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Exploring the Korring Language and Cultural Heritage of Ntezi

By Idenze Ezeme

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Oviode Festival in Ntezi. Photo: Hillary Nnamdi Ajifo

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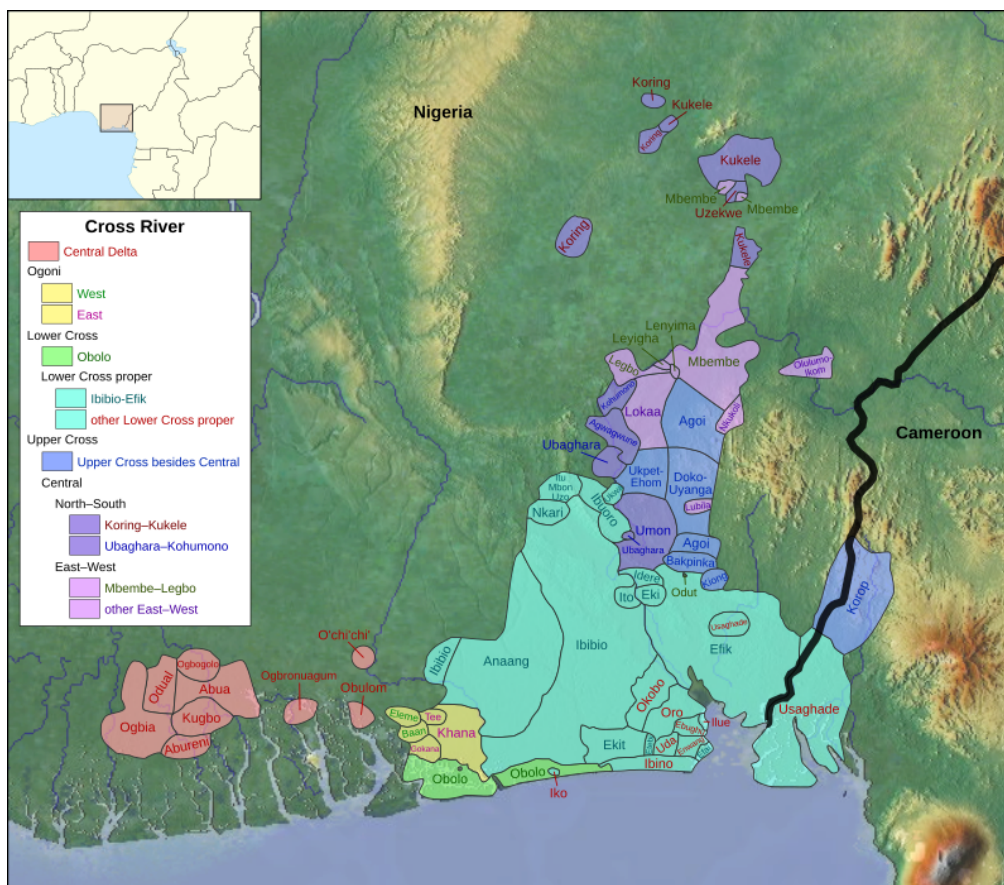
Ntezi

The Igbo people in Southeast Nigeria are known for their rich culture, full of different languages, traditions, and stories. In Ntezi, a town in Ishielu, Ebonyi State, the Korring language and unique customs shine brightly. This article looks at the Korring language, the effects of Christian missionaries, the skill of basket weaving, and the beauty of Ntezi women.

The Korring Language: A Special Language

In Ntezi and nearby areas in Ebonyi State, people speak the Korring

language. It connects to languages in Cross River and Benue States, showing a long history of mixing with others. Some experts say Korring is a Bantu language, while others think it's part of the Igbo language family, like Abakaliki or Nkanu Igbo. No matter what, Korring is the main language used in Ntezi homes.



Map of the Cross River languages including Korring. Photo: SUM1

Korring and Igbo are closely linked. For many years, Ntezi people have married, traded, and celebrated with Igbo neighbours. This makes most Ntezi people speak both Korring and Central Igbo. At home, they use Korring, but in markets or meetings, they might use Central Igbo. For example, an elder might greet someone in Korring but bargain in Central Igbo at the market.

Korring sounds pleasant, with tones like Igbo. Words often carry deep meanings, such as greetings that wish people good fortune and happiness, reflecting Ntezi's values of kindness. But today, Central Igbo and English are more common, especially with young people. To



keep Korring alive, elders tell stories and sing songs in Korring during festivals, teaching children their language.

Christian Missionaries and Igbo Identity

In the 1800s and 1900s, Christian missionaries came to Ntezi and changed its culture. British missionaries used Central Igbo, called Igbo-Nzube, to teach about Christianity. They built schools and churches, and people from places like Onitsha helped spread the message. This made Ntezi feel more connected to other Igbo communities.

In Ntezi, Korring was still spoken at home, but Central Igbo was used in churches and schools. At places like St. Andrew's Cathedral, people sang Igbo hymns and prayed in Central Igbo. This created a double identity: Ntezi people were Korring speakers but also part of the Igbo family.

One big change was in names. Old Korring names like Nweke, Agbo, Onwe, and Aleke were often replaced by Igbo-Christian names like Chibuike, Chukwudi, Chidinma, and Chinazaekpe. These new names showed faith, like Chibuike, meaning "God is my strength." Now, traditional names are often last names, while first names are Christian.

This happens a lot in Ebonyi State because missionaries were very active there. Some elders ask parents to use old names again, and some families give children two names, like Chidinma Nweke, to honour both faith and tradition.

Basket Weaving: The Work of Ntezi Women

Basket weaving is a big part of Ntezi life, especially for women. This old skill is passed from mothers to daughters. Women use palm leaves, raffia, and bamboo to make baskets for carrying things, selling at markets, or using in ceremonies. Each basket has patterns that show family stories or things like rivers and stars.

Women start by collecting materials from the forests around Ntezi. They cut palm leaves into thin strips and dry them in the sun. Weaving baskets is done together, with women singing and talking. A big basket for yams might take days to make, while small ones for ceremonies have pretty, colourful designs.



Basket weaving in Ntezi. Photo: Chukwuka Justice

Baskets are important in festivals like the New Yam Festival (Iri Ji). Women bring baskets filled with yams or kola nuts to thank ancestors. These baskets show wealth and gratitude. Some women now add modern touches, like coloured threads, to sell baskets in cities.

Basket weaving helps families earn money. Women sell baskets in Ntezi markets to buyers from places like Abakaliki. Young girls learn from their mothers to keep the skill alive. But problems like fewer trees and cheap plastic baskets make it harder. Leaders are starting groups and events to protect this tradition.



Ode Market: The Heart of Ntezi's Basket Trade

Ode market in Ntezi, Ebonyi State, is famous for its basket trade. Traders from Ntezi and nearby villages gather on Ode market day to sell baskets of various sizes, shapes, and designs. These baskets are sold to middlemen who distribute them across Nigeria and to neighboring countries like Cameroon, Niger, Chad, Togo, Ghana, and Benin.

Large trucks transport the baskets to markets and farms, especially in northern Nigeria, where they are used to package farm produce like tomatoes, onions, fish, and peppers. Basket-making is a key tradition in Ntezi, passed down to girls from a young age. Nearly every household has a basket-making setup, and the craft is a vital part of the community's culture.

These handmade baskets are so widespread that many baskets seen elsewhere likely come from Ntezi. Hopefully, the Ebonyi State government will one day celebrate these baskets as a symbol of local heritage.

Ntezi women are famous for their beauty, and people talk about it in songs and on social media. Many say they are among the prettiest in Southeast Nigeria. Their beauty is more than looks—it includes grace, smarts, and pride in their culture. During dances like Egwu Ogbo, women wear bright clothes and beads, moving with charm.

In Ntezi, beauty follows Igbo ideas, like glowing skin and strong postures, compared to Ọmụ, the Igbo goddess. Women use uri (a red dye) to paint their bodies and braid their hair in special ways. At weddings, brides with uri designs look pure and blessed.

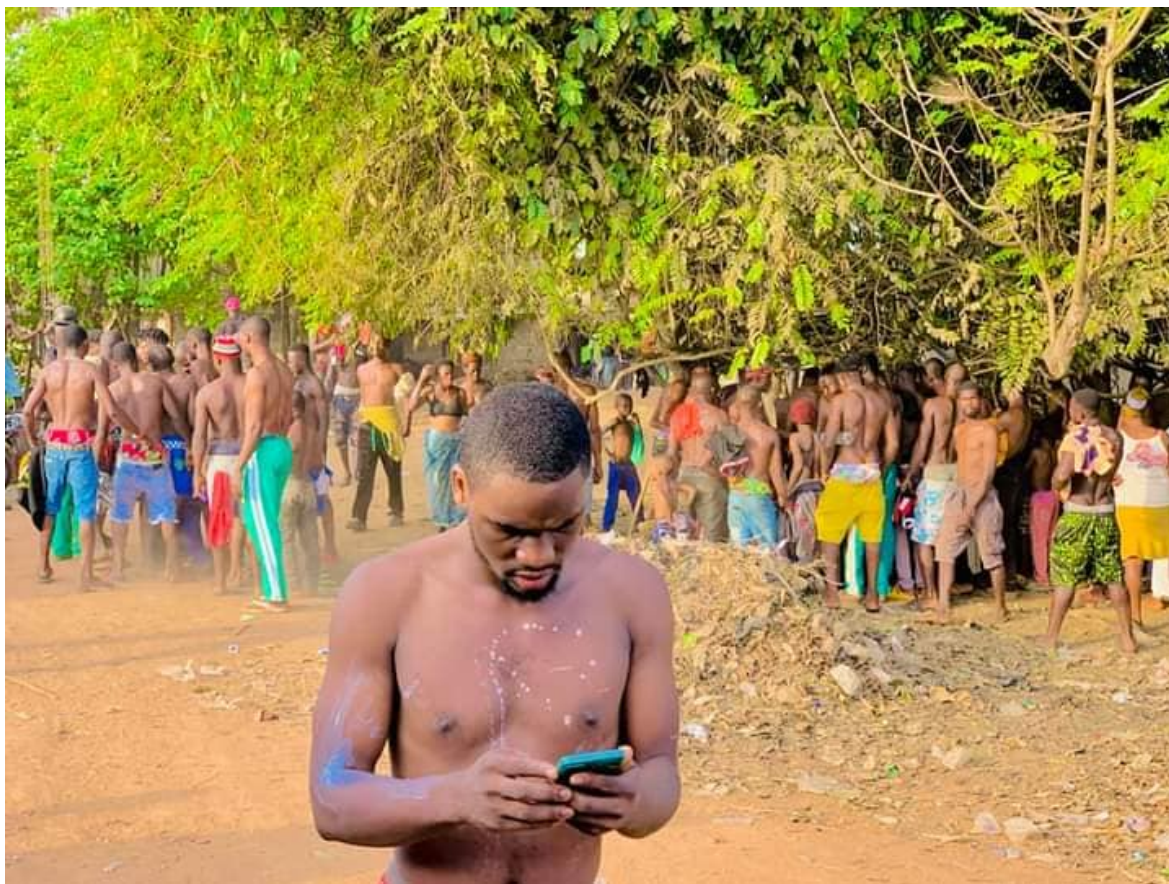
Ntezi women also work hard. They study, trade in markets, or join groups like the Umuada. Their beauty shows their strength and love for community.

Ntezi loves its festivals, which bring everyone together.

The Oviode Festival is the chief cultural event in Ntezi, held every year under the first moon of February. It is a time when the community gathers to celebrate their shared history, showcase their arts, and give thanks to Chukwu (God) and their ancestors.



Happy crowds join Ntezi's Oviode Festival, Masquerades and Igbo dances fill Ode market.. Photo by Hilspress



Happy crowds at the Ntezi's Oviode Festival. Photo: Hillary Nnamdi Ajifo.



The Oviode Festival in Ntezi is bright with Korring songs and dances, bringing people together at Ode market.
Photo: Hillary Nnamdi Ajifo.



Men at the Ntezi's Oviode Festival. Photo: Hillary Nnamdi Ajifo.

The New Yam Festival, or Iri Ji, celebrates the harvest. Families thank Chukwu (God) and ancestors with Korring songs and dances. Women show their baskets, and men dance in masquerade costumes, showing Ntezi's art.

Another fun event is the Egwu Ogbo dance, where young people perform together. These festivals keep Korring alive, with songs about the land's gifts. Most Ntezi people are farmers, growing yams, cassava, and vegetables. The rich land is special, and group farming builds unity, like the Korring saying, "One hand cannot lift a heavy load."

Ntezi struggles to keep its Korring language and traditions. Central Igbo and English are taking over, and many young people move to cities like Lagos, where Korring isn't spoken. Modern things like Western clothes and music compete with basket weaving and dances.

But the community is fighting back. Schools in Ntezi teach Korring



words and stories. Festivals are shared with visitors to build pride and money. Social media posts show Ntezi's culture to Igbo people far away.

Ntezi is a proud part of Igbo culture, with its Korring language, strong traditions, and lively community. From women's baskets to the dances of its maidens, Ntezi shows Igbo beauty and strength. As it faces modern challenges, Ntezi's love for its heritage keeps it shining. Visiting Ntezi means seeing not just beauty but the heart of Igbo land.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



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