n =	noun	=	Noun aki bidẹ kì gbeinyemi	=	Needle is used to sew clothes
ng =	gbangi	=	Ina beleş bì na gbangi bọ gbanadou	=	Mother has placed the pot on the tripod.
ngħ =	Woyenghi	=	Woyenghi kì okpo tememì	=	It was God who created the world.
o =	owou	=	Owouama finì duo paboyemi	=	Smoke is coming out from the fire.
ọ =	owou	=	Owoumọ bọmọ zoru	=	Allow the children to play.
p =	pulou	=	Pulou bì akì fiyaì kì tuofiyemi	=	Oil is used for cooking.
r =	ororo	=	Tobou ororo bì koromi	=	The child fell into the stream.
s =	sarau	=	Woni sarau feughimi	=	We will have to buy a funnel.
t =	toru	=	Ebibara nì iné torumọ dii	=	Take good care of your eyes.
u =	туру	=	Ebi turu feẹ ghọ muti'mi	=	Ebi was going to buy nails.
ù =	uruka	=	Yei uruka na taa pirimì	=	The husband gave a ring to his wife.
v =	vigivigi	=	Kimì vigivigi nì wò wenibomì	=	Somebody hurriedly walked passed us.
w =	wari	=	Arì warì koridou-a?	=	Have you built a house?
y =	yoweì	=	Bei dada yoweì	=	This is (my) father's paddle.



z = zongo = Zongo bi akị mu beni zuubo = Go and fetch water with the jug.

We need to note, however that the Iẓon language does not have or possess the dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/, the palate-alveolar fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ and the palate-alveolar affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. In fact, the language has not found a way of domesticating these sounds and so they are still being approximated. For instance, /θ/ and /ð/ are approximated to the plosives /t/ and /d/ respectively; /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ are approximated to the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ while /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ are approximated to the voiced alveolar fricative /z/. This point is important because, as was stated in Section 1.0 (i.e. the Introduction) of this paper, the orthography of Iẓon is based on the phonetic sounds. Consequently, English words containing these sounds are usually approximated by Iẓon speakers to available sounds in Iẓon.

### **SAMPLE TEXT IN IẒON USING THE PRESCRIBED STANDARD IẒON ORTHOGRAPHY**

#### **AGBOGIDI MỌ OGIDIKPE MỌ ANDA**

Keñj aladej ifie bi, keñj anda olotu Opoku ibe gho tiimi. Bei olotu bi eṛe bi Agbogidi. Eñja bei Agbogidi bi Iẓon ibe se ko urou payemi. Eri Iẓon ibe se anda beindou; uroupatimi olotu mo se eri mo koromodou. Eñja Agbogidi kimimo se koromosindej ni olotu suotimi bo keñj kuraṛ layemi bi, manj u momo andanghi kimi fa bimejni eri uge tijnmi. Uge teinghi erein baj bi, eri koko wo ibe otumo tijkpedejini koro ni uge teimi. Fiyaj mo wuru mo zorutiri bo bein. Ezemo mo dumamo mo fiesei bo kimi-mo sidimodou. Orọ keñj дума gba amee Agbogidi kala indiowo-mo se gboluminisindou ayo. Anda дума-ama kpo tonyemi. Bei keñj:

*Daṛ-o, yenghi-o, I bodọ'wo*  
*Pu bo daadi*  
*Daṛ-o, yenghi-o, I bodọ'wo*  
*Pu bo daadi*  
*Aan eeh, daṛ-o, yenghi-o, I bodọ'wo*  
*Pu bo daadi*

Omiji sejtimi bo keñj seri layemi bi, keñj kimi ni Opuziba mo tinyemi oweikimi wenj bo yo bi lamj. Opuziba kpo keñj anda olotu. Eri Gbarain kimi. Eri kpo Agbogidi piri koromodou. Wo koro bi orukumọ u donyemi. Eri wenj mu zorutiri ladejni Agbogidi tin dorumi:

“Agbogidi-o! Agbogidi! I bei teiyemi uge bi, I mu Gbarain ibe kpo dengimodou-á? I mu Gbarain ibe olotu koromo deiko bo uge teiyemi? Gbarain ibe keñj anda olotu emi-ó. I-ye u kpo koromodou-á?”

Opuziba maseri naa Agbogidi tijn gbamj. Agbogidi Opuziba gba egberi nadejni eze-mo pelomomi. Eri waj ni bei gbayemi owei bi dii-ya, wo keñj seri koromodej Opuziba. Wo bolou bi uka; eri bolou koon kumomomi. Indejni, eri Opuziba biimi: “Opuziba, ari gba amee tekiye (teyeki-é)?”

Opuziba u paraimi: “Arj gba amee I mu Gbarain ibe anda olotu kpo koromo deiko bo bei uge bi teiyem'a-ó? Mo kpo ari biiyemi. Gbarain bolou i-mo suodou aba, Koro bi keñj anda olotu emi. Kimi nanj u koromogha. I-ye u kpo koromodou-á?” Agbogidi ma bolouimbelega. Wo bolou konmi. Eri tje zoo timidejni, u waj Opuziba biimi:

“Opuziba! I bei gbayemi olotu bi teye ki wo eṛe-ó?”

“Wo eṛe bi Ogidikpe ki tijnmi”, Opuziba u paraimi. “Perelayefa ki wo daṛ eṛe. Perelayefa mo Ikpedegha mo tobo: Daṛ bi fidou. Bei bodej kuraṛ ko daṛ bi fimj. Ogidikpe kuronimi bara bi arj Agbogidi u koromogha aba, ari nani olotu ni inongo tinkumo. Ari nani olotugha.”

Bei Ogidikpe egberi nadej bi, Agbogidi ma kurej wo uge bi naa bolou teimogha. Opuziba ikasatua Ogidikpe kuro bi gba uwoumo ni Agbogidi owejmonghj bara ki gbamj. Egberi bi koko Agbogidi ongo duo pusomj,

enini eri ttekiri wó zoru ttemomi, Eri ttekiri ma pusaidej ni gba amee toru bo emi kala indimo se eri mo gboluminisinghimi ki tonweri-ya kenj koodu-e gbadej bi, eri mu ni Ogidikpe kpó gboluminisinghimi ayo. U paki vigivigi zorutiri duo wentej warj ghó mumi, tubi, eri ma bolouinbelega.

Bisa bai duo mu bi, eri Ogidikpe mo anda biinghi bara ni wó ikioju ghó gbumuni. Ye bi u donyemi bimejini eri werj ni alamogha bara ghó anda isomufun geedejini firimo Ogidikpe yarimi. Isomu otumo ma kimi.

Agbogidi isomu otumo wó isomufun mo yomu Koro la baj bi Ogidikpe ama ghó faa. Gba bara bi, eri wó ikiaowei mo Okoloba ghó ere nana ghó munimi. Wó ikiaowei ere bi Uguberi. Bei kimj bi ongo ozun bi meremere dejin eri ma buu kpó ttemi. Menj wó buomo gbeleinimi. Eri kpó andayemi kimj, eniko u mo Ogidikpe ikia nimi.

Eni seri bi, okpo nimiwonimi bara bi, gbololo uwouama fa. Eninj ominj toru ki duo you mumi. Oró mu bi bemi tara dein kpó baidu. Agbogidi isomu otu kpó oru beni kuró kimjama bimejini, ifie famougha bara you ni Okoloba ghó mumi. Ominj buo duo wenj mu Polalu la de j kó toruaru youmi. Ominj pekei duo koro dusu mu Okoloba la seri bi, erein fadu. O paki oró yoweimo akidejini pou duo uwou bo ogbo ghó gbanain dejin Ogidikpe ni ere nana ghó munimi pele bi doumi. O doumu ni Odonani biri la bi, kimj uge teiyemi pele tonmo ni o diamj. O paki wenj mu warj la dejin Ogidikpe dou ni erimi. indejini ominj Agbogidi anda bii isomu-fun bi koromo ni u pirimi.

Ogidikpe bei anda isomufun bi nana deibi tibibiri wó ghó seimi, wó ongo kpó seri girigiri ki seimi; anda teme bo wó ghó suomi. Eri tiekiri gbanain kpó doumi, inda kurej gbanaingha bara fa. Anda bi u disenimi, inda eri la ni andanghi bara fa, tu bi wó yenghi wó anda tin-teri wonimi. Eri anda bowe ni Ilkpedegha bien tjin ni u teri wonimi. Izon otu gba amee okuru ganghain nanabo denghighan, eninj eri kurej ara tibj desi beinghan fanghimi. Eni bimejini wó ikioju bi kirigha ni eri kurej Agbogidi anda bi gbanaingha barafa. Eri paki gba wó ikiaowei piri amee ominj ama ghó mu ladu-é, Wó ikiaowei kpó gbanainmi. Dein korodu bimejini ominj bunutimi bajmi.

#### **TRANSLATION OF SAMPLE TEXT IN ENGLISH THE WRESTLING CONTEST BETWEEN AGBOGIDI AND OGIDIKPE**

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A long time ago, there was a wrestling champion in Opoku clan. The name of this champion was Agbogidi. His fame is heard all over Izon Ibe (i.e. Izon nation). He has wrestled and defeated many champions all over Izon Ibe. After being the undisputed champion for some years, there was nobody to challenge him again. Therefore, he decided to celebrate. When the day of the celebration came, he gathered the people of his clan and they began to celebrate. There was plenty of food and drinks for the people. The drumming and singing intoxicated everybody. One of the songs they sang says that: 'Agbogidi has swallowed all the small fishes'.

They sang many wrestling songs. This is one of them:

##### **Standard Izon**

*Da-u-o, yenghi-o, i bodu'wo*

*Pu bo daadi*

*Da-u-o, yenghi-o, i bodu'wo*

*Pu bo daadi*

*Aán eeh, da-u-o, yenghi-o, i bodu'wo*

*Pu bo daadi*

##### **English Translation**

*Fathers, mothers, I have come*

*Who dares, let him try (me)*

*Fathers, mothers, I have come*

*Who dares let him try (me)*

*Fathers, mothers, I have come*

*Who dares, let him try (me)*

As they were celebrating, singing and dancing, one man called Opuziba came to the place. Opuziba is also a wrestling champion. He hails from Gbarain clan. He has also been defeated by Agbogidi. This defeat has been painful and has hunted him for long. He walked up to the arena and called out to Agbogidi:

"Agbogidi-o! Agbogidi! This feasting celebration you have thrown, have you also defeated the wrestling champion of Gbarain clan? Go and defeat the Gbarain Ibe (i.e. Gbarain clan) champion before you come and celebrate. There is a wrestling champion in Gbarain clan; have you defeated him also?" Opuziba called out to Agbogidi and repeated the same statement twice. Agbogidi heard what Opuziba said and stopped the merriment. When he looked closely to know who was shouting to him, he realized that it was Opuziba, a man he had defeated also. His mind was bitter; he was angry. So he asked Opuziba: "Opuziba, what did you say?" Opuziba

replied: “I said you should go and defeat the champion of Gbarain Ibe before you come to celebrate. And I am still saying that when you go to Gbarain Ibe, there is a wrestling champion in Koro. No champion has defeated him in a wrestling contest. Have you defeated him also?”

Agbogidi was no longer happy. His mind was bitter. He stood mortified and humiliated for a while and asked Opuziba: “Opuziba! This champion you are talking about, what is his name?” “His name is Ogidikpe”, Opuziba replied. His father’s name is Perelayefa. His father has died. His father died last year. Ogidikpe has so much wrestling prowess that if you have not conquered him, you should not call yourself a champion.”

After hearing about Ogidikpe’s championship, Agbogidi did not have the courage and joy to continue the festivity. Opuziba deliberately exaggerated the prowess of Ogidikpe in order to frighten Agbogidi. The information scared him to the marrows so he immediately stopped the merriment. He vowed that he thought he has succeeded in swallowing all the fishes but since there is still one left, he was going to swallow Ogidikpe also. He hurriedly left the arena of the festivity because he was not happy anymore. From that day forward, he only thought of how to challenge Ogidikpe to a contest. Because knowing about Ogidikpe angered him so much, he sent a message of challenge to Ogidikpe through some messengers. The messengers were two.

When the messengers from Agbogidi arrived Koro with his message, Ogidikpe was not at home. They learnt that he accompanied his friend to Okoloba for a marriage. His friend’s name is Uguberi. This man was fair in complexion and has a tall frame, but he has knock-knees. He was also a wrestler, and that was why he and Ogidikpe were friends. In those days, as you know, there were no good roads. Therefore, they travelled by canoes on rivers. Ogidikpe and his friend had already spent three days at Okoloba.

Agbogidi’s messengers were strong men so they did not waste time at Koro and headed for Okoloba. They trekked along a foot path from Koro to Polalu and then continued the journey to Okoloba by canoe upstream the River Nun. They journeyed the whole day and arrived Okoloba in the evening. They moored their canoe, took their paddles and climbed up to the community and enquired of the compound Ogidikpe and his friends marriage party was. They searched to Ododanibiri where someone directed them to the compound where the marriage had been taking place. They got to the house and found out Ogidikpe. They delivered Agbogidi’s message of wrestling challenge.

When Ogidikpe got Agbogidi’s challenge, he was excited and *his body shook* a bit. The thought of wrestling thrilled him tremendously. He wanted to accept the challenge immediately but he couldn’t. He liked to wrestle but right now, he could not because his mother had placed a vow against his wrestling. His mother placed a vow against him because of his dangerous exploits in wrestling. He could not violate her vow because the “okro” (okra in English) plant can never be taller than the planter. As a result, his mind was not settled, and he could not respond to Agbogidi positively. He told his friend that it was time for them to go home. His friend agreed. They would spend the night till following morning.

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