

# YALA (IKOM) A TERRACED-LEVEL LANGUAGE WITH THREE TONES<sup>1</sup>

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1. Yala is probably the southernmost member of the Arago-Idoma-Yala Dialect Cluster, and is spoken by a community of approximately six thousand people who live on the right bank of the Cross River, about six miles west of the city of Ikom, in Ogoja Province, Eastern Nigeria. The people and language have usually been called *Nkúm* in the literature,<sup>2</sup> but this name is regarded as a foreign importation and is disliked. Yala (Ikom) must be distinguished from Yala (Ogoja), spoken to the north and west of Ogoja Town, and from Yala (Obubra), spoken to the east of Obubra town in Abakaliki Division. Yala (Ikom) and Yala (Obubra) differ from all the other dialects of this cluster in having a full array of plural noun-forms. They differ from the numerous Benue-Congo languages which surround them in having only very meagre concord systems, which are in any case, limited to singular-plural concord.

2. The sound system is fairly typical of the Cluster as a whole, and is as follows:

## CONSONANT PHONEMES

|              | LABIAL | ALVEOLAR | PALATAL | VELAR | LABIO-VELAR |    |
|--------------|--------|----------|---------|-------|-------------|----|
| Plosives vl. | p      | t        | c       | k     | kp          | kw |
| vd.          | b      | d        | ɟ       | g     | gb          | gw |
| Prenasalized | mb     |          |         |       | ɲmgb        |    |
| Fricatives   | f      | s        |         | x     |             |    |
| Palatalized  |        | sy       |         |       |             |    |
| Lateral      |        | l        |         |       |             |    |
| Roll         |        | r        |         |       |             |    |
| Nasal        | m      | n        | ɲ       | ŋ     | ɲw          |    |
| Semi vowels  | w      |          | y       |       |             |    |
| Palatalized  | wy     |          |         |       |             |    |

| VOWEL | i | u |
|-------|---|---|
|       | e | o |
|       | ɛ | ɔ |
|       | a |   |

## SYLLABICS

r, l  
N (homorganic with following consonant. Written as  $\bar{n}$ ,  $\acute{n}$ ,  $\grave{n}$ , always tone-marked.)

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<sup>2</sup> D. Forde, P. Brown, and R. Armstrong, PEOPLES OF THE NIGER-BENUE CONFLUENCE, ETHNOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF AFRICA, (West Africa Part X), (London: International African Institute, 1955), pp. 133-4.

