

The Ultimate Guide to Nigeria's Main Languages

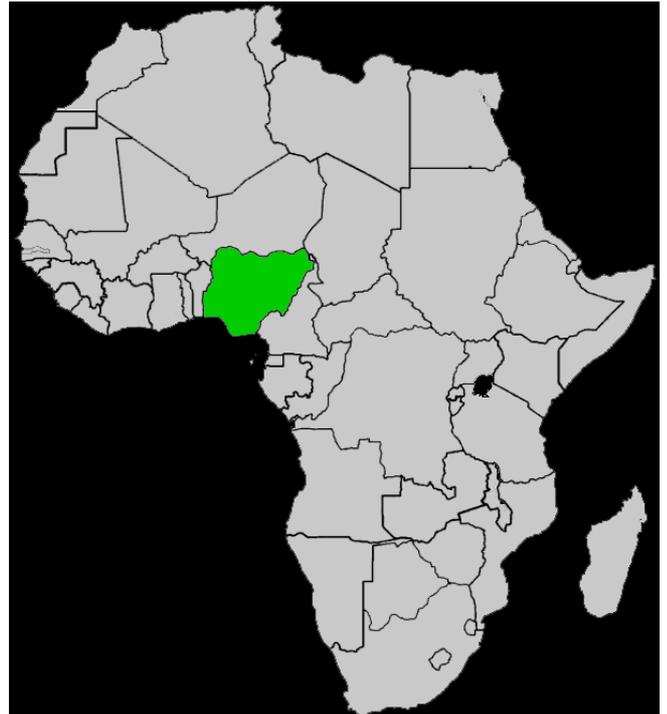
Nigeria: The "Giant of Africa"

Commonly known as the Giant of Africa, Nigeria has paramount importance in the world today. Listed among the "Next Eleven" economies set to become among the biggest in the world, Nigeria is also a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, the African Union, OPEC and the United Nations. This economically and politically growing country is also increasing its population; it is currently the seventh most populous country in the world with approximately 174 million inhabitants. From this population, the government contributes large numbers of troops to The United Nations and other peace keeping organisations.

Furthermore the United States, according to various sources, is becoming increasingly dependent on Nigeria for its oil supply. According to Douglas C. Lovelace, Jr. "Nigeria is the key country in sub-Saharan Africa for the success of American policy and interests... [It] is an African powerhouse blessed with a large growing economy, huge reserves of oil and natural gas". This tight relationship with the United States strengthens Nigeria's fame as the "Giant of Africa".

John Campbell in his book *Nigeria: Dancing on the brink*, ties this together nicely concluding that "with its large population, natural resource endowment, and the tradition of international engagement, Nigeria was perhaps the President George W. Bush administration's most important African strategic partner."

However in this article, we are not interested in the power behind the international relationships that Nigeria maintains but rather the rich cultural linguistic density that exists within this upcoming mega power.



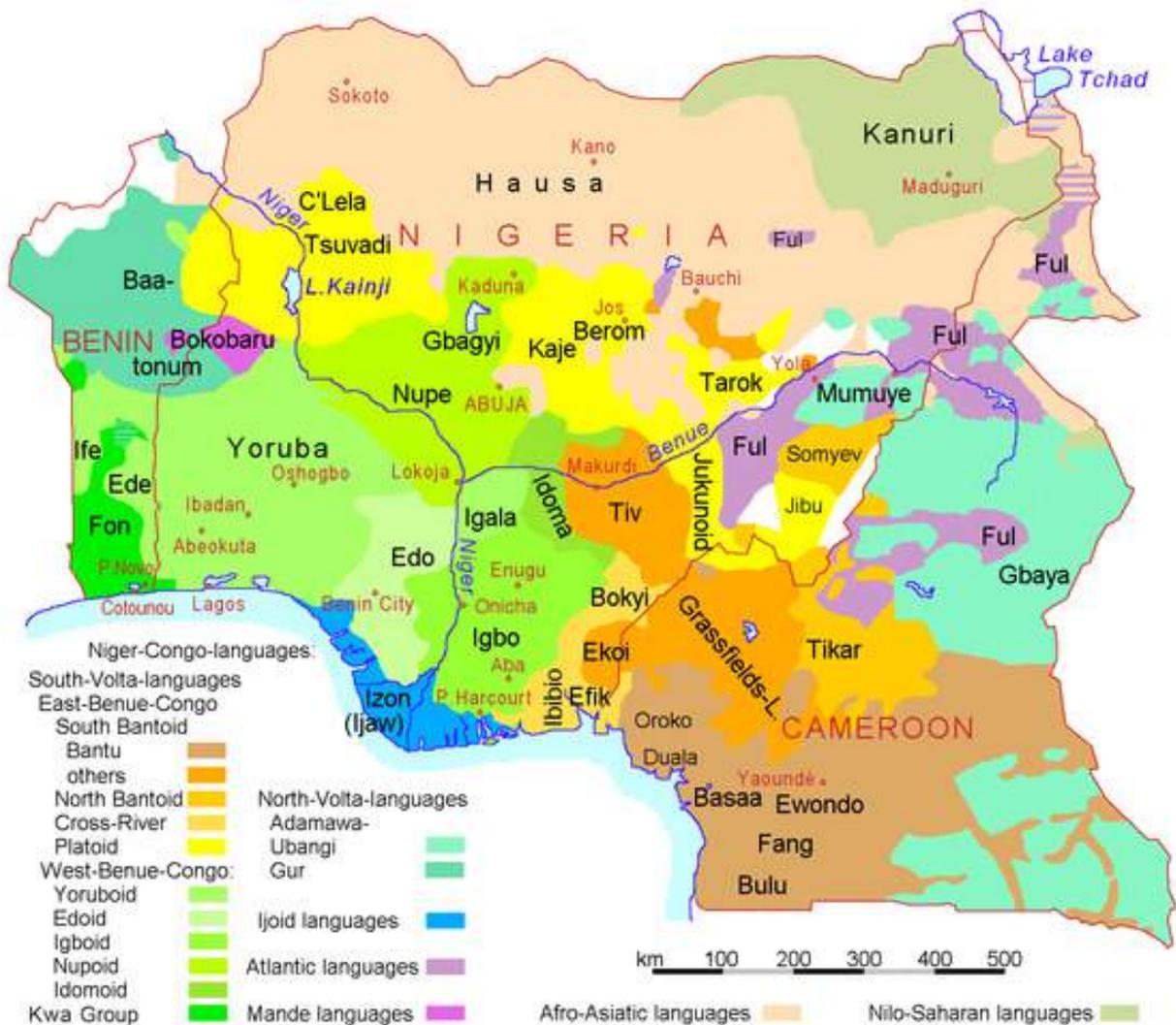
The language families in Nigeria

There are hundreds of languages spoken in Nigeria; officially there are 527 languages in total but according to the Ethnologue "only 514 are considered living languages, 2 are second languages without mother-tongue speakers, and 11 have no known speakers." English is the official language, as after colonisation it was named the best language for communication although this is still resented in the more rural areas of the country. The

urban areas of the country happily accept English as their lingua franca although many of the rural areas stick to their regional languages such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Edo, Efik, Fulani, Idoma, Ijaw and Kanuri.

Nigeria's linguistic diversity can be considered a microcosm of Africa as a whole, encompassing three major African languages families: Afroasiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger-Congo which will we will look at more closely in due course.

Another interesting fact about the linguistic diversity in Nigeria is the presence of several unclassified languages such as Cen Tuum, which may be an example of an older language family giving even greater diversity prior to the current spread of language families in Africa today.



The Niger-Congo language family

The Niger-Congo family is considered one of the world's largest language families and the largest in Africa in terms of geographical area, number of speakers, and number of distinct languages. Excluding northern Africa and the Horn of Africa, around 85% of the population of Africa speak a Niger-Congo language.

According to Kay Williamson, considered one of the leading 20th century scholars of Niger-Congo languages, there is evidence which suggests that the origins of the Benue-Congo languages (which account for half of the Niger-Congo family) were in the area of confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers. From this central point the Benue-Congo speaking population spread out mostly south and east. Scholars began to try to classify the various Niger-Congo languages in the 19th century. Notably, Sigismund W. Koelle, a German missionary obtained lists of 283 words in 156 languages and proceeded to group them so as to reflect his idea of the relationships between the languages. Many of his language groups correspond closely to the current way in which we classify the Niger-Congo languages.

The geographic distribution of Nigeria's Niger-Congo languages predominately spreads over south-central Nigeria, but it is not limited to this area. Due to migration these languages have spread to some northern regions of Nigeria, as well as through West Africa and even in some cases, abroad. Although there are substantial populations that speak other languages, the majority of the population also speaks a Niger Congo languages.

As you can see from the map, Niger-Congo languages predominate in central and southern Nigeria. All of the colours that are not the light brown and murky green constitute a member of the Niger-Congo family. The main branches represented in Nigeria are Mande, Atlantic, Gur, Kwa, Benue-Congo and Adamawa-Ubangian.

A characteristic common to most Niger–Congo languages is the use of a noun-class system. According to the Britannia encyclopedia, “in a noun class system all nouns are marked by an affix; usually one affix signals a singular noun and another signals a plural form... It is also probable that originally semantic considerations determined which affixes marked a particular noun class.” However, a lot of controversy still remains around the classification of all of the languages in this family as some others, such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Ibibio (Efik, Ibibio, and Annang), don't have noun classes.

Unfortunately the linguistic diversity of the Niger-Congo language family is less open than is apparent and sometimes can be considered fairly limited. The majority of these languages may well consist of further regional dialects that may not be mutually intelligible. As a result some of these languages have been standardized and now use a Romanised orthography and now nearly all the languages use a Latin alphabet.

Afro-asiatic languages

The Afro-asiatic language family is another large language family with around 300 different languages and subsequent dialects. Similarly to the Niger-Congo language family, it includes languages that are spoken predominantly in North Africa and the Horn of Africa but additionally in parts of the Sahel and in the Middle East. The Afro-asiatic language family is also very important historically as it is the longest recorded history of any language family, although it has previously been known by the names Hamito-Semitic, Semito-Hamitic, or Erythraean languages.

Today, the Afro-asiatic family has around 250 million speakers with the numbers of speakers per language ranging dramatically. Around 150 million people converse in Arabic whereas only a few hundred use some Cushitic and Chadic languages.

As you can see from the map above, Afro-asiatic cover the northern part of Nigeria and can be divided principally into Chadic, Semitic and Berber. The Chadic language is by far the largest with over 70 languages within it, whereas Semitic languages include various dialects of Arabic (principally spoken in the Northeast) and Berber by the Tuareg-speaking communities in the extreme Northwest.

Common features of the Afroasiatic languages are a set of emphatic consonants, a two-gender system in the singular, with the feminine marked by the sound /t/. In addition all afroasiatic subfamilies show evidence of a causative affix s. There are some similarities to Indo-European languages which have increased scholars interest in looking for a special relationship between Afro-Asiatic and Indo-European language families although as of yet, no concrete evidence has been discovered.

Nilo-Saharan languages

Nilo-Saharan languages are the final language family which co-exists with the other 2 aforementioned language families in Nigeria. It forms one of the four main language families on the African continent and has around 50 million speakers today, making it considerably less potent than the other language families in Nigeria.

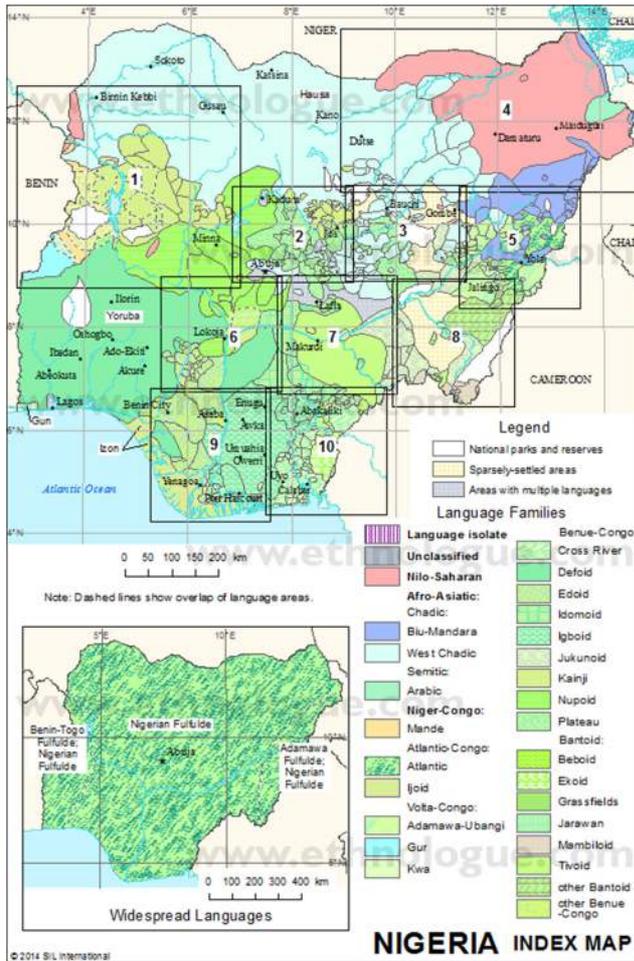
As you can see from the map above, only the very northern eastern parts of Nigeria speak Nilo-Saharan languages, particularly the areas close to Lake Tchard.

Nilo-Saharan languages' large variety is expected given the wide geographical area where these languages are spoken. Often sound systems and word order are shared with unrelated neighbouring language families and irrespective of the trend in the Nilo-Saharan family itself.

The majority of Nilo-Saharan languages don't have a great literary tradition. The only exception is that of Old Nubian which was derived from Coptic which was adapted from the Greek alphabet although it has now been abandoned after Islam spread to northern Sudan.

The languages of Nigeria

Due to the vast number of languages that co-exist in Nigeria, this report will only focus on languages with over 100,000 speakers. There is a large difference in the number of speakers per language ranging from the likes of Ajawa, which is now classified as an extinct language due to only having 10 speakers, and Barikanchi where there are no known L1 speakers and only 9 people who have it as their second language. On the other hand, some languages have over 60,000,000 speakers and various dialects showing the wide breath of diversity within Nigerian languages. The following languages are listed in order of number of speakers, taken from the Ethnologue for Nigeria (<http://www.ethnologue.com/country/NG/languages>).



This map will be used in this report as a reference to see specific areas of the country. It is taken from http://www.ethnologue.com/map/NG_xx where you can find other maps illustrating the linguistic diversity of Nigeria.

Nigerian Pidgin

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : pcm
Language family	Creole language English Creole Atlantic Krio Nigerian Pidgin
Alternative names	Broken English, Brokin, Brokun, Nigerian Creole English, Nigerian Pidgin English
Estimated no. of speakers	30,000,000
Where is it spoken	Southern states; northern states in Sabon Garis; coastal and urban areas of Nigeria
Script	Latin
Language use	A creole with native speakers A pidgin between Africans and Europeans, and Africans from different languages Used on TV and Radio Dictionary and Grammar Bible portions 1957

Many pidgin languages exist in the world today, especially in countries where a wide variety of languages exist harmoniously. A pidgin language is a basic and simple version of a language or various languages which have been developed as a means of communication between different cultural groups who do not share a common language. Nigerian Pidgin is now officially a Creole language as it has become a stable natural language, with many L1 speakers due to children being raised with this language as their mother language. Therefore it can be considered language with specific features, which a pidgin language lacks due to the lack of standardization from mother tongue speakers.

Nigerian pidgin is an English based Creole spoken as a lingua franca across Nigeria, with around 30,000,000 speakers, including both L1 and L2 speakers. It is now considered a Creole due to the aforementioned presence of the native speakers and is spoken by a wide range of cultural groups in all areas of the country. Although native speakers do exist, this language keeps its name as Nigerian Pidgin as the majority of the speakers are not true native speakers, but rather children who have learnt it at birth. The language has also been influenced by Spanish and Portuguese, such as the word “sabi” from saber in both Spanish and Portuguese, and the Caribbean dialects, especially Jamaican due to the returning descendants of slaves.

All of the 250 or more ethnic groups of Nigeria can converse with one another in this language so it is to be expected that variation and additions occurs in each group. For example, the Yorùbas group add the sounds *Se* and *Abi* when they ask questions. For example the phrase “You are coming, right?” would be pronounced “Se you dey come?” or “your dey come abi?”.

If you want to learn how to speak Nigerian Pidgin, why not check out this video:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cf5n_v-S-Y

Yoruba

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : yor
Language family	Niger-Congo Atlantic-Congo Volta-Congo Benue-Congo Defoid Yoruboid Edekiri Yoruba
Alternative names	Yariba, Yooba
Estimated no. of speakers	18,900,000 in Nigeria (total 19,380,800)
Where is it spoken	Most of Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Kwara, and Lagos states; Kogi State, west LGAs; northeast Ondo State, Ào.
Script	Braille or Latin. Original script was Arabic but no longer in use.
Language use	A creole with native speakers Literacy rate in L2: 35%. Taught in primary and secondary schools. Newspapers. New media. Radio programs. TV. Dictionary. Grammar. Bible: 1884–2006.

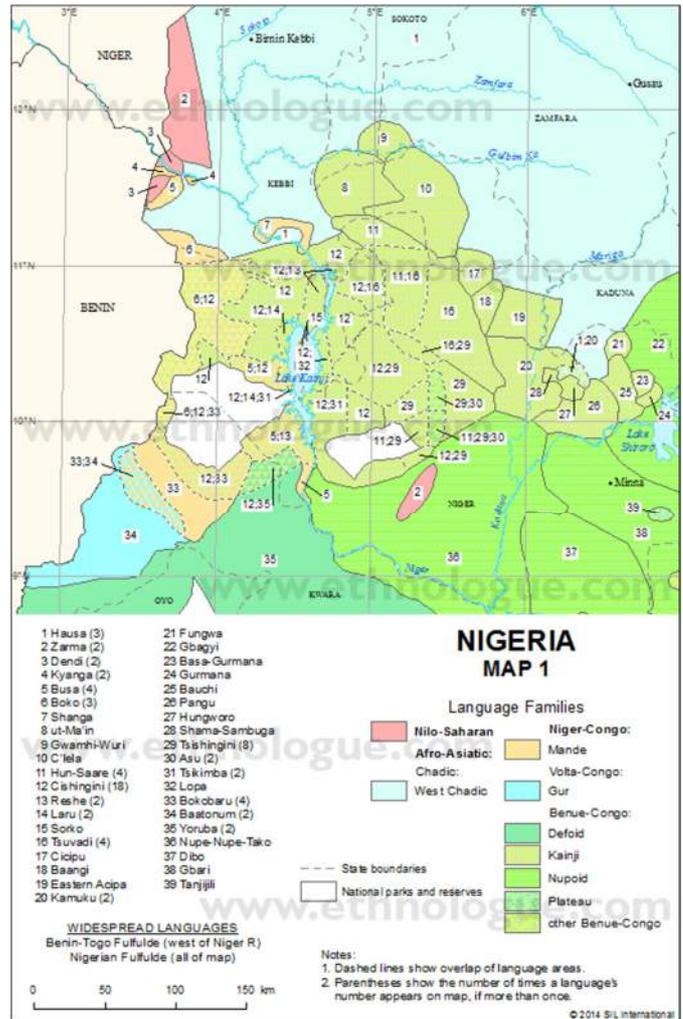
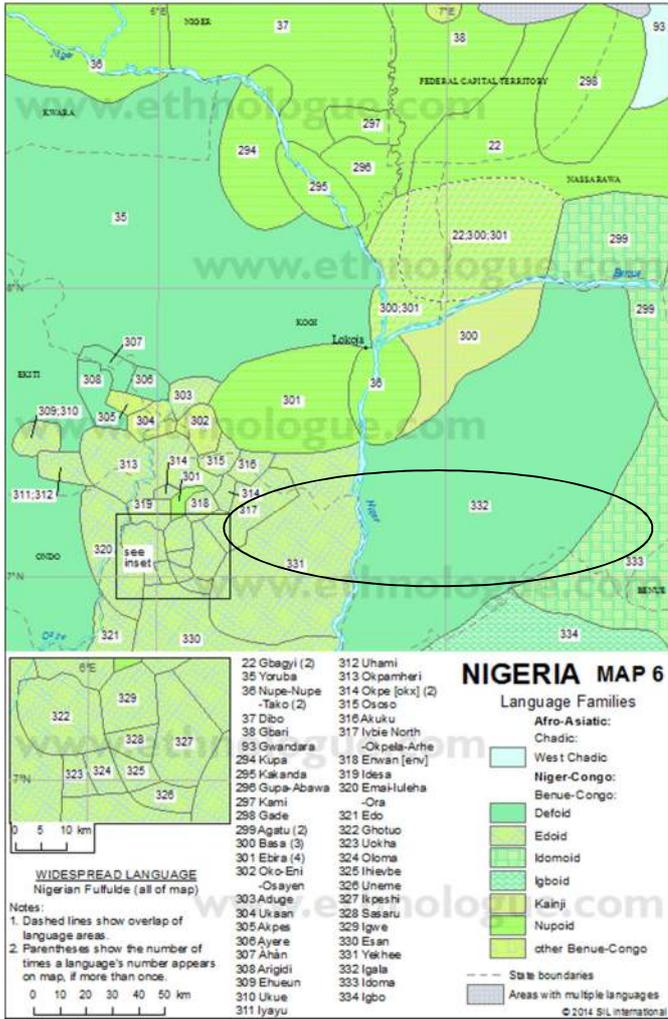
The ethnic group Yoruba consists of over 35 million people in total, with the majority of this population from Nigeria. The Yoruba makes up 21% of Nigeria's population making them one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa.

Originally the Yoruba had a very oral tradition, with a strong focus on passing down their stories and traditions through verbal communication, with little written communication. Nowadays the Yoruba language uses the Braille or Latin script, although it has in the past used an Arabic script.

As one can observe from the table above, Yoruba is classified within the Ederkiri languages which come within the Volta-Niger branch of the Niger-Congo family. It is closely linked with the Igala language, so much so that some researches regard it as a dialect of Yoruba. The Yoruba language is also used as L2 by Akpes, Bokobaru, Ebira and Ukaan increasing its widespread in Nigeria.

Now, the area where North-West Yoruba is spoken corresponds to the historical Oyo Empire whereas South-East Yoruba was most likely associated with the expansion of the Benin Empire. Central Yoruba is a combination of the lexical features of the North-West Yoruba and the ethnographical features of South-East Yoruba. The standard variety taught at schools and used in the press was the result of the grammar compiled in 1857 by a Bishop.

Returning to the map that we saw earlier in the introduction to the languages of Nigeria, if we zoom in on areas 1 and 6, we will see that speakers of Yoruba have a widespread across this area. It is labelled 35 in the maps below.



Hausa

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : hau
Language family	Afro-Asiatic Chadic West A A.1 Hausa
Alternative names	Abakwariga, Habe, Haoussa, Hausawa, Kado, Mgbakpa
Dialects	Adarawa, Arewa, Gobirawa, Hadejiya, Kano, Katagum, Katsina, Kebbawa, Sokoto, Zamfarawa. Barikanchi. There is also a pidgin or market Hausa [gib]. Subdialects of Eastern Hausa: Kano, Katagum, Hadejiya; of Western Hausa: Sokoto, Katsina, Gobirawa, Adarawa, Kebbawa, Zamfarawa; of North Hausa: Arewa, Arawa. Abakwariga is a subgroup.
Estimated no. of speakers	18,500,000 in Nigeria (total 24,988,000)
Where is it spoken	Sokoto, Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, Bauchi, Jigawa, Zamfara, Kebbi, and Gombe states.
Script	Arabic script, Maghribi and Naskh styles. Braille script. Latin script
Language use	New media. Radio programs. TV. Dictionary. Grammar. Bible: 1932–2004.

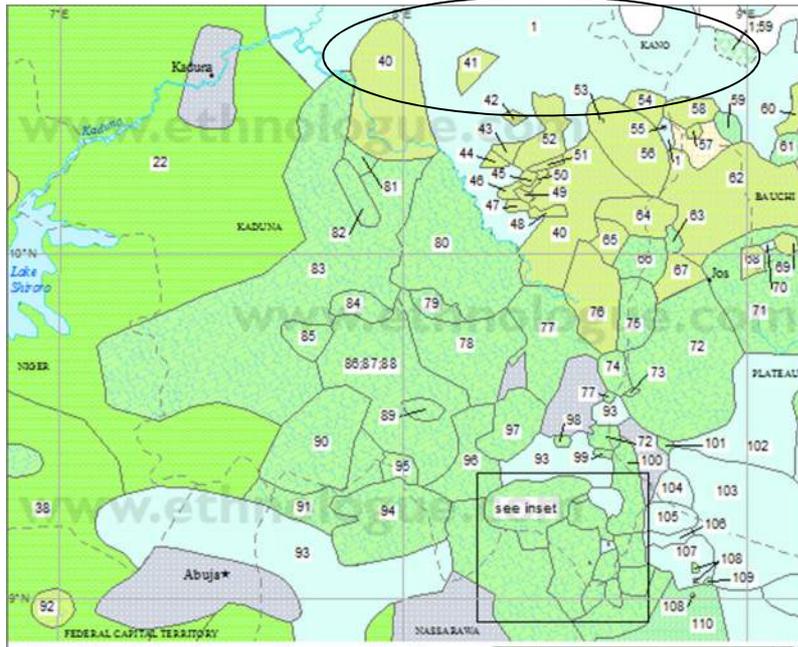
The Hausa language is the most well known Chadic language in Nigeria although the exact number of native speakers in Nigeria is unknown. It is the official language of a number of states in Northern Nigeria, where the most important dialect is Kano, an Eastern Hausa dialect as it is the standard dialect used for official purposes. Barikanchi is a pidgin formerly used in the military whereas the other dialects are spoken in different areas of the country for individual or sub ethnic group purposes.

Although it may be considered the most well known and in some senses deemed the most important Chadic language, Hausa is not typical of this language family at all. It has a reduced tonal system and a phonology which is highly influenced by Arabic. Hausa, as well as other Afroasiatic languages historically have always been written in a modified Arabic script (commonly known as ajami), however the modern script is now a romanization known as boko.

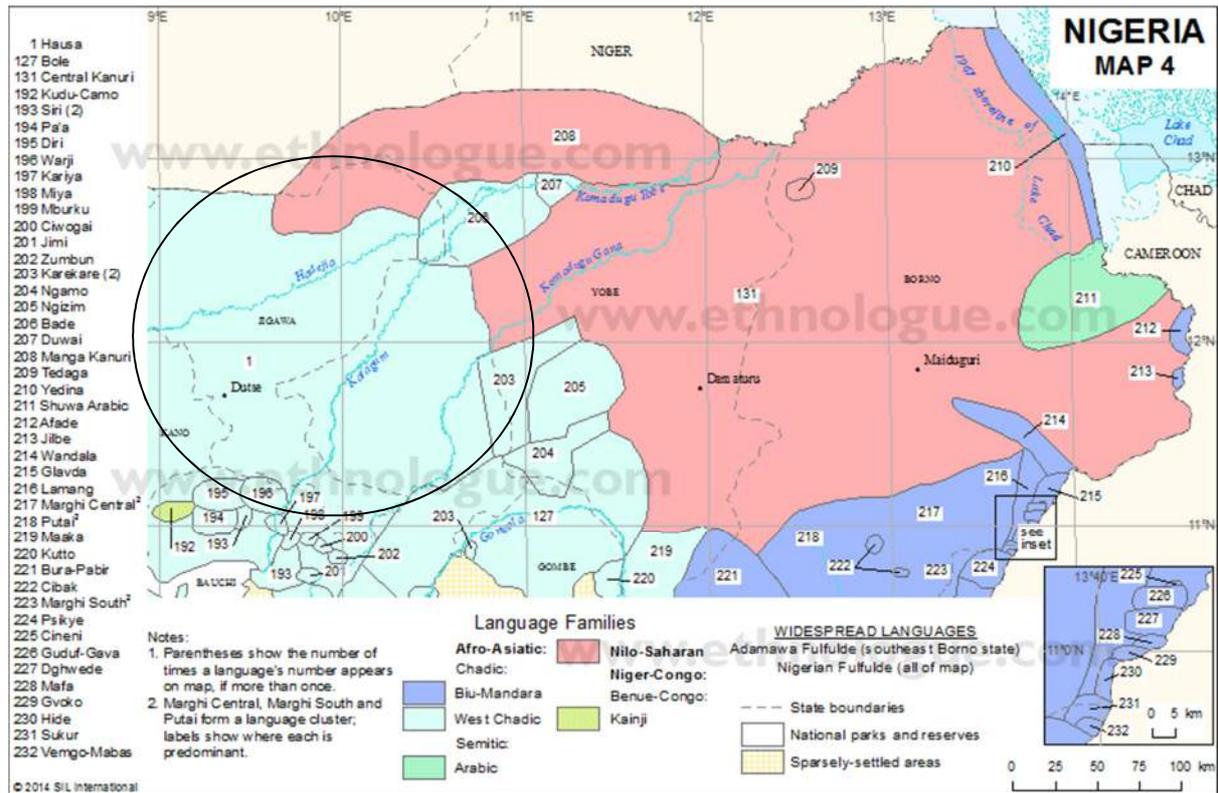
Throughout a lot of West Africa, Hausa is used as a lingua franca and the Sahel in particular. Stereotypically and principally the language is associated with the Islamic culture in Nigeria and West Africa as it is spoken primarily by Muslims. The following languages use Hausa as L2; Adara , Ahwai, Ajiya, Alago, Awak, Ayu, Bacama, Bade, Bali, Bankal, Bata, Bena, Berom,

Bille, Boko, Bokobaru, Bo-Rukul, Busa, Cara, Cicipu, Cishingini, C'lela, Damakawa, Dera, Duguri, Eastern Acipa, Ebira, Eggon, Eloyi, Etkywan, Fali, Fyam, Ga'anda, Gbiri-Niragu, Geji, Gengle, Giiwo, Goemai, Gude, Gwa, Gwamhi-Wuri, Gwandara, Gyem, Hasha, Hõne, Huba, Hwana, Izora, Jara, Jibu, Kaan, Kam, Kamuku, Koma, Kpasham, Kugama, Kumba, Kutep, Kyanga, Labir, Lala-Roba, Longuda, Mangas, Mbat, Mboi, Mbula-Bwazza, Miya, Ndoola, Ngwaba, Ningye, Ninzo, Numana-Nunku-Gbantu-Numbu, Nyankpa, Nyong, Pangu, Pero, Piya-Kwonci, Samba Daka, Shama-Sambuga, Shanga, Shiki, Shoo-Minda-Nye, Sorko, Sukur, Teme, Tera, Tigon Mbembe, Tsikimba, Tsishingini, Tsuvadi, Tunzuii, Tyap, ut-Ma'in, Wandala, Warji, Yendang, Yukuben, Zari, Zeem.

The maps below show the areas where Hausa is spoken within Nigeria; it is labelled as 1 in this diagram. This is map 2, so indicates the central area of Nigeria. The map below is map 4, showing the north east of Nigeria.



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Igbo

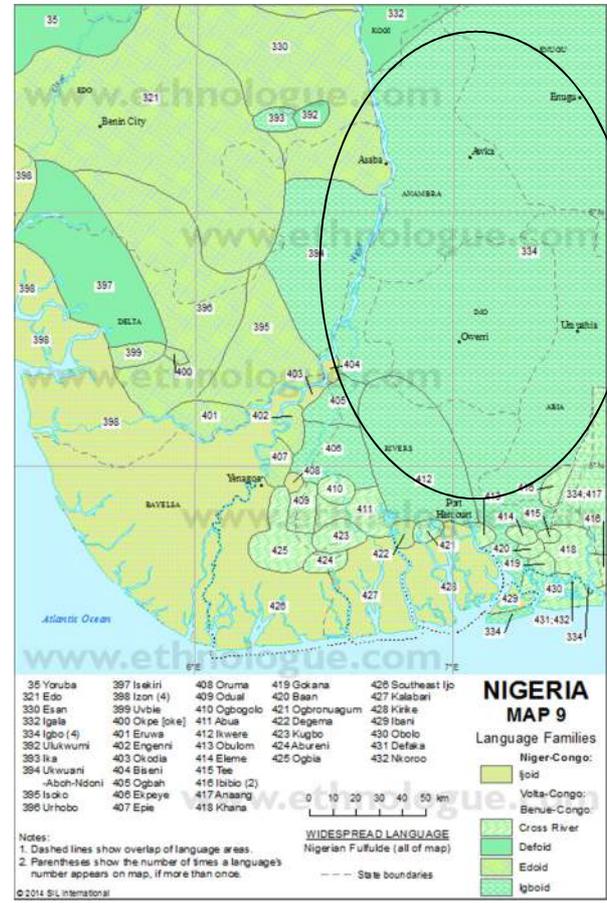
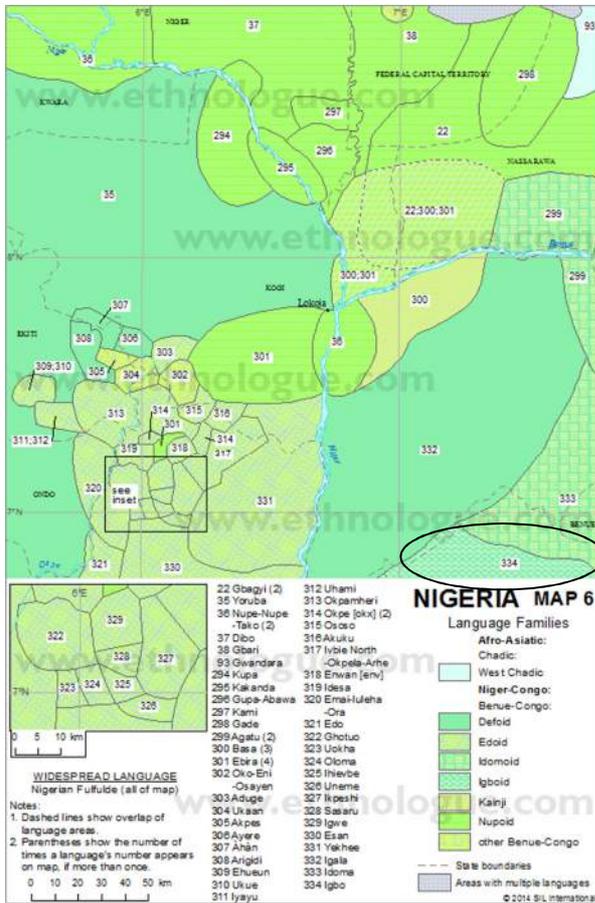
ISO code	ISO 639-3 : ibo
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Igboid, Igbo
Alternative names	Ibo
Dialects	Afikpo, Aniocha, Bonny-Opobo, Eche, Egbema, Mbaise, Ngwa, Nsa, Nsuka, Oguta, Ohuhu, Oka (Awka), Onitsha, Orlu, Owerri (Isuama), Umuahia, Unwana. 30 dialects vary.
Estimated no. of speakers	18,000,000
Where is it spoken	Abia State; Anambra State, Aguata, Anambra, Awka, Idemili, Ihiala, Njikoka, Nnewi, and Onitsha LGAs; Enugu State, Awgu, Enugu, Ezeagu, Igo-Etiti, Igbo-Eze, Isi-Uzo, Nkanu, Nsukka, Udi, and Uzo-Uwani LGAs; Imo State; Rivers State, Ikwerre, Bonny, and Ahoada LGAs; Delta State, Oshimili, Aniocha, and Ndokwa LGAs; Akwa Ibom State, Ika LGA; northeast Delta State; southeast Rivers State, Oyigbo LGA and Opobo part of Opobo-Nkoro LGA, and alongside Ibani [iby] language area in Bonny LGA. The only or majority language in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states.
Script	Latin.
Language use	Used for government notices New media. Radio programs and TV. Dictionary and grammar. Bible: 1906–2006.

Igbo is a Niger-Congo language which is spoken by a population of around 18,000,000 in Nigeria. As you can see from the table above, there are numerous Igbo dialects of which some are not mutually intelligible and as a result it is difficult to identify or even create a standard dialect. The standard literary form is developing based on Owerri and Umuahia dialects. These proposed dialects have been gradually accepted by various missionaries, publishers and even by Cambridge University.

Reading and writing Igbo is not very far reaching and there is a distinct lack of Igbo literature meaning that it is a mainly spoken and colloquial language nowadays. Although it is used by Ikwere, Obolo and Ogbah people as L2.

An interesting characteristic of the Igbo language is its lack of adjectives. According to Payne's article in the Encyclopaedia of language, Emenanjo in 1978 states there are only 8: *ukwu* 'big', *nta* 'small'; *oji* 'dark', *ọcha* 'light'; *ọhuru* 'new', *ochie* 'old'; *ọma* 'good'; *ọjọ* 'bad'.

The maps below show the spread of the Igbo language across Nigeria. To the left is map 6, showing the southern western central part of the country where Igbo dominates the very southern eastern area. The map to the right is map 9 which shows the dominance in southern area of Nigeria. These two maps overlap to further show the dominance of Igbo in this area. (Please see the reference map in the general introduction to the languages section for further information.)

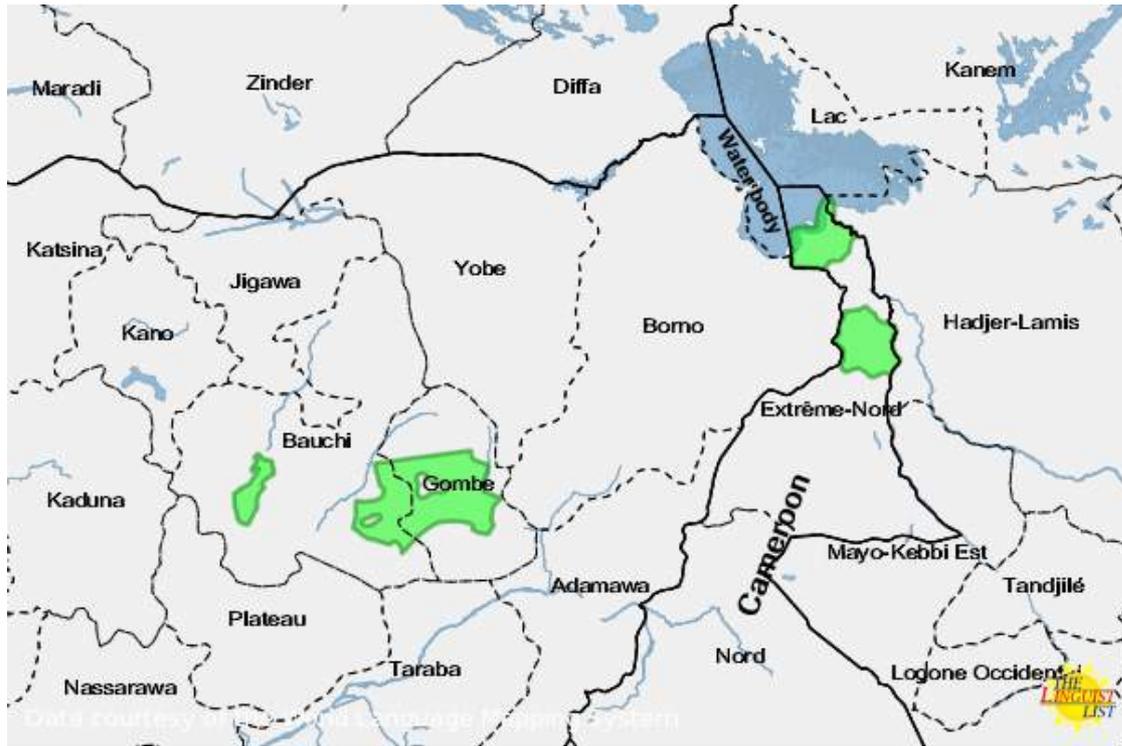


Fulfulde, Nigerian

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : fuv
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Atlantic, Northern, Senegambian, Fula-Wolof, Fula, East Central
Alternative names	Kano-Katsina Fulfulde
Dialects	Bororo (Aku, Fulfulde Caka Nigeria, Mbororo, Nomadic Fulfulde, Woylaare), Kano-Katsina, Sokoto. Intelligibility 40%-50% of Fulfulde Cameroon
Estimated no. of speakers	11,500,000 in Nigeria (total 11,585,000)
Where is it spoken	Kano-Katsina: Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Jos plateau and southeast to Bauchi; Bornu State, Bororro, Maiduguri is center; Sokoto State, Sokoto.
Script	Arabic script, Maghribi and Naskh styles, used since 2011. Latin script used since 2003.
Language use	Home and sometimes in the market Literacy rate in L1 is below 1% Roman script and below 20% in Arabic script Poetry Dictionary New Testament 2007- 2010

The speakers of Fulfulde have mixed opinions about their language. In general they are proud of their oral and written language although in general in the last 10 years they think that speaking and writing English is more important as they country becomes more westernized. It is also used widely across all Africa, and the Cameroon variety also has a high number of speakers in Nigeria.

It is still used as L2 by many other languages, even if its own people don't have the same love for their language. The following languages use Fulfulde as L2; Bali, Bena, Bille, Bokobaru, Bure, Dera, Duguri, Fali, Ga'anda, Gude, Hone, Huba, Hwana, Jara, Jibu, Kaan, Kam, Kpasham, Kumba, Lal-Roba, Lamnso', Longuda, Mbio, Mbula-Bwazza, Mom Jango, Ndoola, Ngwaba, Nigeria Mambila, Nyongm Peere, Samba Daka, Shoo-Minda-Nye, Sukur, Teme, Tsuyadi, Vemgo-Mabas, Waja, Yendang, Zeem.



Kanuri

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : kau
Language family	Nilo-Saharan Saharan Western Saharan Kanuri
Alternative names	Includes Central Kanuri [knc], Manga Kanuri [kby] (Niger), Tumari Kanuri [krt] (Niger) (See below)
Estimated no. of speakers	3,760,500 population in all languages

Kanuri is a macro-language of Nigeria, meaning that it encompasses various other languages, such as central Kanuri, Manga Kanuri and Tumari Kanuri. It is hard to identify the official term of these languages, some linguists classify them as dialects of Kanuri, others as individual languages of a language family. Of these sub languages Central Kanuri is the only one used in Nigeria and thus this will be the language that we will focus on in this report.

Like many other African languages, Kanuri is a tonal language with 3 distinctive tones; high, low and falling, with an extensive system of consonant weakening meaning that the change in the combination of the consonants and tones can further change the verb tense.

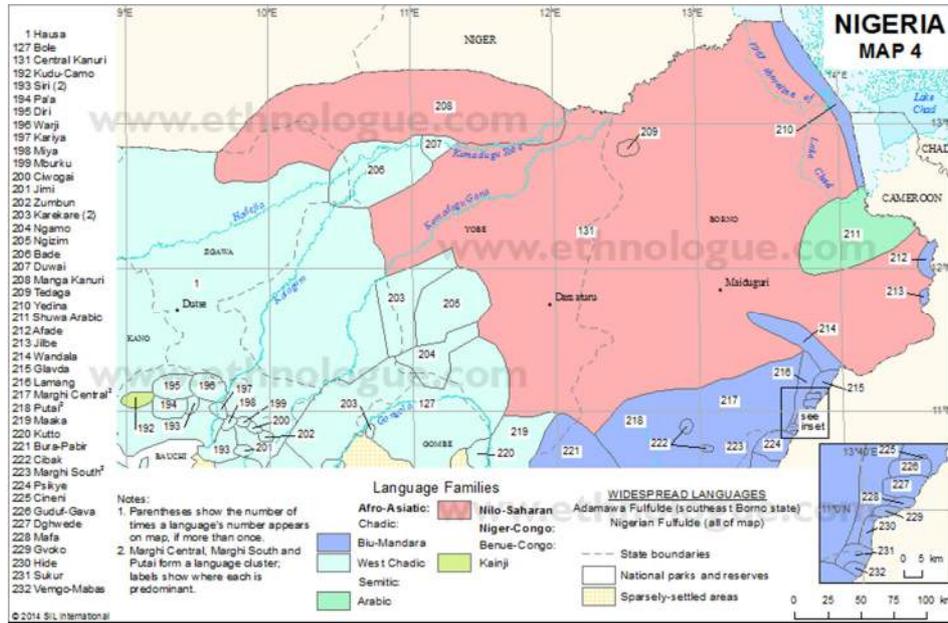
It was traditionally a lingua franca but recently the Kanuri population favour Arabic or Hausa as their second language and can happily converse in that language if the occasion arises. In general the majority of the Kanuri people are Muslim.

Central Kanuri

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : knc
Alternative names	Beriberi, Bornu, Kanouri, Kanoury, Yerwa Kanuri
Dialects	Fadawa, Guvja, Kabari (Kuvuri), Kaga (Kagama), Kwayam, Lare (Lere), Mao, Ngazar, Njesko, Temageri, Yerwa. Yerwa is central dialect.
Estimated no. of speakers	3,000,000 in Nigeria (total 3,240,000)
Where is it spoken	Borno State, Kukawa, Kaga, Konduga, Maiduguri, Monguno, Ngala, Bama, and Gwoza LGAs; Yobe State, Nguru, Geidam, Damaturu, Fika, Fune, and Gujba LGAs; Jigawa State, Hadejia LGA.
Script	Arabic script, Maghribi and Naskh styles. Latin script used since 1949.
Language use	Radio programs.TV. Dictionary. Grammar. New Testament: 1997.

The map below shows the position of the Central Kanuri in Nigeria. The map below is map 4 which focuses on the northern western area on the Country and it is evident that this language has supreme dominance in this area. There are other areas of the country which

have small areas where this language is used but the main dominance of the language is in the northern west along with the other Nilo-Saharan languages.



Tiv

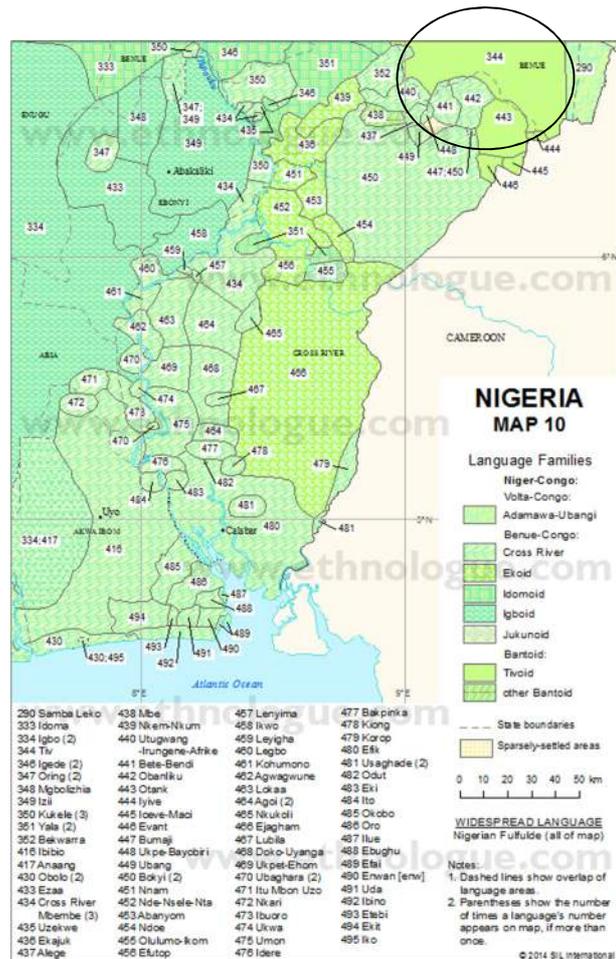
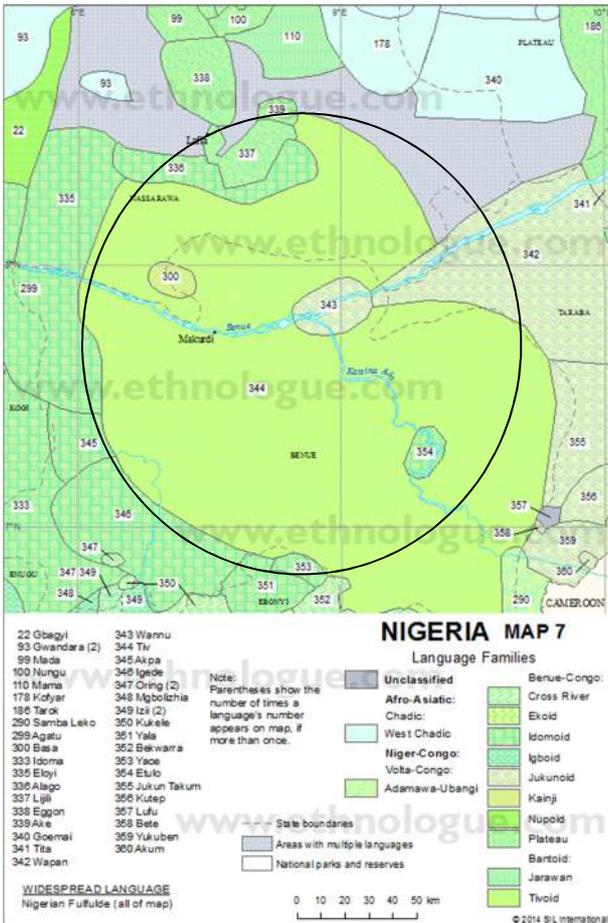
ISO code	ISO 639-3 : tiv
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Tivoid
Alternative names	Munshi
Estimated no. of speakers	2,210,000 in Nigeria
Where is it spoken	Benue State, Makurdi, Gwer, Gboko Kwande, Vandeikya, and Katsina Ala LGAs; Plateau State, Lafia LGA; Taraba State, Bali, Takum, and Wukari LGAs.
Script	Latin Script used since 1936
Language use	Taught in some primary schools Dictionary and Grammar Bible 1964 Used as L2 by Obanliku, Yace.

The Tiv language is spoken by well over 2,000,000 people in Nigeria and a further few hundred thousand in Cameroon. Of these 2,000,000 speakers, the majority can be found in the Benue state in southern eastern Nigeria close to the border with Cameroon.

The Tiv language is the Tivoid language with the largest population of speakers in Nigeria. Tivoid languages are mainly threatened with extinction due to the large variety and the lack of knowledge of their own language.

The map below to the left is map 7, showing the population of Tiv speakers in southern central Nigeria. On the right we have map 10 which is the area of the country that borders

with Cameroon. As you can see the populations speaking this language covers quite a large area.



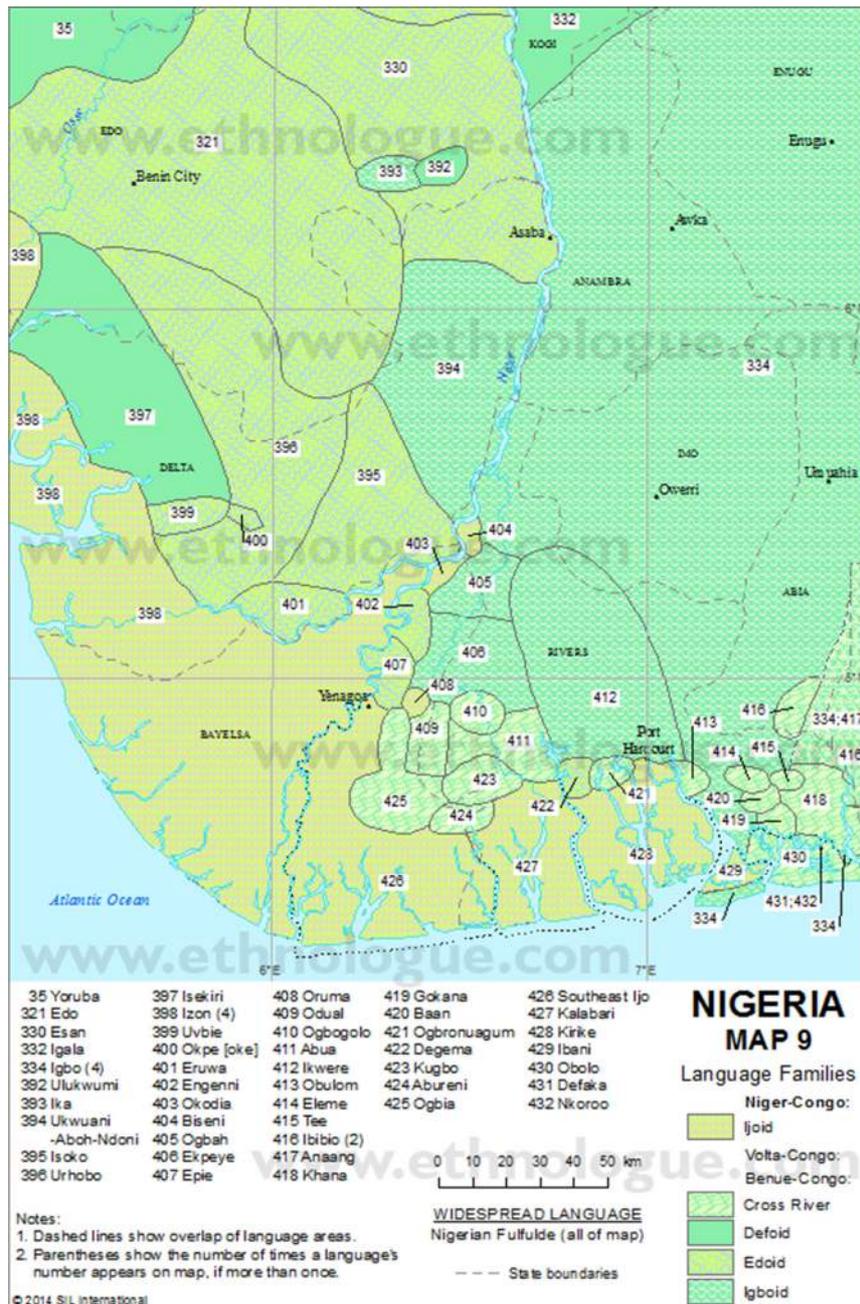
Izon/ Ijaw

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : ijc
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Ijoid, Ijo, West Ijo
Alternative names	Central-Western Ijo, Ijaw, Ijo, Izo, Uzo
Dialects	Apoi, Arogbo, Basan (Bassan), Bumo (Boma), East Olodiama, East Tarakiri, Egbema, Ekpetiama, Furupagha, Gbarain, Iduwini, Ikibiri, Kabo (Kabowei), Kolokuma-Opokuma, Koluama, Kumbo (Kumbowei), Mein, Ogbe Ijo, Ogboin, Ogulagha, Operemo, Oporomo (Oporoma), Oporoza (Gbaranmatu), Oyiakiri, Tuomo, West Olodiama, West Tarakiri. Izon has about 30 inherently intelligible dialects.
Estimated no. of speakers	1,770,000
Where is it spoken	Bayelsa State, Yenagoa, South Ijaw, Kolokuma-Opokuma, Ekeremor, and Sagbama LGAs; Delta State, Burutu, Warri, and Ughelli LGAs; Ondo State, Ilaje, Ese-Odo LGAs; Ekiti State, Ikole LGA.
Script	Latin Script.
Language use	Adult education (primarily in the Kolokuma dialect). Used as L2 by Biseni, Epie, Okodia Taught in primary schools Radio programs TV Dictionary and Grammar Bible portions: 1912- 1924

Izon is the dominant Ijaw language spoken by a majority of the Ijaw people in Nigeria. There are very many dialects of which Kolokuma is the language of education.

There is not much information available about the Izon language or the Ijaw people apart from the fact that they originated from the Niger-Delta in Nigeria. In fact the current president of Nigeria, Goodluck Johnathan is an Ijaw.

The map below illustrates the position of the speakers of Ijaw in Nigeria. As you can see they haven't spread far from the Niger-Delta.



Ibibio

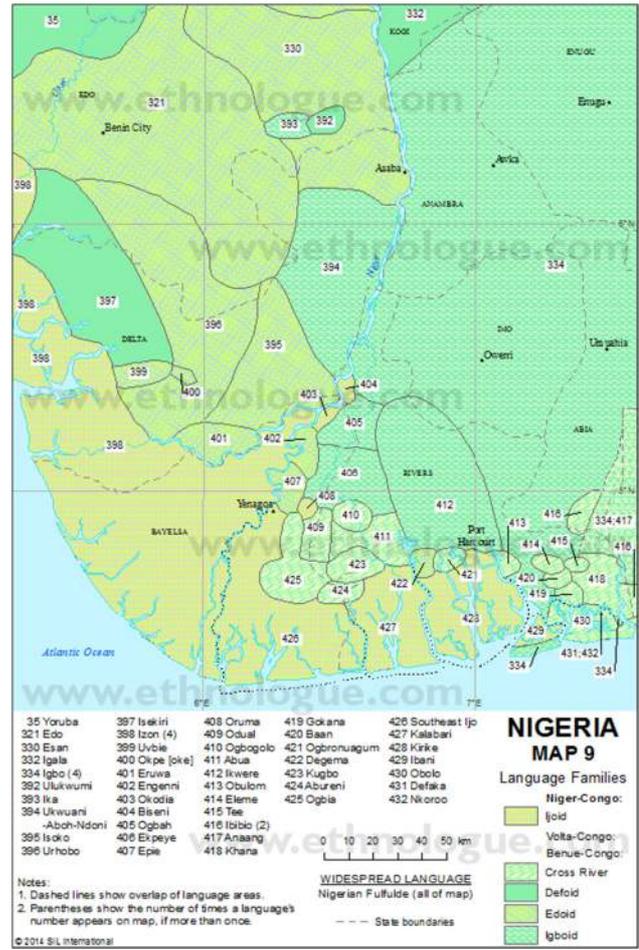
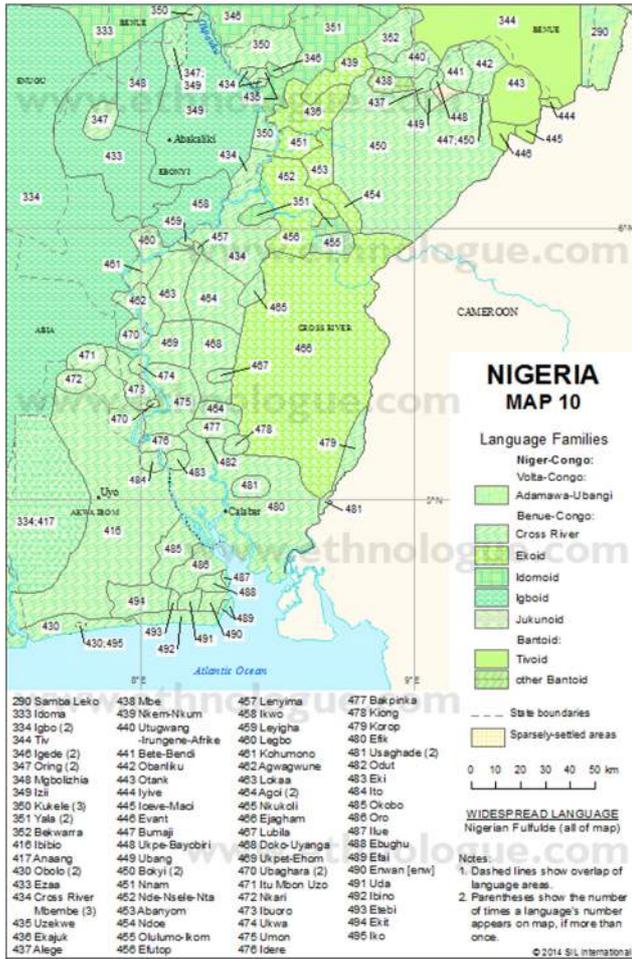
ISO code	ISO 639-3 : ibb
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Cross River, Delta Cross, Lower Cross, Obolo, Efik
Dialects	Central Ibibio, Enyong, Itak, Nsit. Several dialects.
Estimated no. of speakers	1,500,000. L2 users: 4,500,000
Where is it spoken	Akwa Ibom State, Itu, Uyo, Etinan, Ikot Abasi, Ikono, Ekpe-Atai, Uruan, Onna, Nsit-Ubium, and Mkpata Enin LGAs.
Script	Latin Script.
Language use	Used in university courses Taught in primary and secondary schools. Radio programs. TV. Dictionary. Grammar Decreasing in use of Efik as literary language Used as L2 by Ekit, Ibino, Iko, Khana, Obolo, Oro

Ibibio is the Language of Wider Communication of the Akwa Ibom state and the native language of the Ibibio people in southern Nigeria. It is the largest of the 60 Cross River languages (which are the languages that are situated around the Cross River in south-eastern in Nigeria).

Although the language may not have as many speakers as some of the others in this report, it is still classified by the ethnologue as a wide spread language because it is used as other Cross river languages as a lingua franca.

If you want to try and learn the numbers in Ibibio, then why not check out these flash cards: <http://quizlet.com/18912149/ibibio-vocabulary-flash-cards/>

The maps below show where the speakers of Ibibio are situated in southern Nigeria. As you can see they have not migrated far from the Cross River.



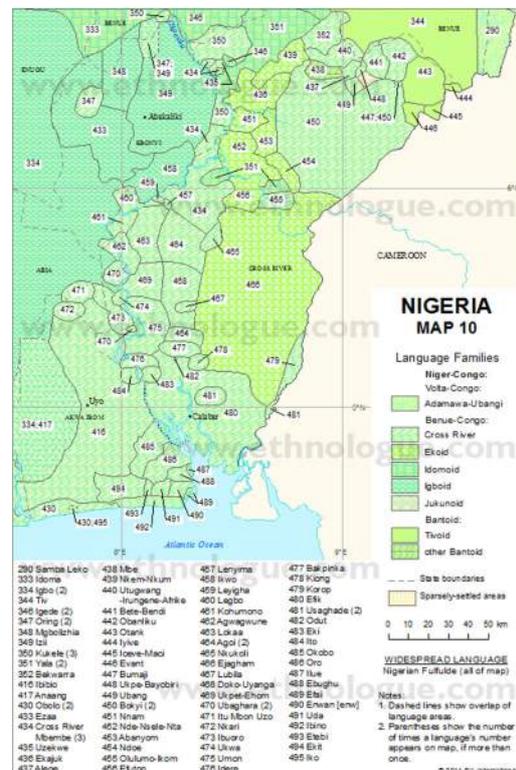
Anaang

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : anw
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Cross River, Delta Cross, Lower Cross, Obolo, Efik
Alternative names	Anang, Annang
Dialects	Abak, Ikot Ekpene, Ukanafun.
Estimated no. of speakers	1,400,000
Where is it spoken	Akwa Ibom State, Ikot Ekpene, Essien Udim, Abak, Ukanafun, and Oruk-Anam LGAs.
Language use	Taught in primary schools TV All ages use the language

Anaang is considered as a developing language and is used by all ages. Parts of the annang are considered partially intelligible to speakers of Efik, Ibibio, Oron and Ekit.

The Anaang speech pattern was never written down as it comes from a very oral based culture. As a result linguists have struggled to produce a standard written variety of the language although one has now been produced and written materials are slowly being created in Anaang.

This map shows the position of the Anaang speakers in southern Nigeria.



Edo

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : bin
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Edoid, North-Central, Edo-Esan-Ora
Alternative names	Addo, Benin, Bini, Oviedo, Ovioba
Estimated no. of speakers	1,000,000
Where is it spoken	Bendel State, Ovia, Oredo, and Orhionmwon LGAs.
Script	Latin
Language use	Adult education, history. Language Development Taught in primary and secondary schools. Radio programs. TV. Dictionary. Bible: 1996.

The home of the Edo language is in the Edo state in Nigeria and is the primary language of the Edo people of Igodomigodo. The Igodomigodo is now named the Edo state in Nigeria and the Ogiso (the King)'s era was the first dynasty of what is now known as the Benin Empire.

The Edo language follows the standard consonant pattern for an Edoid language. There are 13 oral consonants and 8 stops which have various sounds. Then there are seven vowels, all of which may be long or nasal and with three distinct tones.

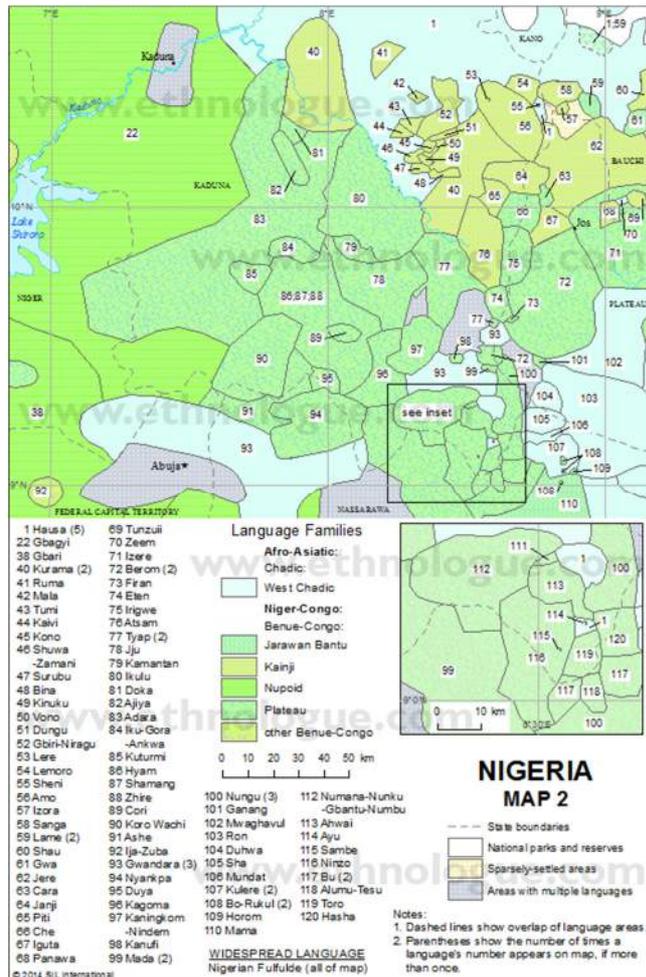
If you want to try learning a few words then how about trying this online lesson provided by Guosa language TV <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tmmWr0pHIE>



The map below shows the position of the Edo state in Nigeria and therefore the position of the majority of the Edo language speakers. As you can see, they haven't migrated away from this area. Other maps only show a very small percentage of speakers in other areas.

Berom

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : bom
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Plateau, Beromic
Alternative names	Afango, Berum, Birom, Gbang, Kibbo, Kibbun, Kibo, Kibyen, Lêm Berom, “Shosho” (pej.)
Dialects	Bachi, Du, Fan, Foron, Gashish, Gyel, Heikpang, Kuru, Rim, Riyom, Ropp, Vwang, Zawan. Three dialect groups: Eastern (Ropp, Fan, Heikpang, Foron, Du), Central (Gyel, Zawan, Kuru, Vwang), Western (Riyom, Rim, Bachi, Gashish).
Estimated no. of speakers	1,000,000
Where is it spoken	Plateau State, Barakin Ladi, Jos South, Riyom LGAs; Kaduna State, Jema’a LGA; Bauchi State.
Script	Latin script used since 1917
Language use	Literacy rate in L1: 10%–30%. Literacy rate in L2: 25%–50%. Dictionary. Grammar. Bible: 2009. Children and adults are less likely to speak it in the city. In the village all ages speak it consistently. All ages. Shifting to Hausa and used as L2 by Cen.



Berom (Biom) is locally considered very important because of its extensive numbers however recently a shift to Hausa has been noted. As such, sometimes it is analysed as a dialect of Hausa due to the similarities within the Niger-Congo family.

Within the Berom language, there are some dialects that are sometimes described as separate languages such as Nincut and Cen.

The tribe is considered mainly Christian as a religion but there are other groups within the tribe.

As you can see from the map to the left, the Berom language is only spoken in one specific area of Nigeria due to lack of migration and development. You can also see from the factfile that the literacy rate is very low which makes it hard for the language to develop.

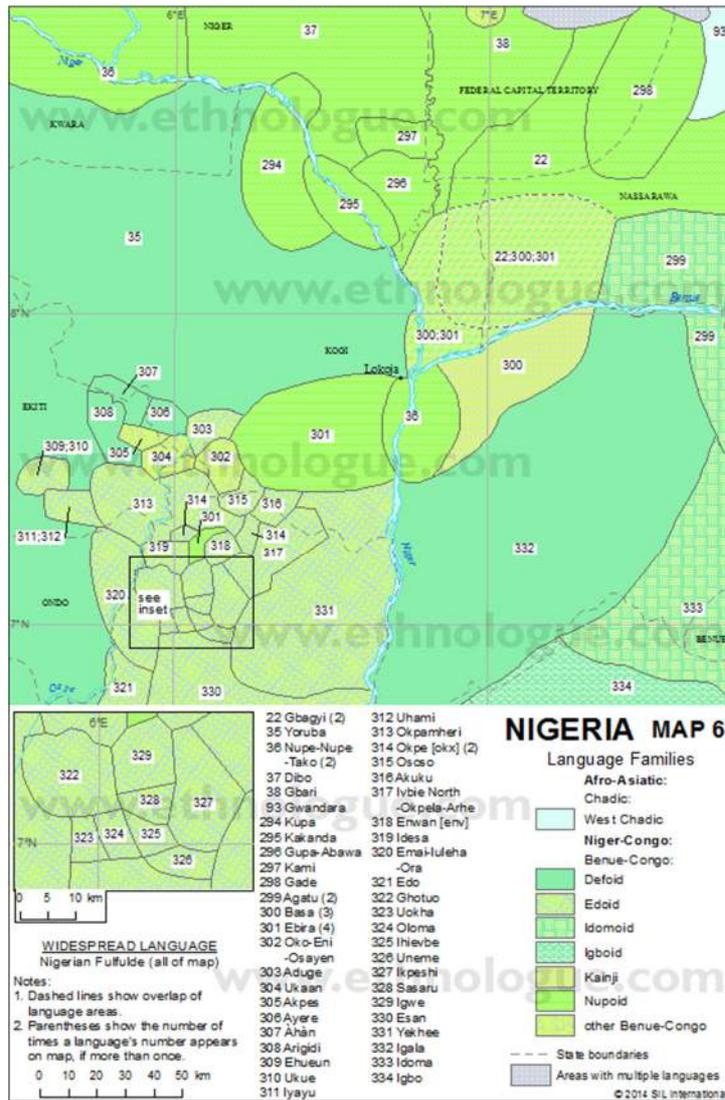
Ebira

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : igb
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Nupoid, Ebira-Gade
Alternative names	Egbira, Egbura, Ibara, Igbarra, Igbira, Igbirra, Katawa, Kotokori, Kwotto
Dialects	Igara (Etuno), Koto (Bira, Biri, Egu, Igu, Ika, Panda), Okene (Hima, Ihima). A dialect subgroup.
Estimated no. of speakers	1,000,000 (900,000 monolinguals)
Where is it spoken	Kwara State, Okene, Okehi, and Kogi LGAs; Nassarawa State, Nasarawa LGA; Edo State, Akoko-Edo LGA.
Script	Latin script used since 1976
Language use	Other language speakers use Ebira to communicate with Ebira people. Used for all areas of life: administration, commerce, oral and written use in religious services Taught in primary schools. Studied at the college of Education. They also use English and Hausa. Literacy rate in L1: 5%–10%. Literacy rate in L2: 25%. High literacy motivation. Radio programs. TV. Grammar. New Testament: 1981.

There is not a lot of information available regarding the Ebira language or the Ebira people apart from the fact that they are generally a Muslim people following the traditional religions who are based in the state of Kogi in Nigeria. That said, as you can see from the factfile above, they have spread slightly, which could be due to their desire to become more literate and expand.

Unfortunately, as is the way with many Nigerian languages, it is being attacked by the presence of Hausa, English and Yoruba, the three main Nigerian languages already alluded to in this report. It still remains one of the largest Nupoid languages which are spoken in the northern western areas of the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers.

The map on the following page shows its position in Nigeria, and clearly indicates the presence of the languages near the confluence of the two principal rivers.



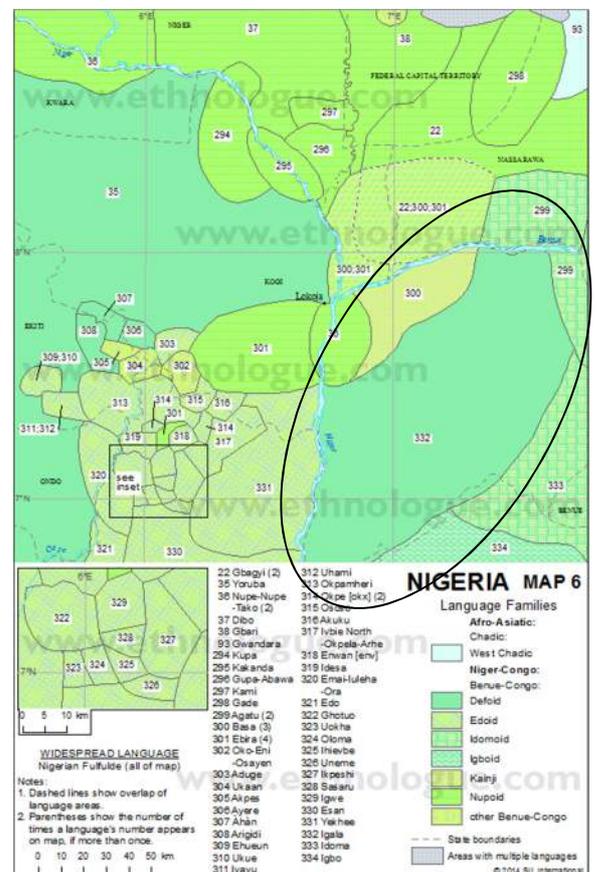
Igala

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : igl
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Defoid, Yoruboid, Igala
Alternative names	Igara
Dialects	Ankpa, Anyugba, Ebu, Ibaji, Idah, Ife, Ogugu.
Estimated no. of speakers	800,000
Where is it spoken	Kogi State, Ankpa, Idah, Dekina, and Bassa LGAs; Edo State, Oshimili LGA; Anambra State, Anambra LGA.
Script	Latin script
Language use	Agatu, Idoma, and Bassa people use Igala to attend Ika Bible School. Used in all areas of life Used as L2 by Basa Taught in Primary schools Bible 1968

Igala is primarily spoken by the Igala ethnic group in Nigeria and it contains various dialects as you can see from the table above. The Igala language as well as the Igala culture in general has had a big influence on other languages and cultures around the Niger and Benue rivers. It could be for this reason that the Ika Bible school is given in this language as opposed to any of the other ones and that it is still taught in primary schools.

The language has level 4 status which means it is used as an educational language.

The map to the right shows the proximity of the Ebiraland and Igala languages but highlights the larger space occupied by the Igala language even though there are fewer speakers.



Gbagyi

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : gbr
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Nupoid, Nupe-Gbagyi, Gbagyi- Gbari
Alternative names	East Gwari, Gbagye, Gwari, Gwari Matai, Ibagyi
Dialects	Diko, Kaduna, Karu, Kuta, Louome, Ngenge (Genge, Gyange, Gyengyen), Tawari, Vwezhi.
Estimated no. of speakers	700,000
Where is it spoken	Niger State, Rafi, Chanchaga, Shiroro, Suleija LGAs; Kaduna State, Kechia LGA; Nassarawa State, Keffi, Nasarawa LGAs; Federal Capital Territory.
Script	Latin script
Language use	New testament:1956

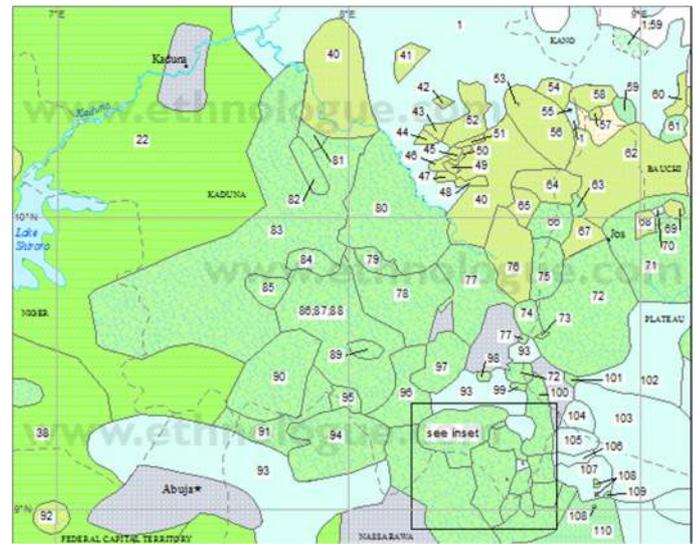
Once again, it is hard to find a great deal of information about the Gbagyi language because it has such a niche usage. Although it is considered a developing language, as of yet it has not developed greatly. The achievement of the New Testament is a reflection of the traditional Christian religion of the tribe and highlights the lack of other resources available for this tribe.

As a people, the Gbagyi people are known for their peaceful, hospitable and easy to read nature, so much so that Nigerians from the north have adapted the saying *muyi shi Gwari Gwari* which means the “let’s do it like the Gbagyi”. According to Wikipedia, Tanko Chigudu found that the Gbagyi people are a unique in that they have come to understand the universe a lot better. They try to give some meaning to life no matter what situation they find themselves in. This optimism is reflective of the Christian religion which has shaped their culture.

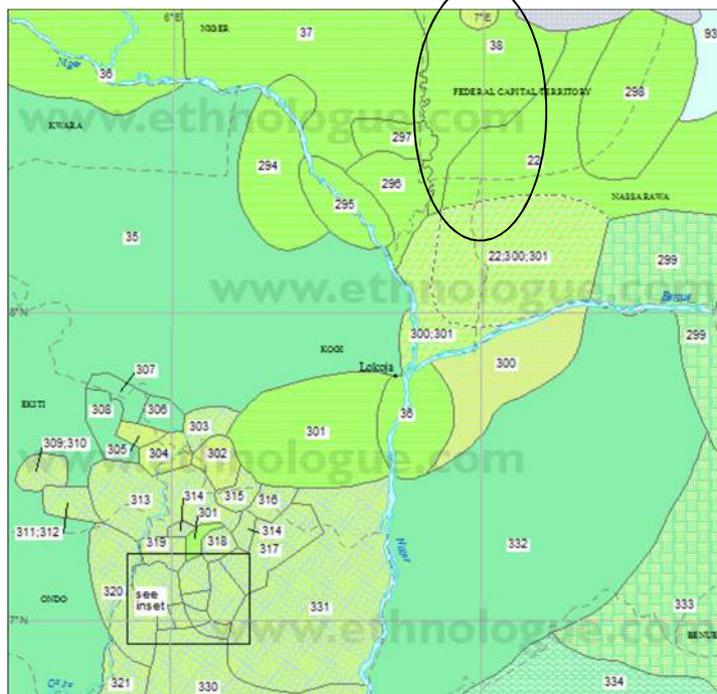
The following maps show the position of the Gbagyi people and thus the language spread across Nigeria.



To the left is map 1 which shows the northern western area of Nigeria. Below is map 2 which links to the same section in the lower right hand corner.



These maps below further show the position of this language in Nigeria. This is map 6 but links to the other two maps. In this map we can see the proximity to the Niger and Benue river confluence.



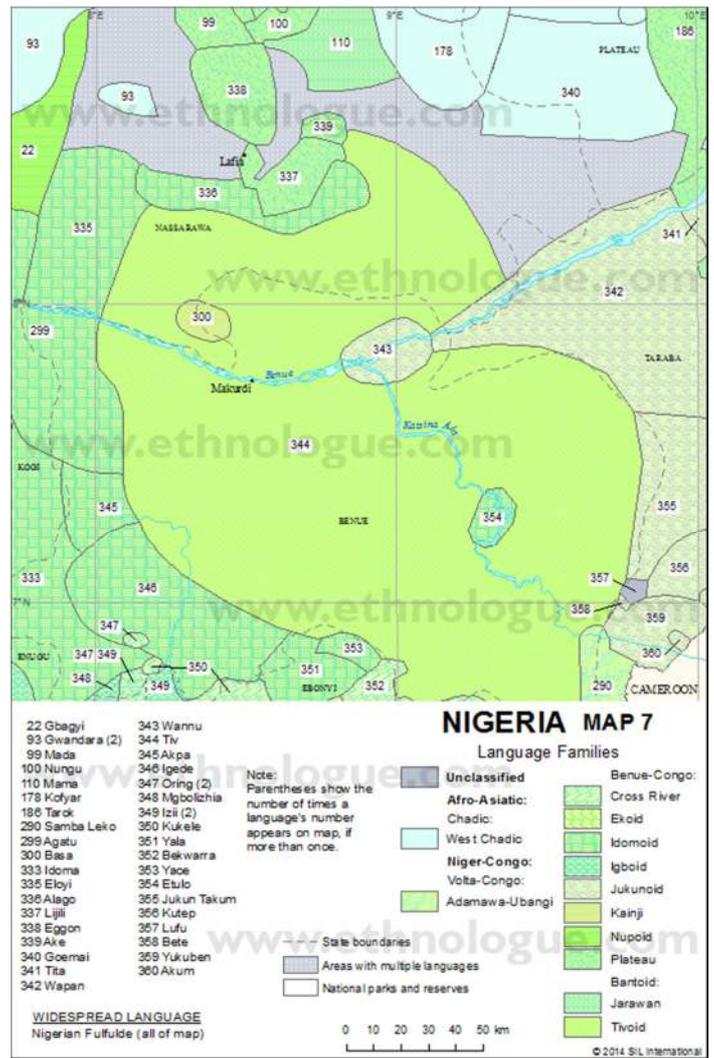
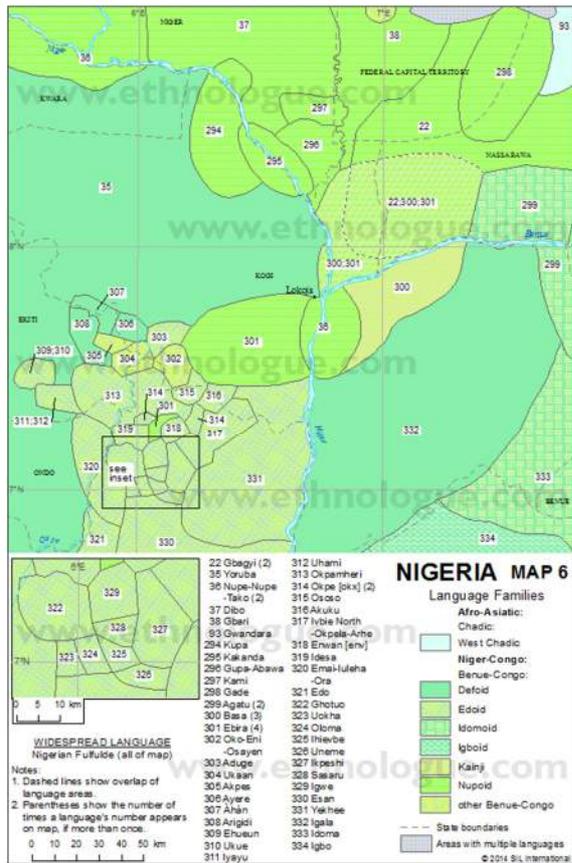
Idoma

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : idu
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Idomoid, Akweya, Etulo-Idoma, Idoma
Dialects	Idoma Central (Akpoto, Oturkpo), Idoma South (Igumale, Igwaale, Ijigbam), Idoma West, Okpogu. Dialect subgroup.
Estimated no. of speakers	600,000
Where is it spoken	Benue State, Otukpo and Okpokwu LGAs.
Script	Latin script (in use since 1979)
Language use	Adult education Taught in primary schools Radio Programs. TV. Grammar New Testament: 1970

Idoma is a developing language which is used primarily in the Benue state where it is the second official language. It currently has around 600,000 known speakers although one would like to hope that this figure will increase due to the education of the language in primary schools.

As a people, the Idoma are peaceful and loving although they are stereotypically known as warriors and hunters. Traditionally the Idoma culture is an oral culture where lessons and knowledge have been passed through the generations orally. They are very proud of their heritage and ancestors and will proudly recite many generations of their family.

The maps below show where the Idoma language is spoken in Nigeria.



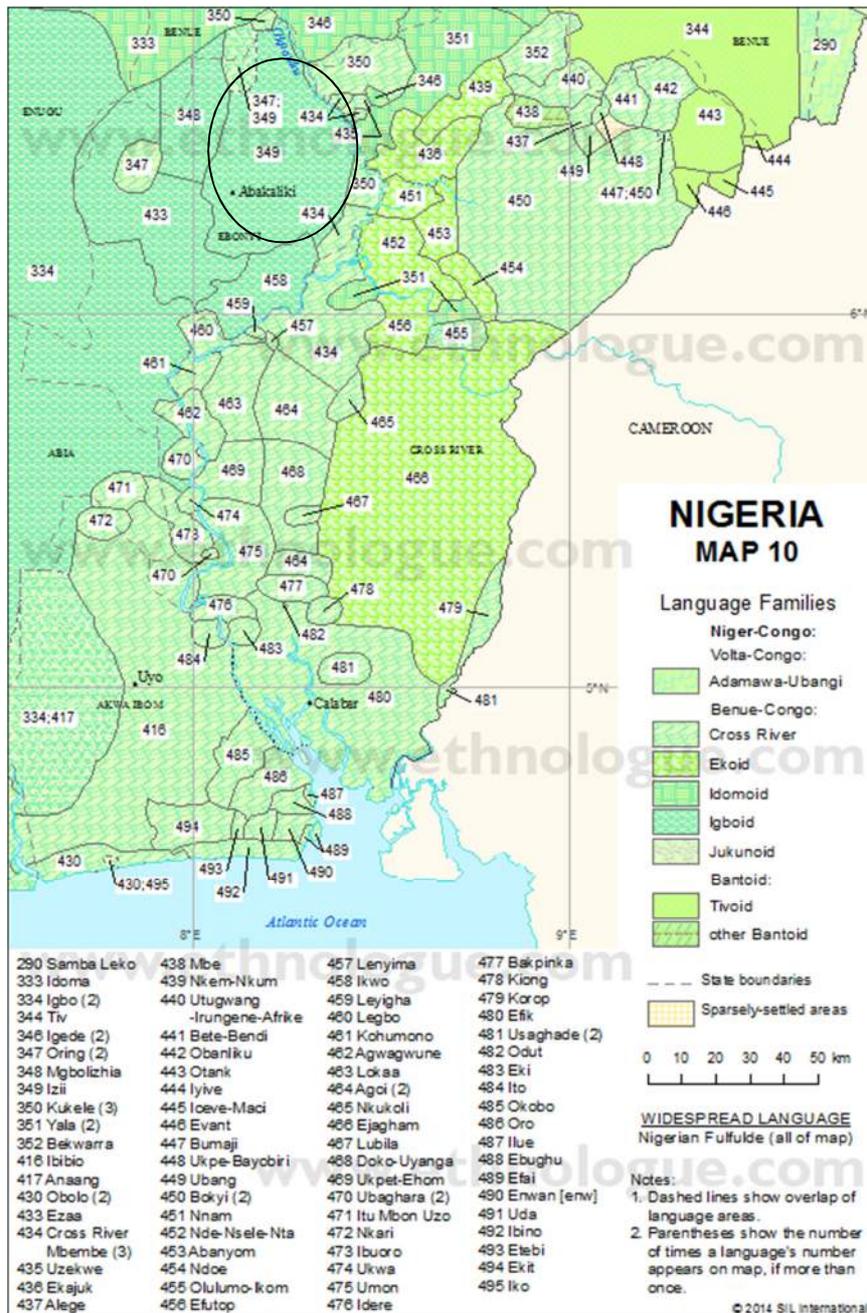
Izii

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : izz
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Igboid, Igbo
Dialects	None known
Estimated no. of speakers	540,000
Where is it spoken	Ebonyi State, Izzi, Abakaliki, and Ebonyi LGAs; Benue State, Ado LGA; Cross River State, Yala LGA.
Script	Latin script
Language use	Nnam use it as L2 Taught in primary schools Grammar Bible: 2002

As you can see from the information above, the Izzi language is less developed or less advanced in its developments. The translation of the Bible into Izii was only 12 years ago as opposed to the 40-50 years ago that we have seen in other languages.

Sometimes the Izzi language is even classified as a dialect of the Igbo language (mentioned above) causing confusion about its language status. It is very similar to two other dialects; Ezaa and Ikwo. It has been discovered that these dialects/ languages share about 95% of their vocabulary.

The map on the following page also highlights the small spread of the Izzi language in just a small area of the Ebonyi state.



Isekiri

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : its
Alternative names	Chekiri, Irhobo, Iselema-Otu, Ishekiri, Itsekiri, Iwere, Jekri, Selemo, Shekiri, Warr
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Idomoid, Defoid, Yoruboid, Ederki ri
Dialects	None known, potentially similar to Yoruba
Estimated no. of speakers	510,000
Where is it spoken	Delta State, Warri, Bomadi, and Ethiope LGAs.
Script	Latin script (in use since 1979)
Language use	Taught in primary schools Grammar New Testament: 1985

Isekiri is a developing language with 510, 000 speakers but struggling to develop due to the presence of the Yoruba language.

The isekiri language is also commonly referred to as the Itsekiri language due to the common name of the Itsekiri branch out of the Yoruboid language family.

Isekiri is most closely related to Yoruba and Igala and mixes elements of both languages. In addition it has been influenced by English, Portuguese and by Edo (as mentioned earlier in this report). Isekiri also borrows and is beginning to accept loan words from the neighbouring languages of Ijo and Urhobo.

The map below show its position in Nigeria.



Isoko

ISO code	ISO 639-3 : iso
Language family	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Edoid, South-western,
Dialects	Aviara, Elu, Emede, Enhwe, Ibiede, Imiv, Irri (Iri), Itebiege, Iwire (Igbide), Iyede, Iyede-Ami, Iyowo, Ofagbe, Ole (Oleh), Olomoro, Owe (Owhe), Oyede, Ozoro, Ume, Unogboko, Uti, Uzere.
Estimated no. of speakers	423,000
Where is it spoken	Delta State, Isoko and Ndokwa LGAs.
Script	Latin script.
Language use	Used as L2 by Eruwa Taught in primary schools Grammar Bible: 1977

Isoko is classified as a developing language although it only has 423,000 speakers. It is also known by the names of “Sobo” and “Igabo” but these are offensive names. According to the ethnologue, “Biotu”, which means interior people, is the Izon name for the Isoko and is not meant offensively by the Izon; however, the Isoko people do not like it.

According to Archangeli & Pulleyblank, in their book, *Grounded phonology* written in 1994, there are nine vowels in Isoko in 2 separate varieties: /i e a o u/ and /ɪ ɛ a ɔ ʊ/.

Isoko is also the name of a region of Delta State in southern Nigeria, which is where the Isoko people primarily live. Due to this location, the Isoko language is very similar to the Urhobo language because of their close proximity. See the map below for this exact location.



Glossary

Creole: A Pidgin language which has become a stable official language, with native speakers.

ISO 639 code: An ISO 639 code is published by the International Organization for Standardization and defines codes for the languages spoken in order to categorize them on a regional basis and to aid analysis for linguistics. Each language is assigned a 2-letter (639-1) and a 3 letter (639-2 and 639-3), lowercase abbreviation.

L1 Speaker : A L1 speaker is someone who has the language as their first language, i.e their primary language for communication, their mother tongue and their native language.

Lingua franca: A lingua franca is language officially used to communicate between populations or on a smaller level, simple people who don't share the same native language.

Mutual intelligibility: When two speakers of different languages can understand one another due to the fact that their languages have similar characteristics or grammar.

Pidgin: An unstructured simplified language which is created from a language to allow communication between different cultural groups.

Further reading

Ethnic Groups Worldwide: A Ready Reference Handbook By David Levinso

Igbo phrasebook: http://wikitravel.org/en/Igbo_phrasebook

The identity, survival, and promotion of minority languages in Nigeria by EFUROSIBINA ADEGBIJA

Multilingualism: A Nigerian Case Study By Efurosibina E. Adegbij

Mutual intelligibility

<http://grammar.about.com/od/mo/g/Mutual-Intelligibility.htm>

Multilingualism, minority languages and language policy in Nigeria by Linguistic Association of Nigeria

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe. (A book describing the influences of an Igbo community from Christian missionaries and British colonisation.)

US army: Why Nigeria is so important to the US; Minabere Ibelema

<http://www.punchng.com/columnists/punchwise/us-army-why-nigeria-is-so-important-to-the-us/>

Why Fulfulde is dying in Nigeria

<http://gainaako.wordpress.com/2013/01/26/why-fulfulde-is-dying-in-nigeria/>

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Nigeria World bank <http://data.worldbank.org/country/nigeria>

Nigeria: Background to Nationalism James S Coleman

An atlas of Nigerian languages: Roger Blench Kay Williamson Educational Foundation

<http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Africa/Nigeria/Atlas%20of%20Nigerian%20Languages-%20ed%20III.pdf>

<http://www.ethnologue.com/country/NG/languages>

http://www.nigeriandictionary.com/all_language.php

Individual languages information

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigerian_Pidgin

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hausa_language

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igbo_language

<http://www.igboguide.org/HT-igbogrammar.htm>

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/311571/Kanuri>

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/707561/Ibibio-language>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anaang_people#Written_Language

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/707545/Ebira-language>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gbagyi_people

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idoma_people

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Izi_language

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isoko_language

Afro-asiatic languages

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afroasiatic_language

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/8488/Afro-Asiatic-languages>

Niger Congo Languages

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/414793/Niger-Congo-languages>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger%E2%80%93Congo_languages

Nilo-Saharan languages

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nilo-Saharan_languages

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/415424/Nilo-Saharan-languages>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_Nigeria