Ibibio

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Ibibio is a Lower Cross (Delta Cross, Cross River, New Benue-Congo, Niger-Congo) language spoken mainly in Akwa Ibom State and in parts of Cross River State, both located in the southeastern part of Nigeria. The number of speakers is estimated at about four million (Essien 1991). Previous work on Ibibio phonetics includes Connell (1992, 1994, 1995) and Urua (1996/97, 2000, 2002). The variety presented here is spoken in Uruan area and Uyo, the capital city of Akwa Ibom State and the recording is that of the author, a female university teacher from Uruan.

The Ibibio language has variants, which appear to be drawn along clan boundaries. Ibibio speakers can easily identify other Ibibio speakers from other clans based on their speech, e.g. Ibiono, Uruan, Uyo, Iman, Ikot Abasi/Mkpat Enin, Ikono, etc. Such dialectal variation is pronounced in the vocalic and tonal domains. For instance, [i] and [ɪ] contrast in Ibiono (Essien 1990) but not in Iman, Uruan or Uyo dialects. A similar situation is true of tones. We provide the following examples from some Ibibio dialects:

Uyo	Ibiono	Iman	Ikono	Gloss
sín	sín	sín	sín	'insert'
sóón	sín	sóón	sóón	'mock'
áfàŋ	áfàŋ	áfàŋ	áfàŋ	'type of edible vegetable'
ébót	ébót	ébót	íbót	'goat'

Cross-speaker and dialectal variation is also widely attested, depending on speech tempo, especially with vowels in interconsonantal position, e.g. **kòp** ∼ **kə̀p** 'hear'.

Consonants

The Ibibio consonant system shows variation depending on the position of the consonant in the syllable or foot. Word-initial position is generally the position of contrast for Ibibio oral (stop) consonants. Nasal consonants, on the other hand, show contrast in all positions. Consonants that occur in medial position are weakened especially when they occur intervocalically. In pre-pausal position the contrast between voiceless and voiced plosives is neutralised. What we find are unreleased stops, indeterminate as to voicing status. The result is that different researchers have proposed different phonemic consonants for Ibibio. In the chart presented here, we provide for thirteen phonemic consonants where there are clear cases of contrast. Apart from the dental and alveolar plosives, /t̪/ and /d/, which contrast, obstruents in Ibibio are generally voiceless. The bilabial plosives, [p] and /b/, occur in complementary distribution

and do not contrast. Nasal consonants also occur as homorganic syllabic prefixes, e.g. **ŋ̀-kà** 'group'; **ǹ-nèmé** 'conversation'.

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labial-Velar
Plosive	(p) b	t̪	ɗ		k	k͡p
Nasal	m		n	ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative	f		s			
Approximant				j		w

bá	'be'	ɲàm	'sell'
k͡pá	'die'	ŋ͡wèn	'be dark'
kàá	'go'	sát	'be dry'
tá	'chew'	fát	'embrace'
dá	'stand'	jét	'wash'
má	'like'	wéŋ	'console'
nɔ̀	'give'		

Another interesting feature of the Ibibio consonant system is that single nasal consonants contrast with the geminate ones in intervocalic position:

sáná	'be clean'
sànná	'move a bit further'
jòmó	'be noisy'
jòmmó	'boo at'

1. In stem initial position, /ŋ/ is realised as [ŋ͡w] and [ŋ] elsewhere.
2. Consonant clusters are rare; in prevocalic position Cɾ and CG are attested, where ɾ is an alveolar tap (from intervocalic weakening of the dental and alveolar plosives) and G is a palatal or labial-velar glide. Examples of the clusters include [**frĕ**] 'forget', [**sják**] 'split', [**kwɔ́**] 'sing'.
3. Ibibio has a dental [t̪] rather than an alveolar although [d] is alveolar. Plosives are weakened in intervocalic position as follows: [p, b] →[β]; t, d → [ɾ]; k → [ʀ] ~ [ɰ] (where [ʀ] is used as the voiced uvular tap and [ɰ] the voiced velar approximant).

Vowels

There are seven contrastive vowels, /i, e, a, ɔ, ʌ, o, u/, and three phonetic variants, [ɪ, ə, ʉ] (Urua 2000). These variants, which have a restricted distribution in C-C position, are in complementary distribution with /i, o, u/, respectively, although other dialects (e.g. Ibiono) attest contrast (Essien 1990).

ɗí	'come'
dá	'stand'
dɔ́	'marry'
dù	'be alive'
sé	'look'
dó	'there'
dʌ́k	'enter'
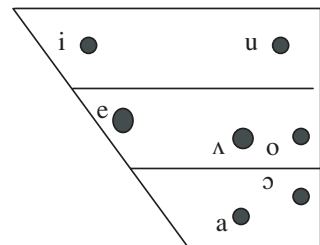
Ibibio vowels partake in many interesting morphophonemic processes, some of which include length, harmony, deletion and assimilation. The harmony system is based on height and back features.

Length contrast

Six of the seven vowels have a length contrast for lexical and morphological functions.

bàk	'be early'		dóm	'bite'
bàak	'be afraid of'		dóom	'bite many things/times'
nèm	'be delicious'		fʌ́k	'cover'
nèem	'crack palm kernel'		fúuk	'cover many things/times'
bɔ́p	'tie'		kít	'see'
bɔ́ɔp	'tie many things/times'		kíit	'see many things/times'

The difference between the vowels in fʌ́k 'cover' and fúuk 'cover many things/times' is dialectal in the singular form – some Ibibio dialects have fúk while some have fʌ́k. The speaker's variant is fʌ́k.

   Interestingly, Ibibio makes a distinction between outright vowel deletion where both the vocalic melody and the vocalic slot or position are lost for one vowel, and vowel assimilation where one of the vowels is modified but both vocalic positions are retained. Examples include:

/CVVCVC/	→	[CVCVC]	
/ké íkáŋ/	→	[kíkáŋ]	'in (the) fire'
/ké úbɔ́k/	→	[kúbɔ́k]	'in (the) hand'
/CVVCVC/	→	[CVVCVC]	
/ké ìŋwáŋ/	→	[kîiŋwáŋ]	'in (the) farm'
/ké ùtáŋ/	→	[kúùtáŋ]	'on (the) rafter'

Tone

Ibibio is a register terraced level tone language with two level tones (H)igh and (L)ow. Combinations of the level tones from tone spreading and segment deletion result in the formation of two types of contour tones, namely, High-Low and Low-High, which are not contrastive with each other. Ibibio also has a downstepped feature, which affects High tones, and manifests both automatic and non-automatic downstep. Tonal variation and alternation are common in Ibibio, depending on the dialect and whether or not one is dealing with items in isolation or in connected speech, as can be observed in the transcribed text below; for instance, items with an LH pattern may be realised as LH or H⁺H, depending on the context. Variation between final HL contour tones in nouns and Low tones is dialectally determined, e.g. **[úfɔ̂k]** ∼ **[úfɔ̀k]** 'house'. Tone performs both lexical and grammatical functions in the language.

Lexical contrast

dá	'stand'		jómmó	'be pregnant'
dà	'mate, friend'		jòmmó	'boo at'
kɔ́p	'scoop food'		ḿbɔ́k	'wrestling (N.)'
kɔ̀p	'lock'		ḿ⁺bɔ́k	'please'
kéɾé	'think'		ɔ́bɔ́ŋ	'mosquito'
kèɾé	'be named'		ɔ́bɔ̀ŋ	'cane'
			ɔ́⁺bɔ́ɔ́ŋ	'chief'

Grammatical contrast
Progressive aspect

àákòn á **dêp** ɔ̀fɔ̀ŋ.	'Akon **is buying** (a) dress.'
àákòn á **wêt** ŋ̀wèt.	'Akon **is writing** (a) book/letter.'

Completive aspect

àákòn á ꜜ**á dép** ɔ̀fɔ̀ŋ.	'Akon **has bought** (a) dress.'
àákòn á ꜜ**á wêt** ŋ̀wèt.	'Akon **has written** (a) book/letter.'

Basic tones on the verbs used to illustrate grammatical tone in Ibibio are H and L, thus: **dép** 'buy' and **wèt** 'write'.

Verbs have two tone classes H and L. Disyllabic verbs have predictable high tone on the final syllable in isolation and in simple declarative sentences. Tone patterns in nouns are more variable. High (´), Low (`) and the downstep feature (↓) are marked. Where long vowels have identical tones, only the first vowel is marked with a tone.

Transcription of recorded passage

áf̞ɨm édèré jù útɨ́n éké꜓níe ḿ̞fáaŋé báŋá ǹdikôβ ùkó ŋ̀kán, ké ɪ̀nɪ̀ àkàísàŋ áꜜmáaké ꜜfúuʀ ídém ɔ́mɔ̀ ké èfɔ̀ŋ úfʌʀɔ̀twèβ ásáŋàkè dísɪ̃m. ɔ̀mmɔ̂ éꜜmá éꜜɲímmé tè ké ǹdɨdɪ̃̂itô ɪ̃kân ɪ̃nâm nɔ̀ ɔ̀kàísàŋ ásíŋŋè fɔ̀ŋ úfʌʀɔ̀ ké èɲé dò ké dɪ̃̂idât ǹtè ɲé kôβ ùkó ókân àɲékò. áf̞ɨm édèré ꜜmáaf̞ɨmé etáá kpɔ̀sɔ̀ŋ ɔ́kpɔ́sɔ́ŋ kéèfʀ úkèmé mɔ̀, ódò dáŋá ǹte ɲé kâβ ánénèkké f̞ɨmè k pà ǹtrô ŋ̃́ꜜkoˊké èkàísàŋ ánénèkké túuʀ ɔ̀fɔ̀ŋ úfʌʀɔ̀ ɔ́ꜜfʌ́ʀ ídém ɔ́mɔ̀. ké ùt̞ɨré f̞ɨm édèré ꜜmáaꜜsíŋŋ ídém éfèp. útɨ́n áꜜmáadɨsákká ɔ́nɔ̀ úfjób, ǹdɨen ɪ̀nɪ̀kèeʀ ɪ̀nɪ̀kèeʀ àkàísàŋ áꜜmáasíŋŋé ɔ̀fɔ̀ŋ úfʌʀɔ̀ ɔ́mɔ̀. ké èkpàtrĕ f̞ɨm édèré ꜜmáadɨɲímmé étè ké tú ḿ̞ꜜmɔ́ ḿ̞bà kútɨn ó kôβ ùkó ókân.

Orthographic version of recorded passage
Key to symbols:

ị = [ɪ]; ọ = [ɔ]

Áf̞ịm Édèré yè Útị́n éké꜓níe ḿ̞fáañá àndíkôp ùkó ñkán, ké ɪ̀nɪ̀ àkàísàñ áàmáké꜓fúuk ídém ọ́mọ̀ ké ọ̀fọ̀ñ úfʌhọ̀átùep ásáñàkè ádísɪ̃m. Ọ̀mmô éꜜmáé꜓nyị́mmé étè ké àndídɪ̃̂itô ɪ̃kân ɪ̃nâm nọ̀ àkàísàñ ásị́ññè ọ̀fọ̀ñ úfʌhọ̀ ké ènyé ódò ké édɪ̃̂idât ǹtè ènyé ókôp ùkó ákân ànyékò. Áf̞ịm Édèré áꜜmáaf̞ịmé àtáa ọ́kpọ̀sọ̀ñ-ọ́kpọ́sọ́ñ ké àf̞ịt úkèmé ọ́mọ̀, ódò dáñá ǹtè ènyé ákâp ánénèkké áf̞ịmè kpà ǹtrô ñ̃́ꜜkó ké àkàísàñ ánénèkké átúut ọ̀fọ̀ñ úfʌhọ̀ ọ́fʌ́k ídém ọ́mọ̀; ké ùt̞ịt Áf̞ịm Édèré áꜜmá á꜓sị́ññé ídém áfèp. Útị́n áꜜmáadɨsákká ọ́nọ̀ úfịop, ǹdɨen ɪ̀nɪ̀kèed-ɪ̀nɪ̀kèed àkàísàñ áꜜmáásị́ññé ọ̀fọ̀ñ úfʌhọ̀ ọ́mọ̀. Ké àkpàtrĕ Áf̞ịm Édèré áꜜmáadɨnyị́mmé étè ké ótú ḿ̞ꜜmọ́ ḿ̞bà ké Útị́n ókôp ùkó ákân.

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