



# **A Reference Grammar of Oko: A West-Benue Congo Language of North-Central Nigeria**

*Joseph Dele Atoyebi*

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The present study represents the first complete grammatical description of Oko, a language belonging to the Western Benue Congo language family of the Niger Congo phylum. It is assumed that Oko is distantly related to languages like Yoruba, Edo, Idoma and Ebira. The speakers of this language live in the communities of Ogori and Magongo in the Kogi state of North Central Nigeria. According to the most recent census of 2005, the total number of speakers in both communities is 39,252. Oko has two dialects: Oko, spoken in Ogori, and Osanyen, spoken in Mogongo. The differences between the two dialects are limited to minor phonological variations. The language examples are based on the Oko dialect, because it has much more speakers than Osanyen as well as a higher status. A third dialect, Eni, has been assumed by earlier studies, but cannot be approved regarding strictly linguistic viewpoints. The data for this grammatical description have been, on the one hand, taken from existing electronic databases and, on the other hand, collected from several research trips which amount to about seven months made by the author in both communities, Ogori and Magongo. There is no orthography for Oko available so far. Thus, one of the tasks of the present grammatical description was to propose a practicable orthography which applies to linguistic criteria as well as to the account of the native speakers. It is used - except in chapters 2 and 3 - in all examples of the study. The grammatical description is divided into four parts which deal with different aspects of the structure of Oko: phonology, morphology, the syntax of the phrases and the complex syntax. The appendix lists several original texts with interlinear translations and their transformations into English.

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