

## **Koring: Audio-Visual Documentation of Folktales**

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### **Language context**

Koring is a seriously endangered language of 224,000 speakers in Nigeria. Due to dominant language groups who have moved into Koring speaking communities this language is under greater stress. It is the language of the Oring people who live in parts of Ebonyi state. Ebonyi state is in the southeastern part of Nigeria where the Igbo are the dominant ethnic group. Igbo is the dominant language spoken in the core Igbo states of Nigeria - Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Koring-speaking communities are located at Okpoto, Ntezi and some parts of Nkalagu in Ishielu LGA, Effium in Ohaukwu LGA, and Amuuda in Ezza LGA of Ebonyi state. Talbot (1969:226), in tracing the origin of the Oring, speculated that the Oring were the first to settle in the area where they now cohabit with the Igbo in southeastern Nigeria. Talbot went further to posit that the Igbo joined the Oring later in a number greater than the Oring. The Igbo, in an attempt to dominate the Oring, instigated constant fights. Isichei (1976:89) observes that communities that were previously Koring-speaking were assimilated by the war-like Ezza Igbo after defeating them. Some of the Oring were compelled to move away from the Igbo and found new settlements within non-Igbo ethnic groups. Therefore, the presence of the Oring is patchy in some other parts of Nigeria outside the Igbo-speaking areas namely: Utonkon and Offa in Benue state and Okpoma in Cross-River state.

Koring belongs to the Upper-Cross group of the Delta-Cross sub-branch of the Cross River language family of the East Benue-Congo (Williamson and Blench, 2000). The Okpoto dialect is chosen for the present analysis because it is the variety spoken by my informants. I have established a good degree of familiarity with the Okpoto people due to my several fieldtrips to the community. The Oring people claim to be Christians. The bible, hymn book and other Christian materials are only in Igbo. Therefore, the Oring believe that for one to be a Christian, one must be an Igbo and speak the Igbo language. Igbo not only dominates Koring but assimilates it. Koring is not used by mass media. It is not used as a medium of instruction in schools. Igbo, the dominant language and the Language of the Immediate Community (LIC), is used in all formal discourse. Koring is used in only informal discourse. There are recent attempts to reduce Koring to writing, though there has not been an accepted orthography of the language.

### **Documentation methods**

I employed participant observation. I observed mothers telling stories to their children and jotted down overheard utterances. There were video and audio recordings of such

performances as samples of natural communicative events. This will result in the production of video tapes and audio CDs which will be given to members of the speech community.

I recorded a few minutes of texts in 24-bit stereo WAV files at a 44.1 kHz sampling rate with accompanying MPEG2 video files. These recordings were uploaded to my computer and stored in a folder dedicated to this project. A part of the recordings was transcribed using IPA symbols. There was a bilingual translation from Koring into English using the orthographies of both languages. I produced metadata in the form of images to be submitted to GBS.

Equipment such as the under listed were used:

Video camera - for video recording of events

Tripod - to stabilize movement of the video camera

Headphone - for monitoring sounds while recording and transcribing

Audio recorder - for audio recording of events and language consultants

SD cards 8GB - for storing data for use on portable or computing devices

USB SD card reader

AA batteries - to provide additional power

Pelicans - for preserving the items of equipment in order to avoid damage

Computer (Laptop) - for storing, analysis, transcription, processing and archiving of data

Dead cat - to reduce wind noise when recording in windy conditions

### **Research outcome**

The main character observed in Koring folktales is the 'Tortoise'. Tortoise is seen as a trickster in Koring culture because of its tricks, mischief and deceit. To the Oring people, the tortoise is a cunning animal unlike how it is perceived in some other cultures like the Chinese and Japanese cultures.

### **Future research**

A good number of research papers will emanate from this research. One of them is a synchronic description of the phonology of the Koring language. This includes a phonetic description of the tone system which reveals tonal alternation in Koring while outlining the various grammatical functions of tone in the language. These will contribute to linguistic scholarship. New areas of inquiry that this documentation of Koring folktales will reveal include but are not limited to the syntax of folktales, tonal behaviour in folktales and didactic functions of folktales in Koring.

### **Orthographic texts**

*Text 1: Ekul bee Utumu*

Ekul bee utumu bee isum me isitere, bee be anaye elomolo. Ophong e be anay ootu utumu otolo. Bee ekul odine utumu kea be labun emara, bee abunye amara, bee utumu uphulo otolo ne kwee ekul, ri ke ago ame ob ke koda. Bee ekul otie ke olugwa ame emara ano ojaph kedu, okeke ujere koda ame, bee bowala koser, ke losum lokong uphu bee egukpe osar. Bee utumu osane ijoo sum uku e lolong uphu, isakom aphopholo koda e, see ajaa ona lokong, banumn ukur okiere. Utumu osua kulu oshi lako urie, ikpona kileto, oti uwe oke o ophonge lugwa ame ona ama, ophilo ona kileto.

*Text 2: Ekul bee be Kenong*

O bo ega gun, bee kenong n bee a tume kama itumele baa kilokpata bee ekul otine, be ke ne otungono abe boje kee me i tujo. Bee be atine, kea be kada eselabie be amegwe ueton ukuir ugwon abe osel itumele baa kilokpata. Bee no dane esel ekul. Bee be ekure abo baa onoo e jone i tame o kiere be bole, be ekul o tine ke o jeo ke onono lotala lekol ame. Bee be onono o talane lek i ame, bee ekul o tine kea me o raa ajo-ootu. Bee sum ne lebu e jile be, ati ke lebu o ke ayo-abootu, bee ekul o tarane lebu o gbaa amina, o ti lebu oke kwee ame lorane ayo-abootu. Ophong ootu asum ne ejile be ekul o kpeeme ona uji, ke boke ne abomu ati oke ayo-abootu. Asum bati ejile, ekul bee ase kaphura, onono ko na ekul esel o gie isok m ukwuphu. Bee onoo, kwee uphele bee ophura ijo olupha ekul esel me, gbishini akpee esel. Ebe agine ekul akpaa aluph, ekul ikpo otoo kporo mi. Bee tun neregeren o ketene ekul uri baa kuopata otoph ka likise. Ekul otokekie kwee okene ke atoph kikporo ekul mi, oke, ke atoph kikporo ekul etoph, o nane kikporo ekul otane mi, ok eke atoph pe etoph. Kporogiji, boje ke onoo lojaa okophu.

**English Translation of the texts**

*Text 1: Tortoise and Lizard*

Once upon a time, the tortoise and the lizard became friends. They moved about together and did everything together. But then, the lizard would always perform better than the tortoise. They were involved in many competitions and the lizard always took the lead. One day, the tortoise told the lizard that they would have house competition in order to find out the best builder. The lizard agreed. They built their different houses but at the end, lizard won the competition. Tortoise was not happy that it lost the competition but pretended to be happy. He congratulated the lizard and also told it that the roof of the house was not properly dried. Lizard wanted to know what he would do so that the house would become dried and tortoise told it to use fire to dry it. The lizard then put fire on top of the roof. Within a twinkle of an eye, the whole house burnt to ashes. The lizard cried and nodded as the house was razed down by fire. So, anytime the lizard comes around a house, it reminds it of its burnt house. This is the lizard's reason for nodding its head anytime it is on a wall.

*Text 2: The Tortoise and Birds*

Once upon a time, tortoise befriended some birds. Then, there came a famine. There was no food anywhere. Tortoise and its friends had gone everywhere in search of food but did not succeed in getting food. Then, they had a meeting and agreed that they would fly to the sky in search of food. Tortoise insisted that he must be a part of the flight to the sky. The birds agreed to lend it some of their feathers. When they got to the sky, they met a being who agreed to give them some food. They were asked to introduce themselves. The birds gave their names while tortoise said his name was 'All of you'. The being brought so many things to them and each time he would say, 'This is for all of you.' Tortoise would drag the food closer to itself. Tortoise ate everything alone because they were for 'All of you'. The birds became angry and collected their feathers from tortoise. Tortoise became stranded. It was left with no other option than to fall from the sky. It fell and landed on earth. That is the reason for tortoise's broken shell.

**Pictures taken from the field**





Pictures of an Oring woman telling stories to children