

Òkó an Endangered Language

by Pat Dowling and Dian Hulsebosch

Òkó Origins

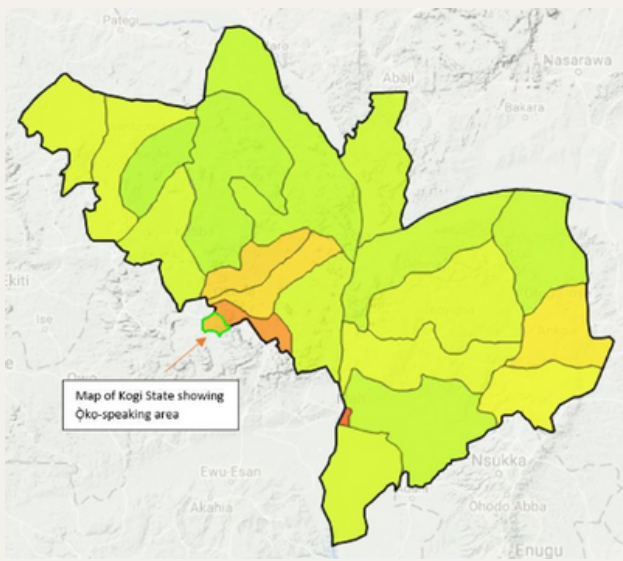
A language or dialect cluster of the Ogori and Magongo people in the state of Kogi, Nigeria. A part of the Kwa language family, and of village origins.

1. body	iwú
2. head	epan[i]
3. hair	epen[ii]
4. face	áyén
5. eye	áyén
6. ear	oton
7. nose	ómódórè
8. mouth	ówó
9. teeth	irùn
10. tongue	elárè

Language Facts

- 1963 Census - 10,000 speakers
- 2006 Census - 49,807 speakers
- 2016 Census - 53,700 speakers
- Spoken in mainly village settings
- Tonal language (low, medium, neutral)
- Ogori and Magongo dialect varieties exist
- Òkó has a limited orthography

Map of Òkó Speakers



Nuances

- Ogori (referred to by the locals as Ọ̀kọ́)
- Magongo (referred to by the indigenes as Osayin).
- Two varieties have slight differences in accents.
- Òkó officially exists in spoken form.

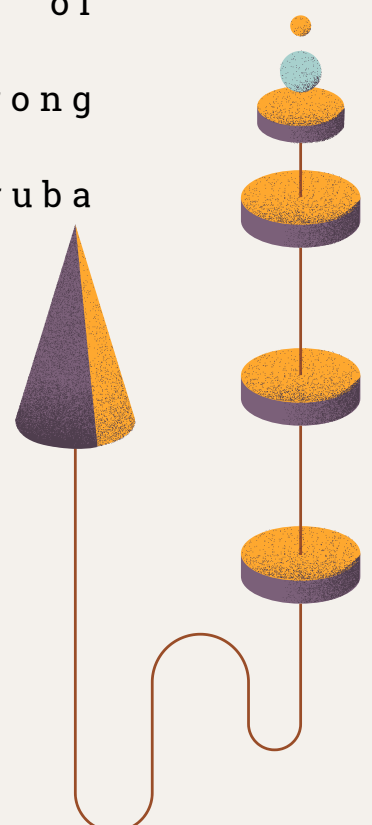
Villagers History

- The speakers of Òkó have a 700-year history, thought to be a product of Yoruba peoples that migrated.
- Ogori and Magongo are strong indigenous cultures.
- Bi-lingual aspects with many Yoruba speakers.

Letters of Òkó Alphabet

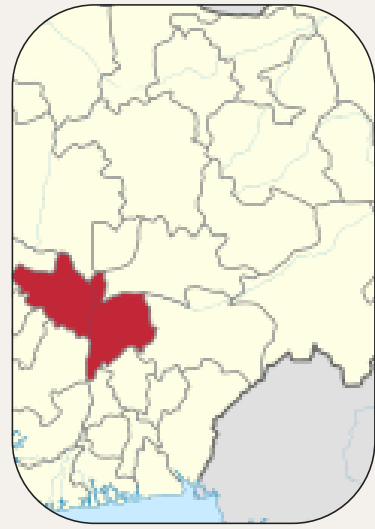
Aa Bb Dd Ee Eẹ Ff Gg GBgb Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm

Nn Oo Oọ KPkp Pp Rr Ss Cc Tt Uu Vv Ww Yy.



Kogi State Neighbours

- Surrounded by 22 linguistic groups including over a dozen Okpameri dialects.
- Ebira is a dominant language surrounding the villages, through intermarriage.



Threats

- Functionally irrelevant language, pushed out by other bigger indigenous languages in Nigeria.
- Few characteristics are shared between Òkó and surrounding languages.
- Holds low emotional, intellectual and functional investment in small languages.



GIDS

Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale

Okó has two levels.

1. Level 8: in urban regions, it is expected to disappear.
2. Level 6: continued use of the language in the familial and social spheres.

Generations

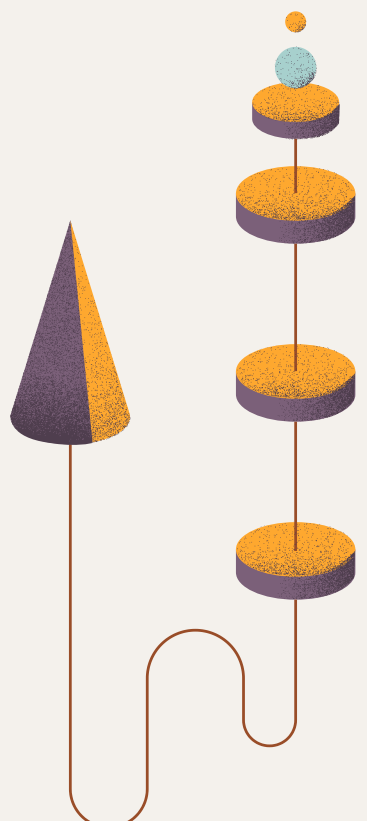
Children reared outside the community often learn only Yoruba and English.

Youth migrating to the bigger locations have no use of Òkó

Higher level education taught in English.

Revival Strategies

- Cultural
- Political
- Linguistic



Cultural

Oko festivals are gaining attention and celebrating language and culture (Ovia festival) This is very effective in RLS but hard to involve those that lost touch with oko culture. Ceremonies surrounding deaths and births are good ways to share cultural practices, songs, folktales, and games.

Political

In the Ogori community, the politics behind the promotion of the Ogori language is played both within the community itself, to convert the uninitiated, and outside it. It also occurs at individual, local, family regional and national levels. Parents encourage speaking by children, systems that are in place regional/national need to be more proactive and overcome internal rivalry.

Linguistic

Language planning, as a systematic programme of development has remained largely peripheral to the mainstream of national planning where language planning can actually help saving threatened language. community takes accountability through corpus planning and encouragement of linguistic studies, younger generations now receiving Oko names again and people renaming themselves in oko tradition

Reflection Perspective

One of the main challenges endangered languages face is when they are not spoken anymore. Especially a language like Oko that is dependent on its speakers for sharing, rather than official orthography. The locality of a language can be its strength but also its weakness. A community that speaks the language can reinforce the speaking of it but is at risk of dying out due to size. The growing migration to urban centres will be a growing danger to already endangered languages as this promotes the loss of language to assimilate into a new city culture. It will be dependent on the efforts of the speakers of Oko what will happen to the language and whether it will survive. It seems that strategies are taken to promote the language, but whether this survives urbanisation remains to be seen.

Sources:

<http://okolanguage.com/>

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