

**LESSON VII**  
**(IHE OMUMU NKE ASAA)**

by  
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onye ájuju ánaghì éfù óhìà.  
*(He or she who asks questions does  
not go astray.) – Igbo Proverb*

Although we have not concluded our discussion of the Igbo verbs **íbu** **mmd/íhè** and **ídì** + a noun, an adjective, a preposition, etc., we will take a break from grammar in this lesson. That will enable those of you who are still lagging behind to catch up. In the first part, we will deal mainly with salutations (or greetings). In the second part, we will briefly discuss questions in Igbo and, possibly, return to the above-mentioned verbs. We may also decide to leave the verbs for another lesson. It all depends on the availability of room to accommodate extra stuff without prolonging the lesson unnecessarily.

### **7.1 Salutation or Greeting**

Greeting is an important aspect of Igbo culture. To the Igbo people, it is an indicator of a good upbringing. When a child gets up from bed in the morning, the first thing he or she does is to greet the parents, grand parents, brothers, sisters, and other senior members of the family. Each family member will then acknowledge the greeting and, in turn, ask the child how his (or her) sleep was during the night. If, for any reason, the child forgets to greet the parents and other members of the family, they may greet him or her first as if he (or she) were older than them. And the child will learn an unforgettable lesson from the polite embarrassment – that there is, perhaps, no better indicator of a good upbringing, as far as the behaviour of an Igbo child is concerned, than regular morning, afternoon, night, and evening greetings. The parents and older family members in question may also, if they so desire, discipline the child in any other way.

The greeting does not stop within the family premises. As soon as the child steps out of the family compound, he or she is expected to greet every other adult. In other words, if an Igbo child sees someone going to or returning from the stream in the morning, he or she must, in keeping with local customs, greet the person warmly. If, on the other hand, the child sees the same individual or other villagers going to or returning from different places (= church, farm, market, the neighbouring village, etc.), he or she will equally be obliged to greet each and every one of them. And the child cannot count the number of times he or she has greeted a given individual in the course of the day and use it as an excuse for not greeting him or her again.

Although Igbo culture requires young people to greet their parents and other grownups first, that is not always the case. Even when they are busy, adults often scramble to greet younger people first whenever they see them returning from a trip, work, school, market, church or doing something else. After all, they themselves were brought up like the kids and taught to greet people tirelessly, too. Generally speaking, an adult Igbo speaker, male or female, may politely initiate the greeting by asking any younger speaker questions like *ì sáala chí nwá m?* and *ì bọ́ọ́la chí nwá m?* In fact, it is not uncommon for adult Igbo speakers who, for example, arrive somewhat late at a forum, and wish to make their presence known to all the participants for record purposes, to initiate the greetings by loudly saluting those already present. Upon hearing such expressions as *mmamma nù wo! ndéwo nù wó! unu àbọ́ọ́la chí yé? unu àsáala chí yé? ekèléle m únù wó, ùdó dírí únù wó,* etc. the young and older speakers who may not have been aware of the arrival of the adults in question will immediately and enthusiastically acknowledge the greetings.

The situation described above is somewhat different in the cities. The cities are not like the villages where all the villagers know each other and every one is his brother's or her sister's keeper. To make a long story short, greeting is to the Igbo people a situation in which neither the greeter nor the person greeted loses. It is a metaphorical penny. The greeter takes half a penny and the person greeted takes the remaining half that balances the cultural equation. I must point out, though, that despite the strong emphasis the Igbo culture lays on greeting, respect for elders, and obedience to authority, the Igbo people, young and old, are overly subservient to nobody. We live, as most of you already know, in an egalitarian society; we fear and worship no one except God; we care very much for each other, even in Diaspora; we love peace and endless tranquility; and we fight like an angry lion when threatened by a common enemy. These are some of our attributes that we cannot, to the bitter disappointment of our detractors, wish away.

## 7.2 English Salutations versus Igbo Greetings

If a group of native Igbo speakers (twelve, twenty-four, thirty-six, or more) are asked to translate the English expressions *good morning*, *good day*, *good afternoon*, *good evening*, and *good night* word for word into Igbo, they will unanimously agree on the following translations:

- |                     |                                       |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| (a) Good morning:   | ùtútù óma; ézigbo útutù; ézi útutù    |
| (b) Good day:       | úbòchì óma; ézigbo úbòchì; ézi úbòchì |
| (c) Good afternoon: | èhíhiè óma; ézigbo éhihiè; ézi éhihiè |



ánwùla (dáa/dáda./ńne/dédè)	(dáa/dáda./ńne/dédè) ánwùla
ánwùchula (dáda or dédè)	(dédè or dáda) ánwùchula
á nà m̀ èkpùfùrù gí òkpù!	ékpu fùrùla m̀ gí òkpù!
aka m̀ dī n'élú (dédè/dáda [X])!	ekèléle m̀ gí! (de/dá [X/Y])!
á nà m̀ ègbùfùrù gí (dé/dá [X])!	égbu fùrùla m̀ gí (dé/dá [Y])!
ásòfùrùla m̀ gí (dédè or dáda)!	ásòpùrùla m̀ gí (dáda/dédè)!

### GOOD EVENING [ONE PERSON]

mmamma (dé/dá [X] or dédè)	m̀mamma (dáa/dédè or dáda [Y])
(de/dá [X] or dédè) m̀mamma	(dáa or dáda [Y]) m̀mamma
ndéwo (dédè m̀ or dáda m̀)	ǹnòò (dáda m̀ or dédè m̀)
(dedè or dáda [X]) ǹndéwo	(dáda or dédè [Y]) ǹndéwo
ánwùla (dáa/dáda./ńne/dédè)	(dáa/dáda./ńne/dédè) ánwùla
ánwùchula (dáda or dédè)	(dédè or dáda) ánwùchula
á nà m̀ èkpùfùrù gí òkpù!	ékpu fùrùla m̀ gí òkpù!
aka m̀ dī n'élú (dáda or dédè)!	á nà m̀ ékèlé gí (díanyị)!
á nà m̀ ègbùfùrù gí (dé/dá [X])!	égbu fùrùla m̀ gí (dé/dá [Y])!
ásòfùrùla m̀ gí (dáda or dédè)!	ásòpùrùla m̀ gí (dáda/dédè)!

### GOOD NIGHT [ONE PERSON]

ka chí f́óo (dáda or dédè)	kà chí b̀òò (dédè or dáda)
ka chí b̀òò (̀nke ́oma)	kà ó f́óo (̀nke ́oma)

Two or more people together at a place are greeted collectively by placing “nù” -- a shortened form of the second person plural subject pronoun “únù” -- before or after the appropriate expression. Specifically, únù (= also an Igbo pluralizer) is preferably placed before ì sáala chí, ì b̀òòla chí, ì f̀ùtála, ì ǹòòla, and ánwù(chu)la . Note that it replaces the first person subject pronoun. The shortened form, nù, on the other hand, follows the expression m̀mamma, ǹndéwo, ǹnòò, kà chí f́óo, and kà chí b̀òò, as the following examples show.

**GOOD MORNING [COLLECTIVELY]:**

(dedè or dáda) ímmamma nù	ímmamma nù wó (dédè or dáda)
(dada or dédè) ùnu àbọ́ọ́la chí?	(dada) ùnu àbọ́ọ́la chí yé?
(dedè or dáda) ùnu àsáala chí?	(dedè) ùnu àsáala chí yé?
(dada or dédè) ùnu áfùtála?	(dada) ùnu áfùtála yé?
(dada or dédè) ndéwo nù	(dédè or dáda) ndéwo nù wó
nnọ̀ọ̀ nù; nnọ̀ọ̀ nù wó	únu ánwùla; únu ánwùla wó
ánwùchula (dáda or dédè)	(dáa/dédè) únu ánwùchula wó
(dada/dédè) ùnu áfùtála yé?	(daa/dédè) ùnu ànoọ́la yé?
á nà m̀ èkpúfùrú́ únú òkpú wó!	ékpufùrú́la m̀ únú òkpú wó!
ekèléle m̀ únú wó!	á nà m̀ èkèlé únú wó!
á nà m̀ ègbúfùrú́ únú wó!	égbufùrú́la m̀ únú wó!
ásọfùrú́la m̀ únú wó!	ásọpùrú́la m̀ únú wó!
aka m̀ dī n'élú wó!	unù nàrá èkèlé (útútù) wó!
ya gázíere únú wó!	udó dīrī́ únú wó!

**GOOD DAY/AFTERNOON [COLLECTIVELY]:**

(dada or dédè) ímmamma nù	(dédè or dáda) ímmamma nù wó
(dedè or dáda) ndéwo nù	(ndī íne/ínà) ndéwo nù wó
(dedè or dáda) nnọ̀ọ̀ nù wó!	(dada or dédè) nnọ̀ọ̀ nù wó!
unu ánwùla (dédè/dáda)	(dáa/dédè) únu ánwùchula wó
unu ánwùchula (dáda or dédè)	(dé X/Y) únu ánwùchula wó!
á nà m̀ èkèlé únú wó!	ekèlékwaala m̀ únú wó!
unù nàrá èkèlé wó!	nará nù èkèlé wó!
aka m̀ dī n'élú wó!	udó dīrī́ únú wó!
á nà m̀ èkpúfùrú́ únú òkpú wó!	ékpufùrú́la m̀ únú òkpú wó!
ekèléle m̀ únú wó!	á nà m̀ èkèlé únú wó!
á nà m̀ ègbúfùrú́ únú wó!	égbufùrú́la m̀ únú wó!
ásọfùrú́la m̀ únú wó!	ásọpùrú́la m̀ únú wó!

**GOOD EVENING [COLLECTIVELY]:**

mmamma nù (dédè or dáda)	(dáa or dáda) ímmamma nù wó
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(dedè m or dáda m) ñdéwo nù	ñdéwo nù wó (dáda or dédè)
nnòò nù!; nnòò nù wó!	unu nókwa ñke óma yé?
unu ánwùla (dáda m or dédè m)	únu ánwùla wó (dédè or dáda)
unu ánwùchule wó (dédè m)!	(dada m) únu ánwùchule wó!
unù nàrá èkelé wó!	nará nù èkelé wó!
aka m dì n'èlu wó!	udó dìrì únù wó!
á nà m èkpúfùrù únù òkpú wó!	ékpufùrùla m únù òkpú wo!
ùwa dīkwára únù ímma wó!	ya gàzíere únù wó!
ekèléle m únù wó!	á nà m èkèlé únù wó!
á nà m ègbúfùrù únù wó!	égbufùrùla m únù wó!
ásòfùrùla m únù wó!	ásòpùrùla m únù wó!

**GOOD NIGHT [COLLECTIVELY]:**

ka chí fóo nù!	ka chí bọ́o nù!
ka chí bọ́o nù wó!	ka ó fóo nù wó!

And if, for curiosity sake, we ask the native informants in question to explain for us the astonishing discrepancy between the word-for-word translation of the five English expressions and what native Igbo speakers actually say, they will immediately dismiss the translated expressions as “EngliIgbo” (= a corruption of Igbo). In other words, an Igbo speaker will not see another Igbo speaker in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening or at any other time during the day and say **ùtùtù óma, ézigbo útutù, èhíhie óma, ézigbo èhíhiè, mgbède óma, ézigbo mgbède, ùhùruchi óma, ézigbo úhuruchi, àbali óma, ézigbo àbali**, etc. to him or her by way of greeting. These offensive expressions, used in Unubi area, as I understand, are literal translations of the English greetings. They do not represent what the Igbo people say. And no native Igbo speaker, living outside the above-mentioned area, considers them appropriate for greeting purposes. Briefly, the standard Igbo equivalent of each of them is what we, the native speakers, say in similar circumstances, not the literal or word-for-word translation of the corresponding English expression. So, if you happen to come across them (= the expressions in question) in the course of your study of Igbo, please ignore them. You have a lot to choose from in the preceding and following pages.

The expression **únu ánwùla** (variant = **únu ánwùchule**) is commonly used by Igbo radio and television newscasters at the beginning of their daily news bulletin. In fact, our

Igbo readers who were old enough during the war will remember hearing Onwuzuruigbo Umezuruike and Ebiereonwu Anyanwu of the Broadcasting Corporation of Biafra (BCB) greet the Igbo people in the following ways:

(A) **Greeting:** *ńdị ébe ányị únu ánwùchule. nké à bù ákụkọ sí nà BCB, Enugu, ná-àbịára únù. ónye únu nà-ànú ólu yá bù Onwuzuruigbo Umezuruike.*

**Translation:** Greetings to you all, fellow Biafrans. The news (read by Onwuzuruigbo Umezuruike) is coming to you from BCB, Enugu.

(B) **Greeting:** *ńdị ébe ányị ímamma nù. nké à bù ákụkọ sí nà BCB, Enugu, ná-àbịára únù. onye únu nà-ànú ólu yá bù Ebiereonwu Anyanwu.*

**Translation:** Greetings to you all, fellow Biafrans. The news (read by Ebiereonwu Anyanwu) is coming to you from BCB, Enugu.

If the people you want to greet collectively are busy working, it is preferable to use expressions like the following instead of the traditional expressions listed above, the time of the day notwithstanding.

**One Person:**

*ị méwele (yí)?  
ị rúwala (yí)?  
ị nàghá àrúla (yé)?  
jisíe íke wó  
nyìkísia àhụ!  
ị rútu gí èzurú íke wó!  
ùwa dìkwára gí ímma wó!*

**Two or more persons:**

*unu èméwele (yí)?  
unu àrúwala (yí)?  
unu nàghá àrúla (yé)?  
jisíe nù íke wó!  
nyìkísia nù àhụ (wó)!  
na-émé nù wó!  
ùwa dìkwára únù ímma wó!*

The expressions *ị sáala chí? ị bọ́ọ́la chí? unu ásaala chí?* and *unu àbọ́ọ́la chí?* all presuppose a position of authority or equality by virtue of age. For that reason, young Igbo speakers cannot use them for their parents or seniors. Similarly, an adult Igbo speaker cannot greet a child *ímamma*. He or she can only use *ị sáala chí?* And *ị bọ́ọ́la chí?* Children and younger adult speakers, on the other hand,

must use the expression for their parents and seniors. The expression “*ì dīkwa ímma?*” (one person) and “*ùnu dīkwa ímma?*” (two or more people) cannot be used by an Igbo child for his parents or by young Igbo speakers for their seniors. The expressions are exclusively reserved for senior Igbo speakers. Finally, the titles **dáa**, **dédè**, **dáda**, **de** [X], and **dá** [Y] are the Igbo equivalent of *papa* and *mama*; consequently, young Igbo speakers use them only for people who are far older than they are (= individuals that they cannot address by their first names). I must add, though, that an adult Igbo speaker may intentionally use any of the titles for a younger person, particularly when he or she wants to mock the younger person or to get him or her agree to something that would have been virtually impossible under normal circumstances.

### 7.3 Response to Greetings

As Igbo learner, it is not enough for you to know how to greet someone in Igbo. You also need to know how to acknowledge greetings directed to or towards you by someone else, as well as how to respond to a response, that is, another Igbo speaker’s response to your greeting that, in turn, contains a question for you the greeter to further respond to. This section teaches you how to handle such situations in Igbo.

**GREETING:** *ímmamma (nù)!*

**RESPONSE: (ONE PERSON)**

*íyà nwá m! íyà àdá m!*

*íyà nwá m, ì bọ́ọ́la chí?*

*iyà ónye m, ì fùtáala?*

*íyà nwá m, ì dīkwa ímma?*

*iyà (nwá m), ì dī ághaa?*

*iyà (nwá m), ì tétala?*

*iyà (nwá m), ì mére ághaa?*

*íyà nwánnè m (or nwánnà m)*

*iyà ógò m; íyà ézigbo ógò m*

*íyà nwánnè m; íyà nwánwa*

*íyà áfonne; íyà nwánnè m*

*íyà óchò m; íyà nnàóchò*

*íì ndé (nwá m)*

*ndéwo (nù)! nnóò (nù)!*

**RESPONSE: (COLLECTIVELY)**

*iyà ùmù m, ùnu àsáala chí?*

*iyà ùmù m, ùnu àbọ́ọ́la chí?*

*iyà (ndi m) ùnu áfùtáala?*

*iyà ùmù m, ùnu dīkwa ímma?*

*iyà ùmù m, ùnu áfùtáala?*

*iyà (ùmù m) ùnu ètétala yé?*

*iyà, ùnu mére òtú óle (yé)?*

*íyà (ndi m or ndi nwé ímmadù)*

*íyà ndi ógò m (or ógò anyi)*

*íyà ùmùnnè m nà ùmùnnà m*

*íyà nnàúkwu (or nnàntà)*

*íyà ndi m, ùnu mére ághaa?*

*íì ndé (ùmù m)*



tòó òmmeji!  
tùó òn̄ju (nwá ím)!

**GREETING:** ánwù(chu)la!  
**RESPONSE: (ONE PERSON)**  
ma gí (or ghí) kwá!  
ma gí nwà kwà!

**GREETING:** kà chí foo!  
**RESPONSE: (ONE PERSON)**  
ngwa ní, kà ó bọ́ó!  
(ngwa ní), kà ó bọ́ó!  
(ngwa ní), kà ó bọ́ó (n̄ke óma)!  
(ngwa ní), kà ó fọ́o!  
í òráhụ(cháa), gí éteta.  
í òráhụjuru (= úrà), gí éteta.  
í híchaa (= úrà), gí éteta.

**GREETING:** ì sáala/bọ́óla chí?  
**RESPONSE:** èyéwu (dédè, dáda)

tòó òn̄ òmmeji!  
tùó òn̄ òn̄ju!

unu ánwù(chu)la!  
**RESPONSE: (COLLECTIVELY)**  
ma ún̄ òn̄ kwà (= and you, too)!  
ma ún̄ òn̄ nwà kwà (and you, too)!

ka chí fọ́o òn̄ (= bọ́ó òn̄)!  
**RESPONSE: (COLLECTIVELY)**  
ngwa ní, kà ó bọ́ó òn̄!  
(ngwa ní), kà ó bọ́ó òn̄!  
ka ó bọ́ó òn̄ (n̄ke óma)!  
(ngwa ní), kà ó fọ́o òn̄!  
unu òráhụ(cháa), ún̄ òn̄ éteta.  
unu òráhụjuru, ún̄ òn̄ éteta.  
unu híjuru, ún̄ òn̄ éteta.

unu ásaala (ábọ́óla) chí?  
èyéwu (dédè or dáda)

Before we leave this section, I would like to emphasize, once more, that although the English expression “*morning greeting*” is equivalent to “èkelé útútù” in Igbo, “útútù óma” and “ézigbo útútù” do not represent what native Igbo speakers themselves say. Similarly, the English expression “*afternoon greeting*” is equivalent to “èkelé éhihiè” in Igbo. But “éhihiè óma” and “ézigbo éhihiè” are not the standard expressions for “good afternoon” in Igbo. The comments apply equally to the two remaining expressions “*evening greeting*” and “*night greeting*.” Although they are equivalent to “èkelé úhuruchì” (or “èkelé ígbède”) and “èkelé ányasù or “èkelé àbalì” respectively, “ùhúrchì óma, ézigbo úhuruchì, ígbède óma, ézigbo ígbède, “ànyasù óma” and “ézigbo ányasù” are, in fact, used for greeting purposes by no native Igbo speaker outside Unubi area. In other words, none

of them is a standard form of greeting in Igbo. Please disregard them and select from the above-listed expressions.

#### 7.4 Response to Unacknowledged Greeting

If an Igbo speaker greets another person in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening, or at any other time during the day, and the greeted person fails (for whatever reason) to respond to the greeting, the Igbo greeter would normally say any of the following:

ya wúrụ ógwù, ò réghì.	If it is voodoo, it did not work.
ya wuru ógwù ò gághì írè.	If it is voodoo, you are disappointed.
ihe ójọọ gàwákwa òke ó gà!	God forbid!
tùfíyà (or ùgbú m) kwá!	God forbid!
chukwu ékwele íhe ójọọ.	God forbid!
fíyàrírì m (or fíyàrírì gí)!	God forbid!
ya búrụ ógwù, ó rúọla.	If it is voodoo, it has been nullified.
ághuntííke (metaphorically)!	An animal hard of hearing.

In general, the Igbo people are unlike North Americans when it comes to greetings. In North America, a person can see his or her next-door neighbour or boss in the morning and say nothing to him. An Igbo speaker will not do that in Igboland. Secondly, if the former, upon seeing the individuals in question, decides to greet them enthusiastically, he or she may, sad to say, end up being snubbed by the greeted persons who, more often than not, utter no word in acknowledgement of greetings. Again, that is rare among the Igbo people. Igbo speakers are rarely snobbish. And just as Igbo culture obliges younger people to greet their seniors first, it equally imposes on the recipient of the greeting the obligation of responding to it. Refusal to do so is usually indicative of enmity between the greeter and the greeted person that the former may, in some cases, be surprisingly unaware of.

#### 7.5 Tautology or Idiosyncrasy?

Some of you may have been wondering why an adult Igbo speaker would turn around and ask the child that greets him or her ì sáala chí (= have you woken up; have you seen the light of a new day)? ì bọ́ọ́la chí (= have you woken up; have you seen the light of the new day)? ì téele or ì tétala (= have you woken up)? ì fùtála

(= have you come out (from sleep))?. Obviously, the child could not have been able to greet the adult speaker if he or she had not been fortunate enough to live and see the light of the day in question. After all, the blessing of waking up and seeing the light of a new day is what makes the morning good. It probably explains why the Igbo people use the expressions in question in situations where English would use “good morning.” In other words, we use the expressions for good morning because they herald the beginning of a new day that the greeter and the greeted person have been privileged to witness. And to us, it is a blessing that cannot be quantified in financial terms. So, what is the relevance of the question? The answer is very simple: it is an idiosyncrasy of the Igbo language and culture. Every generation of Igbo speakers grows up with it and subsequently passes it on to the next generation.

The following scenario is also very common: an Igbo living in a city far from his home, or in another country, returns to his ancestral village for an unspecified number of days. In the course of his first day in the village, he sees some of the villagers and greets each of them individually. Each of the villagers acknowledges the greeting and, in turn, asks the greeter (in Igbo) if he came home. In their own words:  $\dot{\text{i}} \text{ l}\dot{\text{o}}\text{tara}$  (or  $\text{bi}\dot{\text{a}}\text{ra}$ )  $\dot{\text{u}}\text{l}\dot{\text{o}}$  (= did you return or come home)?  $\dot{\text{i}} \text{ r}\dot{\text{u}}\text{tere}$   $\dot{\text{u}}\text{l}\dot{\text{o}}$  (= did you come or return home)?  $\dot{\text{i}} \text{ gb}\dot{\text{a}}\text{rutere}$   $\dot{\text{u}}\text{l}\dot{\text{o}}$  (= did you come home)? And  $\dot{\text{i}} \text{ biara}$   $\text{n}'\dot{\text{u}}\text{hu}$  (= are you visiting home)?  $\dot{\text{i}} \text{ s}\dot{\text{i}} \text{ k}\dot{\text{a}} \dot{\text{i}} \text{ bi}\dot{\text{a}} \text{ l}\dot{\text{e}}\text{ta}$   $\dot{\text{a}}\text{ny}\dot{\text{i}}$  (= did you come to see us)?  $\dot{\text{i}} \text{ s}\dot{\text{i}} \text{ k}\dot{\text{a}} \dot{\text{i}} \text{ bi}\dot{\text{a}} \text{ h}\dot{\text{u}} \text{ }\dot{\text{o}}\text{tu}$   $\dot{\text{a}}\text{ny}\dot{\text{i}} \text{ d}\dot{\text{i}}$  (did you come to see how we are doing?  $\dot{\text{i}} \text{ s}\dot{\text{i}} \text{ k}\dot{\text{a}} \dot{\text{i}} \text{ gb}\dot{\text{a}}\text{rute}$   $\dot{\text{u}}\text{l}\dot{\text{o}} \text{ m}\dot{\text{a}}\text{ra}$   $\dot{\text{o}}\text{tu}$   $\dot{\text{u}}\text{wa}$   $\text{d}\dot{\text{o}}\text{ro}$   $\dot{\text{a}}\text{ny}\dot{\text{i}}$  (= are you visiting to find out how the world is treating us)?

The returnee is standing in front of the villagers and yet they are asking him or her if he or she came home. What is the point? Are the resident villagers ignorant? Why are they exposing themselves to ridicule? Each of them is aware that that the returnee is visiting the village because he is conversing with them face to face in Igbo. It is simply a matter of cultural conditioning, a habit every Igbo speaker grows up with and cherish.

We came across another interesting idiosyncrasy of the Igbo language when we were discussing the structure of the Igbo verbs. Do you remember what it is? I know you do. In Igbo, one does not simply die, sleep, dream, or laugh; one dies death, sleeps sleep, dreams a dream, and laughs laughter. Similarly, we do not just fight, cry, sing, run and dance. We fight a fight, cry tears, sing a song, run a race and dance a dance.

To some native Igbo speakers, the expressions are tautologous, pure and simple. To others, they are words to crack jokes with. And to yet another group of Igbo speakers, the seemingly tautologous part of each expression should be dropped. But to us, the structure in question is not only in perfect harmony with the Igbo vision of the universe;

it contributes to the beauty and clarity of the Igbo language. In fact, the failure of our predecessors to understand that led Igbo in the wrong direction over the years. We must, therefore, chart a new course for Igbo in the twenty-first century.

## 7.6 Questions in Igbo

At this point, you know how to greet someone in Igbo. You also know how to respond when someone else greets you in Igbo. Because some Igbo greetings sometimes require the greeted person to ask the greeter questions about his or her welfare, quality of sleep the previous night, etc., you need to know how to formulate simple questions in Igbo.

Besides, we naturally like to ask questions. And, as the proverb at the beginning of this lesson shows, the Igbo people believe that he or she who asks question does not and should not go astray. Whenever an Igbo is faced with a difficult situation that he or she does not know how to handle, advice is usually sought from older Igbo speakers, starting from the person's immediate family members. If a solution to the problem is not found within the family circle, the perimeter is widened and outsiders are then consulted. By so doing, the person concerned reduces to a significant degree his or her chances of making avoidable mistakes, of exposing himself or herself to ridicule unnecessarily, and of doing something that will give his or her family a bad name within the community in which they live. Questions, in other words, constitute a part of the daily life of an Igbo. And knowing how they are asked will undoubtedly help you in your relationship with Igbo speakers the world over.

In this lesson, we will examine three different ways in which you can formulate questions in Igbo: change of tone, use of interrogative pronouns, and adverbs of interrogation.

## 7.7 Question by Change of Tone

Although we have not yet discussed the tonal system of Igbo, it is important to mention here that a number of statements can be turned into questions by simply changing some of the tones that the individual words carry. Here are a few examples:

**Statement:**

(a) ǒ bụ́ yá. It's him/her.

(b) ị̀ nà-èrí ńrị. You are eating.

**Question:**

ò bụ́ yá? Is that him/her?

ì nà-é rí ńrị? Are you eating?

We have a lot to say about questions in Igbo. But, as you can see, we have no room left. We will treat the topic in another lesson. If you have questions to ask in the meantime, you can reach the language instructor through the Igbo Language Forum – your forum