

LESSON III
(IHE OMUMU NKE ATO)

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The story is told of Fray Luis de Leon who, after completing a five-year prison term, returned to his classroom at the University of Salamanca, stood up before the assembled students, and began: “As I was saying....”

Although our protracted silence has absolutely nothing to do with the penitentiary, the gap that separates the posting of lessons II and III on the Web is so wide that it almost feels like five years in the minds of our faithful readers. We sincerely apologize for the unfortunate situation and, at the same time, assure you all that subsequent lessons will henceforth be posted on the Web at regular intervals.

So, as we were saying in lesson II, numbers are not the only things that are counted in Igbo. The days of the week, the weeks of the month, and the months of the year – all are counted as well. Since they are things we deal with on a daily basis, you should be thoroughly familiar with them.

3.1 Days of the Igbo Week

Have you ever wondered why our fathers and mothers (the older generation of Igbo speakers) often say “kwà àbalị àsátọ bọrọ n’ ígwe” (every eight days under the sun)? If you have, what do you think is the reason? It is because there are eight dynamic market days (not four, as some people erroneously believe) in an Igbo week. And they are as follows:

- | | | | |
|---------------|----------|--------------|------------|
| (1) ñkwó úkwu | big ñkwó | (2) ñkwó ntà | small ñkwó |
| (3) èké úkwu | big èké | (4) èké ntà | small èké |
| (5) óriè úkwu | big óriè | (6) óriè ntà | small óriè |
| (7) àfọ úkwu | big àfọ | (8) àfọ ntà | small àfọ |

The eight, together, make up an Igbo week. The Western or Gregorian calendar recognizes Sunday as the first day of the week; Saturday, as the last day. And the intermediate days follow in that fixed order. On the contrary, Igbo market days are not fixed. They are dynamic. No particular day from Sunday to Saturday is always ñkwó, èké, óriè, or àfọ. Because the Igbo calendar system is not taught at Igbo schools, elementary or secondary, the younger generation of Igbo speakers does not know how it works. And that is scary because we are on the verge of losing an important aspect of the

Igbo language. We at IgboNet are doing something about the complex system, though. And we will tell you what it is in due course.

If generations of Igbo speakers do not know how the indigenous system works, how then do they denominate the days of the week in Igbo? They use a parallel system that counts the days of the week just like the months.

(1) àbalí mbụ́ (n' ízùúkà)	Day 1 (of the week)	Monday
(2) àbalí àbúọ́ (n' ízùúkà)	Day 2 (of the week)	Tuesday
(3) àbalí àtọ́ (n' ízùúkà)	Day 3 (of the week)	Wednesday
(4) àbalí ànọ́ (n' ízùúkà)	Day 4 (of the week)	Thursday
(5) àbalí ìsẹ́ (n' ízùúkà)	Day 5 (of the week)	Friday
(6) àbalí ìshíì (n' ízùúkà)	Day 6 (of the week)	Saturday
(7) àbalí àsáà (n' ízùúkà)	Day 7 (of the week)	Sunday

As you have probably noted from the above, the first day of the week has shifted from Sunday to Monday; the last day, from Saturday to Sunday. It is because of this shift that members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, who worship on Saturdays, are referred to as “*ndí úkà àbalí ìshíì*” (those who worship on the sixth day of the week) in Igbo.

The bracketed expression (n' ízùúkà) is obligatory in days (2) – (7) above. Without it, (2) – (7) will change from the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh day to two, three, four, five, six, and seven days respectively.

3.2 Weeks of the Month

The weeks of the month are as follows:

(1) ízùúkà (n'kẹ́) mbụ́ (n' ónwa)	Week one (of the month)
(2) ízùúkà (n'kẹ́) àbúọ́ (n' ónwa)	Week two (of the month)
(3) ízùúkà (n'kẹ́) àtọ́ (n' ónwa)	Week three (of the month)
(4) ízùúkà (n'kẹ́) ànọ́ (n' ónwa)	Week four (of the month)

The bracketed words and expressions – “n'kẹ́” and “n' ónwa” -- are obligatory before and after the numbers àbúọ́, àtọ́, and ànọ́ because they help to indicate the order or succession of the weeks. Without them, each item above (2) – (3) will change from the second, the third, and the fourth week to two, three and four weeks respectively.

3.3 Months of the Year

In Igbo, the most common way of designating the months is by counting them. There is, however, a parallel system that is not based on counting. Here are the months:

(1) ́nwa mbu (n' áfò)	Month 1 (of the year)	January
(2) ́nwa àbúò (n' áfò)	Month 2 (of the year)	February
(3) ́nwa átò (n' áfò)	Month 3 (of the year)	March
(4) ́nwa ánò (n' áfò)	Month 4 (of the year)	April
(5) ́nwa íse (n' áfò)	Month 5 (of the year)	May
(6) ́nwa íshii (n' áfò)	Month 6 (of the year)	June
(7) ́nwa ásaà (n' áfò)	Month 7 (of the year)	July
(8) ́nwa ásatò (n' áfò)	Month 8 (of the year)	August
(9) ́nwa íteghite (n' áfò)	Month 9 (of the year)	September
(10) ́nwa íri (n' áfò)	Month 10 (of the year)	October
(11) ́nwa íri nà ótù (n' áfò)	Month 11 (of the year)	November
(12) ́nwa íri nà àbúò (n' áfò)	Month 12 (of the year)	December

Again, the expression “n' áfò” is obligatory in (2) – (12) above. If it is dropped, the meaning of (2) – (12) will automatically change from “order or succession” to “number.” In other words, they will all become two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, and twelve months instead of first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth month of the year.

If you have followed the lesson thus far, you must have noticed that àbalì mbu does not mean “one day”, that ízùúkà mbu does not mean “one week” either, and that ́nwa mbu does not mean “one month.” They do not because the word mbú and its synonym ìzizi are ordinal numbers that refer exclusively to the first item in a sequence of things. That must have left you wondering how native speakers of the Igbo language say “one day, one week, one month, and one year.” They simply place the cardinal number “ótù” (= one) before the Igbo words for day, week, month, and year, as the following examples show:

(1) ótù ubòchì	One day	(2) ótù ízùúkà	One week
(3) ótù ́nwa	One month	(4) ótù áfò	One year

3.4 Forms of the Igbo Verb

You know (from lesson II) how to recognize an Igbo verb when you see one. The next thing you need to know is how to use them to express your ideas and needs correctly, to communicate with Igbo speakers, to tell your friends Igbo stories, etc. In other words, you need to master the various forms an Igbo verb can take. The forms tell us whether or not the event or activity described by the verb occurred in the past (past tense), is occurring at this moment (present tense), or will take place in the future (future tense). And the easiest way to master them is to learn how to conjugate every Igbo verb in the respective tenses. We are going to conjugate some verbs in a minute, but before doing so, you need to know one more thing: Igbo personal pronouns.

3.5 Igbo Personal Pronouns

Igbo, like other languages of the world, have different kinds of pronouns: personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, reflexive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, etc. that play different roles in sentences. Before you ask what a pronoun is, it is a word that acts as a substitute for a noun – the name of a person, place, thing, or idea – and therefore reduces the need for repetition. If you have already told your parents that one of your friends called Azunna came to see you, you may tell them that he wanted to borrow a book from you without mentioning his name again, since they already know whom you are referring to. In other words, you will probably say something like this to them in Igbo:

- (a) ọ́ chọ̀rọ́ ị̀gbażirí ḿ ákwụkwọ́. He wants to borrow a book from me.
(b) ọ́ chọ̀rọ́ ị̀kọ̀rọ́ ḿ ákụkọ́ ọ́chị́. He wants to tell me a funny story.
(c) ọ́ chọ̀rọ́ ị̀dùwe ḿ ózi. He came to accompany me on an errand.

A pronoun, as you can see from the above examples, is a word that is used as a substitute for a previously stated or mentioned noun, called its *antecedent*. In Igbo, the personal pronouns are the following:

PERSON	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1 st person	m(ú) I	ányị we
2 nd person	ị/í you	únù you
3 rd person	ọ/ó he/she/it	há they

Do you understand what we mean by person? It indicates whether the pronoun is referring to the person who is speaking (first person), to the one who is spoken to (second person), or to the one who is spoken about (third person). Similarly, number indicates whether the pronoun refers to a singular (= only one) or a plural (= more than one) noun. For example, a father or mother who is giving a newly born baby a name always does so in the first person singular by saying “I name you X (= the name given to the baby).” In

the same way, a priest baptizing a member of his congregation always does so in the first person by saying something like this: “by virtue of the power invested in me as God’s messenger, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” Can you think of what the reaction of the congregants would be if the priest were to carry out the baptism in the third person? That reminds me of an amusing anecdote about an Igbo interpreter and an English-speaking preacher.

In the course of his sermon, the visiting preacher said: “I am from such and such a place.” And the interpreter interpreted the message as follows: “é sî ì ébe nà ébe dī́ ótu à.” When the preacher made reference to his father and said “my father did such and such a thing for me,” the interpreter rendered the message as follows: “ńnà mú mèere mù íhe nà íhe dī́ ótu à.” But when the visiting preacher made an additional reference to the death of his father and said “when my father died at such and such a time...” the Igbo interpreter automatically and predictably switched from the first person to the third person by rendering the preacher’s statement as follows: “m̀gbe ńnà yá nwùrụ́ ébe nà ébe dī́ ótu à” By doing so, the interpreter distanced himself from the preacher’s statement and made it crystal clear that the person that died was the father of the visiting minister, not that of the interpreter. The interpreter’s reaction, as every adult Igbo-speaker knows, was predictable. In fact, any other Igbo interpreter whose father is alive would have reacted the same way because the thought of death makes us feel extremely uncomfortable. As a people, we do not joke with death.

3.6 Conjugation of Igbo I-dot verbs

Because we promised, in our response to one of your questions on the Igbo Language Forum, to discuss the present continuous tense in lesson III, our examination of Igbo tenses and the conjugation of I-dot verbs will begin with it.

To conjugate an I-dot verb in the present continuous tense, follow the following steps:

1. Drop the infinitive (base form) marker and replace it with the letter “a”.
2. Place the auxiliary verb nà before the main verb and join the two words with a hyphen. The hyphen is obligatory.
3. Put each of the personal pronouns in front of the auxiliary verb and the complement of the verb immediately after the main verb.
4. Do not replace the vowel of the auxiliary verb nà with an apostrophe as some native Igbo speakers mistakenly do. Here are some examples:

Remember (from lesson II) that every Igbo verb has a complement that completes its meaning, and that one does not simply die, sleep, fight, sing, or eat in Igbo. One dies death, sleeps sleep, runs a race, fights a fight, sings a song, and eats food (= something).

Example I: ́gba ́sọ (to run)

́ nà-àgbá ́sọ	I am running
í nà-àgbá ́sọ	you are running
ó nà-àgbá ́sọ	he/she/it is running
ányì nà-àgbá ́sọ	we are running
únù nà-àgbá ́sọ	you are running
há nà-àgbá ́sọ	they are running

Example II: ́nà ntì (to listen)

́ nà-àńá ntì	I am listening
í nà-àńá ntì	you are listening
ó nà-àńá ntì	he/she/it is listening
ányì nà-àńá ntì	we are listening
únù nà-àńá ntì	you are listening
há nà-àńá ntì	they are listening

Example III: ́rù ́rù (to work)

́ nà-àrù ́rù	I am working
í nà-àrù ́rù	you are working
ó nà-àrù ́rù	he/she/it is working
ányì nà-àrù ́rù	we are working
únù nà-àrù ́rù	you are working
há nà-àrù ́rù	they are working

Example IV: ́chì ́chì (to laugh)

́ nà-áchì ́chì	I am laughing
í nà-áchì ́chì	you are laughing
ó nà-áchì ́chì	he/she/it is laughing
ányì nà-áchì ́chì	we are laughing
únù nà-áchì ́chì	you are laughing
há nà-áchì ́chì	they are laughing

Example V: ị̀r̀ahụ ụ̀r̀a (to sleep)

ń nà-àr̀áhụ ụ̀r̀a	I am sleeping
í nà-àr̀áhụ ụ̀r̀a	you are sleeping
ọ nà-àr̀áhụ ụ̀r̀a	he/she/it is sleeping
ányị nà-àr̀áhụ ụ̀r̀a	we are sleeping
únù nà-àr̀áhụ ụ̀r̀a	you are sleeping
há nà-àr̀áhụ ụ̀r̀a	they are sleeping

As the name indicates, the present progressive or continuous tense tells us that the event described by the verb is taking place at this moment. The word *nà* that you find between the personal pronoun and the main verb is what we call an **auxiliary verb** because it helps to establish the relationship between a subject and the rest of a sentence. It always accompanies the main verb to which it is almost always attached with a hyphen. The present progressive (or continuous) tense is the first of many tenses that you should familiarize yourself with. We will examine the others in the coming lessons.

Example VI: ị̀gụ ákwụkwọ (to read)

ń nà-àgụ ákwụkwọ	I am reading (a book/letter)
í nà-àgụ ákwụkwọ	you are reading (a book/letter)
ọ nà-àgụ ákwụkwọ	he/she/it is reading (a book/letter)
ányị nà-àgụ ákwụkwọ	we are reading (a book/letter)
únù nà-àgụ ákwụkwọ	you are reading (a book/letter)
há nà-àgụ ákwụkwọ	they are reading (a book/letter)

Example VII: ị̀sụ ásụsụ (to speak a language)

ń nà-ásụ ị̀gbo / b̀èkèè	I am speaking Igbo/English
í nà-ásụ ị̀gbo / b̀èkèè	you are speaking Igbo/English
ọ nà-ásụ ị̀gbo / b̀èkèè	he/she/it is speaking Igbo/English
ányị nà-ásụ ị̀gbo / b̀èkèè	we are speaking Igbo/English
únù nà-ásụ ị̀gbo / b̀èkèè	you are speaking Igbo/English
há nà-ásụ ị̀gbo / b̀èkèè	they are speaking Igbo/English

NOTE: To say that you are speaking any other language, just replace Igbo and English above with the name of the language in question. If, on the other hand, the words *ásùsù* and *Igbo* above are replaced with the word *ngngò*, the meaning of the verb will immediately change from speaking (a language) to something else.

Example VIII: ìrì òrìrì (to think /ponder something)

ń nà-árì òrìrì	I am thinking/pondering sth.
í nà-árì òrìrì	you are thinking/pondering sth.
ó nà-árì òrìrì	he/she/it is thinking/pondering sth.
ányì nà-árì òrìrì	we are thinking/pondering sth.
únù nà-árì òrìrì	you are thinking/pondering sth.
há nà-árì òrìrì	they are thinking/pondering sth.

Another handy I-dot verb that you should know is *imu ihe* (to study or learn anything imaginable: a trade, a new language, biology, mathematics, driving). The conjugation follows the same pattern as the other I-dot verbs.

Example IX: ìmù íhe (to study / learn sth.)

ń nà-ámù íhe/ìgbo	I am studying/learning Igbo
í nà-ámù íhe/ìgbo	you are studying/learning Igbo
ó nà-ámù íhe/ìgbo	he/she/it is studying/learning Igbo
ányì nà-ámù íhe/ìgbo	we are studying/learning/ Igbo
únù nà-ámù íhe/ìgbo	you are studying/learning Igbo
há nà-ámù íhe/ìgbo	they are studying/learning Igbo

If you follow the above examples rigidly, you will never go wrong. However, the first person singular and the third person plural forms of the verb have alternative versions that you should know, too. To derive the forms in question, simply do the following:

1. Move the pronoun in between the auxiliary verb and the main verb.
2. Delete the hyphen and insert a word space before and after the moved pronoun.
3. Place the letter “a” in the subject position (= the position occupied by the pronoun before the movement).

For the nine conjugated verbs, therefore, we will have the following alternative forms:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| (1a) á nà m̀ àgbá ọ̀sọ. | (1b) á nà hà àgbá ọ̀sọ. |
| (2a) á nà m̀ àńá ntị. | (2b) á nà hà àńá ntị. |
| (3a) á nà m̀ àr̀ú ọ̀r̀ụ. | (3b) á nà hà àr̀ú ọ̀r̀ụ. |
| (4a) á nà m̀ áchị ọ̀chị. | (4b) á nà hà áchị ọ̀chị. |
| (5a) á nà m̀ àr̀áhụ ụ̀rà. | (5b) á nà hà àr̀áhụ ụ̀rà. |
| (6a) á nà m̀ àgú ákwụkwọ. | (6b) á nà hà àgú ákwụkwọ. |
| (7a) á nà m̀ ásù ásùsù. | (7b) á nà hà ásù ásùsù. |
| (8a) á nà m̀ árị ọ̀rịrị. | (8b) á nà hà árị ọ̀rịrị. |
| (9a) á nà m̀ ámù íhe. | (9b) á nà hà ámù íhe. |

3.7 Reference to parts of the human body

We are now ready to show you, as promised in lesson II, how to make references to parts of your own body or to those of someone else. You do so by placing the name of the part or parts of the body in question directly in front of the appropriate possessive pronoun.

3.8 Igbo Possessive Pronouns

As the name indicates, the possessive pronouns are words that show possession or ownership. In other words, they tell us who owns what. And they are just like the personal pronouns.

PERSON	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1 st person	m(́) (of me = my)	ányị (of us = our)
2 nd person	gị (of you = your)	únù (of you = your)
3 rd person	yá (of him/her/it = his/her/its)	há (of them = their)

They are as simple as that. As we indicated earlier, to refer to anything that belongs to you or to someone else, just place the name of the thing in question in front of the appropriate possessive pronoun. What can be simpler than that? Here are a few examples that you should know or memorize:

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------|
| (1) áka m̀ | (= the hand of me) | my hand |
| (2) ánya m̀ | (= the eyes of me) | my eyes |
| (3) íshi gị | (= the head of you) | your head |
| (4) ákwụkwọ m̀ | (= the book of me) | my book |

(5) ényì ḿ	(= the friend of me)	my friend
(6) nwá yá	(= the child of him/her)	his/her child
(7) ụlọ́ ányị	(= the house of us)	our house
(8) òbodo únù	(= the country of you)	your country
(9) íhu há	(= the face of them)	their faces
(10) ígwè há	(= the bicycle of them)	their bicycle)
(11) ìgbé gí	(= the box of you)	your box, suitcase
(12) àkpa yá	(= the bag of him/her)	his/her bag, pocket
(13) òkpú ḿ	(= the hat of me)	my hat
(14) nwúnyè yá	(= the wife of him)	his wife
(16) ényì únù	(= the friend of you)	your friend

3.9 Useful expressions to memorize

Learn the following kwá expressions and use them in your daily conversations. You will discover that certain interpretations you take for granted as a native speaker of Igbo are not as straightforward, in all cases, as you think. The list is not exhaustive.

(a) kwá m̀gbe	all the time, always
(b) kwà ụbòchị	every day, daily
(c) kwà ízùúkà	every week, weekly
(d) kwà ọnwa	every month, monthly
(e) kwà áfọ̀	every year, yearly
(f) kwà ụtụtù	every morning
(g) kwà ùhúruchì / m̀gbède	every evening
(h) kwà ànyásù / àbalị	every night
(i) kwà àbalị àbụọ	every two days
(j) kwà àbalị àsáà	every seven days
(k) kwà ọnwa ásaà	every seven months
(l) kwà àbalị àtọ́	every three days
(m) kwà àbalị fèé ótù	every other day
(n) kwà àbalị àsáà n' ízùúkà	every Sunday
(o) kwà ọnwa ásaà n' áfọ̀	every July
(p) kwà àbalị àtọ́ n' ízùúkà	every Wednesday

(q) kwà ọ́nwa ìrírí nà ọ́tù	every eleven months
(r) kwà ọ́nwa ìrírí nà ọ́tù n'áfò	every November
(s) kwà mbido áfò	every beginning of the year
(t) kwà ètítì áfò	every middle of the year
(u) kwà àbali ìshíì	every six days
(v) kwà àbali ìshíì n'ízùúkà	every Saturday
(w) kwà áfò ìrírí	every ten years, every decade
(x) kwà nnù áfò	every 400 years
(y) kwà óhu áfò ìsé	every 100 years, every century
(z) kwà púghu (or púku) áfò	every 1000 years

3.10 ASSIGNMENT

1. God, according to the Christian Bible, is believed to have said the following:

(a) á bù m̀ íhe m̀ bù!	I am that I am! (to Moses for Pharaoh)
(ã) á bù m̀ mmàlíte nà ọ̀gwúgwù	I am the beginning and the end.

In what person was He speaking?

2. Identify the person in which each of the following declarations is being made:

(a) á nà m̀ ágù gí Chúkùwù.	I name you Chúkùwù.
(b) á nà m̀ èkwé gí ñkwà égo.	I promise you some money.
(c) á nà m̀ àkwá gí ézè.	I crown you king.
(d) á nà m̀ àwù gí mmiri.	I baptize you.

3. Translate the following sentences into Igbo:

(a) This is my book; it belongs to me.	(j) My name is (insert your name).
(b) What is your last name?	(k) We are coming.
(c) Oji is singing a song.	(l) Ada is reading a book.
(d) You (plural) are bathing.	(m) She is washing plates.
(e) He is my grandmother.	(n) Nnaji is my brother.
(f) Uzo came on the third day of the week.	(o) He is a sabbatharian.
(g) I am a "Sundatarian."	(p) Today is Wednesday.
(h) My neighbour (ónyèàgbata óbì).	(q) Every five days.
(i) It happens every other month.	(r) He comes every fortnight.

4. Conjugate the following I-dot verbs in the present continuous tense:

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------|---|----------------|
| (a) $\dot{í}k\dot{u}$ $\acute{á}ka$ | to clap (hands) | (h) $\dot{í}kw\dot{o}$ $\acute{á}ka$ | to wash hands |
| (b) $\dot{í}kpa$ $\dot{í}b\grave{a}ra$ | to joke | (i) $\dot{í}j\dot{u}$ $\acute{í}he$ | to reject sth. |
| (c) $\dot{í}r\grave{o}$ $\acute{á}r\grave{o}$ | to dream | (j) $\dot{í}gba$ $\grave{m}gb\acute{a}$ | to wrestle |
| (d) $\dot{í}f\dot{u}$ $\grave{e}z\acute{í}$ | to go out | (k) $\dot{í}gha$ $\grave{u}gh\acute{a}$ | to tell a lie |
| (e) $\dot{í}n\dot{u}$ $\acute{á}nw\dot{u}r\dot{u}$ | to smoke | (l) $\dot{í}v\dot{o}$ $\acute{í}shi$ | to comb hair |
| (f) $\dot{í}v\dot{u}$ $\grave{m}kp\dot{u}kp\dot{o}$ | to scream | (m) $\dot{í}ga$ $\acute{í}j\grave{e}$ | to walk |
| (g) $\dot{í}t\dot{u}$ $\acute{u}j\dot{o}$ | to fear | (n) $\dot{í}b\dot{u}$ $\acute{á}b\dot{u}$ | to sing a song |

4. Where do the following popular Igbo names come from?

1. $nw\grave{a}nkw\dot{o}$, $\grave{o}k\acute{o}ronkw\dot{o}$, $\grave{m}gb\acute{o}nkw\dot{o}$ (female), $\grave{o}k\acute{o}nkw\dot{o}$
2. $nw\acute{a}eke$, $\grave{o}k\acute{o}roeke$, $\grave{o}k\acute{e}ke$, $\grave{m}gb\acute{o}eke$ (female), $\grave{e}k\acute{e}mma$ (female)
3. $nw\acute{a}ori\grave{e}$, $nw\acute{o}kori\grave{e}$, $\grave{o}k\acute{o}ri\grave{e}$, $\grave{m}gb\acute{o}ori\grave{e}$ (female), $\acute{o}ri\grave{e}mma$ (female)
4. $nw\acute{a}àf\dot{o}$, $\grave{o}k\acute{o}roàf\dot{o}$, $\grave{m}gb\acute{o}àf\dot{o}$ (female)

You can figure out the meaning of each name from 3.1 (days of the Igbo week).

Again, we sincerely apologize for the delay in posting this lesson on the Web and thank you for your understanding and support. As promised, subsequent lessons will be posted on the Web at regular intervals. In the meantime, you can channel your questions or feedback on the lesson to us via the language forum. Thank you a million times!