



An Evaluation of the Use of Igbo Language Among Igbo Residents in Lagos State Nigeria

Eze Cyprian Chidozie^{1*}, Eze Mabel Nkechinyere², Ikwuegbu Rosemary Nkem³
Lagos State University of Education, Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos State, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Eze Cyprian Chidozie cypeze62@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Igbo is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The people are Igbo and their language is Igbo. They are known for business minded and the most travelled of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria. Due to concentration of industries in Lagos state, thousands of Igbo people are found in all the parts of Lagos state which is in South Western Nigeria. They migrate continuously from South-Eastern Nigeria to Lagos state, Nigeria. As they come to Lagos, they meet the host language which is Yoruba and English language which is the official language of the country Nigeria. They also come with their heritage language Igbo. Being faced with these two languages in addition to their heritage language, they have options of which language to use. The research is to investigate the Igbo language usage in communication among the Igbo residents in Lagos state, Nigeria. The researchers employed the survey research method and the questionnaire for data collection. A sample of 500 was taken from the total population. Multi-stage sampling was also used for the study. It was found that although the Igbo people in Lagos still cherish Igbo food as against their host delicacies and the western foods they prefer to communicate in English language and sometimes code-switching from Igbo to English when communicating with fellow Igbo. It is recommended that Igbo parents should speak Igbo to their fellow Igbo anywhere they found themselves to prevent Igbo extinction.

INTRODUCTION

Igbo the mother-tongue of over thirty million of the Igbo people is one of the three major national languages in Nigeria. The other two are Hausa and Yoruba. Igbo people hail majorly from the following states of Nigeria: Abia state, Anambra state, Ebonyi state, Enugu state and Imo state. They are also in some parts of the following states: Delta state and River state of Nigeria. Igbo is one of the eight major languages in Benue, Congo group of African languages and has been classified as a member of the 'kwa' subgroup of the Niger-Congo family. Igbo has several dialects and it is spoken in all the states in Igbo land. Yet, it has standardized form. According to Egwuonwu (2016:79), it is also recognized as a minority language in Equatorial Guinea. It is also written in the Latin script which was introduced by the British colonialists. Igbo language is the language with which to express Igbo culture. It is a language full of wisdom. Neglect of the language means neglect of the people and their culture.

Language cannot be easily defined although many linguists have made attempts to define language. Syal and Jindal (2016:3) talking on what language is, stated that everybody knows the answer to the question 'what is language?' but nobody has so far been able to bring out any standard definition that fully explains the term language. They compared defining language to defining life. They stated that 'language like life everybody knows what language is but one cannot present a satisfactory definition of language. In order to understand the term language, one has to talk of the properties or the characteristics. Most of the definitions and descriptions of language indicate that language is unique to man and primarily oral, conventional, makes use of signs and symbols, meaningful and a means of communication.

Oshoba (2024:9) stated that of all the means of communication available to man, language is the most important, developed, elaborate and versatile. Language is peculiar to man. Fromkin and Rodman (1974:173) stated that 'No matter how eloquently a dog may bark, it cannot tell you that its parents are honest. This shows that language is for the use of man and it is an important tool in the hand of writers. Language and culture go together. In fact, language is a part of culture. It is language that interprets culture. Enete (2008:8) states that one cannot study a language of people without knowing their culture. This is because most human group behaviours are language embedded. Kuper and Kupper (1996:452) state that language is not only part of culture but also a major and critical part. All those who seek to fully enter into and understand a given culture must accordingly master its language, for only through that language can they possibly participate in and experience the culture.

Language cannot be separated from culture because it is a part of culture and every language provides an index of the culture with which it is most intimately associated. Cook (1991:10) described language as a life wire of every society. Language is culture bound. There is no society without culture so also there is no society without language of communication which enables understanding and harmony. Culture is seen as the way people live their lives, which reflects and expressed in their language. Nwadike (1998:20) stated that language is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lost the

people, if we treasure the key and keep it safe, things will go well. Bamidele (2001:129) commenting on Nwadike's statement said we cannot ignore such as a possession in a national development. Language is so important in every aspect of our life. It is needed for both formal and informal teaching.

Indigenous language is part of the people's culture and it is native to the people. It is the people's mother-tongue and it is not foreign to the indigenes of the land. Agbim and Chukwuma (2020:173) described indigenous language as the language of a particular group; the mother-tongue which is acquired and not learnt. It belongs to the owners of the group. Igbo language the mother-tongue of the Igbo people has evolved for millions of years. It is the language of the South-Eastern Nigeria. The Igbos have the culture of travelling to many places. They are found in all the thirty states of the nation Nigeria and the capital city, Abuja in thousands.

Agbim and Chukwuma (2020:174) described the Igbo as having by nature mercantilistic, migratory, adaptive and inventive. Because of this, the Igbo people are found in large number all over the states of Nigeria. As they go, they go with their language and culture and meet the host language and culture added with the official language of the country which is English language. Many of these Igbo native speakers are found in Lagos in large number. The researchers investigate the level of their use of Igbo language and culture in Lagos state, Nigeria.

1. Statement of the Problem

Despite the large population of the Igbo native speakers in Nigeria and many scattered abroad, the Igbo language faced with a threat of extinction. This is because of the Igbo people's neglect to the language and culture and migration nature of the people. As they migrate, they adapt and integrate to the host language and culture or neglect both the heritage language Igbo and the host community language and embrace the western language. When a language is not used in communicating, the culture of the people is no longer practiced anywhere. The language and the culture are regarded dead. If nothing is done in the area of Igbo language and culture, both the language and culture will die and when we say a language is dead, it means they have gone into extinction. To sustain a language is to speak, cherish it and practice the culture that it expresses. Refusing to speak the language means that it cannot be transmitted to the next generation which means that both the language and culture have gone into extinction if the next generation did not inherit it. The above observations motivated the researchers to investigate the extent of the Igbo language use in Lagos state of Nigeria which inhabits thousands of Igbo people.

2. Research Aims and Objectives

The general aim of this research is examination of the Igbo language use in communication among the Igbo residents in Lagos State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Ascertain the frequency of the Igbo language use in communication among the Igbo residents in Lagos State Nigeria.

2. Determine the major constraints to Igbo language usage in communication among the Igbo in Lagos State, Nigeria.

3. Research Questions

Following the research objectives, the study will address the following questions:

1. What is the frequency of Igbo language usage in communication among the Igbo residents in Lagos State?
2. What are the major constraints to the use of Igbo language in communication among the Igbo residents in Lagos State, Nigeria?

4. Significance of the Study

The result of this study can immensely contribute as a valuable reference document for further studies on the Igbo language use in diaspora. It will be of immense relevant to researchers on language use. It will also be relevant to policy makers and those interested in promotion of Igbo language and culture. Schools and curriculum designers will also find this study relevant.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Igbo language situation is a serious challenge to every well thinking Igbo indigene. No doubt the backward situation of the language and in extension the culture has pushed some Igbo elites especially those in diaspora into action. Anyanwu (2017:3) described it as a battle for survival but a battle without a captain or general. He goes further to state that soldiers, meaning those fighting for the Igbo language survival go in different directions with different agenda; sometimes shoot themselves and vandalise their own land. This can be attributed to the republican nature of the Igbo race. The above observation is true because Igbo unlike the Hausa and Yoruba has no central leader. Igbo, they say, "Igbo enwe Eze" meaning Igbo has no king. This type of struggle led to the standardized Igbo language being a collection of different dialects instead of allowing one dialect to be the favoured dialect or chosen as the standard dialect. Everyone strives to solve the problem of the language in the way that seems best in the person's eyes with little consideration to the lasting consequences on the language. There is a need to face one direction with an agreed aim to enable us revive the language and culture.

As Chikwendu (2017:3) observed, the need to move the language forward stems from the need to help our children born in diaspora to know and speak the language fluently. The second-generation Igbo Londoners could be described as victims of uniformed parents; who easily accepted the false theory that their children would be confused at school if they speak their mother tongue. Those children who are the second-generation Londoners are today's youth some who cannot speak this Igbo language. The above observation by Anyanwu concerning the Igbo London dwellers is not different from what one can see concerning the internal migrants (Igbo Lagos dwellers) and their second generation who are now youth and some already adults but cannot speak Igbo language fluently. The second-generation Igbo London dwellers who are not

comfortable with not speaking Igbo language are now learning Igbo as adults. It is time to turn things around with the third generation (Chikwendu, 2017:3).

As we earlier stated, Igbo has the migration culture. They are involved in internal and international migration. By internal migration, we mean migrating from South-Eastern Nigeria (Igbo land) to other parts of the country outside Igbo land. It is that of the internal migrants particularly those who migrate to Lagos State Nigeria and their use of Igbo language that is the focus of this research. Because for many years, Igbo people have been migrating and dwelling in Lagos state, the research involves both first- and second-generation migrants. This is because some of the second-generation migrants have settled in Lagos relaxed and have taken Lagos as their home.

Many researchers have given evidences pointing that Igbo language is at a serious threat of extinction. Udeze (2017:24) attributed the causes of this danger which Igbo language has found itself to attitude of the Igbo people towards their language. He noted that even within Igbo villages, people converse in the medium of English language rather than Igbo. Schools especially private schools promote the use of English language instead of Igbo. All these are signs to extinction of the language. Onumajuru (2017:65 – 66) classified problems militating against the development and popular use of the Igbo language under the following headings: socio-political factors, economic factors, standardization factors and socio-political factors. Among the factors listed above we believe that economic factors are the major factors. This is mainly the reason for migration of many Igbo people. Many see English as a language that can market them easily. For this, they speak English more than Igbo. Onumajuru (1998:82) noted that the civil war had a serious negative effect on the Igbo language. According to him, the attempt to be reintegrated economically, politically and socially to the Nigerian system made them neglect their language and embrace English language. But unfortunately, even many who did not witness the war are not different. Odinye and Odinye (2015) cited in Okechukwu and Winifred Stella (2020:176) mentioned the following as the cause of the Igbo people's negative attitude towards their language. They are:

- Education
- Government language policies
- Globalization

At despite that Igbo language is the tool for communication and cultural expression among the Igbo people, many of the Igbo people are not proud of the language. English which is the language of the colonial masters to many of the African nations has become the language many Igbo people pride on at the expense of their heritage language which is Igbo. Teachers in many schools even in Igbo land contributed to this shift from Igbo language to English. Some punish any child that speaks Igbo in the class or asks any question in Igbo. Some parents speak English to their children even at home. Considering that language is learnt or acquired in the process of growth not born with many children of Igbo indigenes have lost their native language.

1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study is cultural marginalization theory of language. This theory describes a situation where a people in search of higher social status embrace the linguistic and cultural trait, they feel are more prestigious than theirs. This may be the linguistic and cultural life of their colonial masters or the people that dominate them through invasion or a more favoured language by the government of the land. Embracing of another language and culture at the expense of the people's language and culture is a signal to language extinction. A casual look at the Igbo people especially thousands of them in Lagos state and other places prove that Igbo people are marginalizing their heritage language and culture. The worst of this marginalization is marginalization within the Igbo native land.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted survey research in the study. The researcher adopted both quantitative and qualitative approach in data collection. The quantitative data is driven by the questionnaire that is used to collect a reasonable amount of data for the sake of generalization of the study. The qualitative data is collected through interview. The Igbo residents in Lagos state make up the population for the study. A sample size of 200 Igbo natives was drawn. The questionnaire was used to collect data from the sample size of 200 Igbo natives residing in Lagos. Again, the interview method was used to collect data from 5 informants. These five informants provided information in a more detailed way than was collected through questionnaire. Out of twenty local government areas in Lagos state, a sample of five local government areas was taken. The five local governments areas selected have large concentration of the Igbo people. The local governments selected are: Ojo, Agege, Ikeja, Apapa and Somolu. The researchers made sure that only the Igbo natives were studied.

1. Presentation of Data and Result Analysis

The data collected through quantitative and qualitative methods are presented for clarity.

2. Presentation of Quantitative Data Analysis

Simple percentage is used in presenting and analysing the data in the table below. Two hundred copies of the questionnaire were distributed and the two hundred were returned. Being able to collect the two hundred copies, the researcher made use of the two hundred copies.

Table 1. Frequency of Using Igbo Language among the Igbo in Lagos

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Regular users	15	7.5%
2.	Occasionally	170	85%
3.	Do not use Igbo at all	5	2.5
4.	Ashamed of using Igbo	5	2.5
5.	Rarely	5	2.5
	Total	200	100

From the above table, a reasonable number of the Igbo residents in Lagos, more than half of the population use Igbo language occasionally as a means of communication. This makes 85% percent of the sample population.

Table 2. The Major Obstacles to the use of Igbo Language in Lagos State among the Igbo Residents

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Don't understand	15	7.5%
2.	Occasionally	170	85%
3.	Do not use Igbo at all	5	2.5
4.	Ashamed of using Igbo	5	2.5
5.	Rarely	5	2.5
	Total	200	100

The above table shows that preference to English language over Igbo, the inability to understand Igbo language and the low rating of the Igbo language are the major constraints to use of Igbo language in Lagos state.

3. Qualitative Data Presentation

Interview Question One: Gịnị bụ aha gị? (What is your name?)

Interviewee 1: A a m Emeka

Interviewee 2: Uchechi

Interviewee 3: I don't know Ibo o! say it in English. I don't even like the language.

Interviewee 4: Aha m bụ Christian

Interviewee 5: My parents are Igbo but we don't speak Igbo in our home don't understand the language.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Here, findings from research question one, two and the interview are discussed for a better understanding of the result.

1. Research Question One: What is the frequency of the Igbo Language use among the Igbo resident in Lagos.

The above question was to find out the frequency of Igbo language usage among the Igbo respondents residing in Lagos State Nigeria. The data presented in table one is used to answer the research question. As can be seen from the data, 15 respondents out of the 200 use Igbo language regularly in communication. This makes up 7.5%. From the table also, the occasional users of Igbo language in communication are 170 out of 200 respondents. This amounts to 85% of the total. At the same time, 5 respondents which is 2.5% do not use Igbo language at all, another 5 respondents which is 2.5% testified being ashamed of using the language while the remaining 5 respondents that is, 2.5% rarely use Igbo language in communication.

From the data above, there is a drastic decline in the use of Igbo language in communication among the Igbo residents in Lagos State Nigeria. The researchers observed that unlike the other two major Nigerian languages

Hausa and Yoruba users in Lagos, the Igbo natives hardly speak their language in Lagos. Even those who are not fluent in English speak pidgin rather than Igbo language. This is in line with the observation of Okoli (2015) as cited in Okechukwu and Winifred Stella (2020:181). His study shows that Igbo native speakers rarely speak their language among themselves compared to other two dominant language speakers. Such neglect of a language among the natives and preference of an alternative language is a signal to extinction of the former. The death of a language is in extension the death of a culture that the language interprets. When a language has no speaker, it will definitely go into extinction. When a language goes into extinction, the culture also goes into extinction.

2. Research Question Two: What are the major obstacles to the use of Igbo language in communication among Igbo residents in Lagos State Nigeria?

The above question was raised by the researchers to find out the major hindrances to the use of Igbo language in communication among the Igbo residents in Lagos state Nigeria. The data used to answer this question is presented on table two above. Simple percentage of the respondents was used in analysing the result.

From the data, 60 respondents which is 30% of the respondents do not understand Igbo language, 25 respondents constituting of 12.5% expressed not having interest in Igbo language, 70 out of 200 respondents constituting 35% prefers English over Igbo language in communication, 40 respondents which is 20% of the respondents see Igbo language as an inferior language and don't use it in communication. Finally, 5 respondents which is 2.5% claim that the speakers in Lagos are not many. From the above presentation, it means that preference of English language over Igbo and not understanding Igbo language respectively among the respondents make up the major obstacles to the use of Igbo language in communication among the Igbo people residing in Lagos state Nigeria.

In line with the above study, a study conducted by Njoku (2015), Okechukwu and Winifred Stella (2020) showed that inadequate knowledge and preference for English language are over native language the major factors preventing Nigerians from using their native language in communication. This research, is in line with the research conducted by Okechukwu and Winifred on the use of Igbo language as a means of communication among the residents of South Eastern Nigeria. In their finding, as it is in this research, preference to English over Igbo in communication among the Igbo natives dominated other constraints to the use of the language.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

So far in this research we have evaluated the use of Igbo language in communication among the Igbo dwellers in Lagos state Nigeria. At the end of the study, we found out that a small percentage of respondents use Igbo language regularly in communication. Greater percentage rarely use the language choosing English as preferred option.

From the findings, diaspora Igbo especially those in Lagos are not promoting Igbo language enough to support its continuity. Joining this research with the study conducted on the use Igbo language for communication among the South-Easter. Nigeria by Okechukwu and Winifred Stella (2012), one can conclude that the Igbo both at home and diaspora are not promoting Igbo language enough. If nothing is done urgently to rescue the language, it may go into extinction. However, this being 2024, Igbo language may not go into extinction in 2025 as predicted by UNESCO that Igbo language and by implication culture may go into extinction 2020 if nothing is done.

However, the language is into serious threat considering the number of the Igbo people that migrate to other non-Igbo speaking parts of the world. Again, considering that those residing in the South-East part of Nigeria are not working enough to rescue the language. The hatred, the neglect and the looking down of the Igbo language and by implication the Igbo culture are extinction signal to the language.

1. The Igbo people both at home and in diaspora should start using the language in communication.
2. Parents and guardians who speak Igbo language should make use of regularly while communication with their wards.
3. Elites among the Igbo should let others realize that all languages are equal and that no language is inferior to the other.
4. Non-governmental organization should start giving scholarship Igbo students in schools especially to those in colleges of education and universities.
5. State governments in Igbo land should promote the study of the language in schools.
6. The media houses should both in Igbo states and outside Igbo states should be encouraged to make broadcasts in Igbo.
7. Federal government should monitor the full implementation of the language policy they make especially as it concerns the use of mother-tongue in school.
8. The masses in Igbo land should make the Igbo politicians to express themselves in Igbo language to earn their votes.
9. Publishing houses in Nigeria should be encouraged by the government to publish Nigerian language including Igbo.
10. Those living outside Igbo land should be taking their children home regularly.
11. Igbo cultural days should be promoted by all Igbo people both at home and in diaspora.

We state if all the listed suggestions are implemented, there will be a good improvement in the use of Igbo language in Lagos state and other places.

