

ACCULTURATION IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE IGBO LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Culture encompasses the knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and habits acquired by members of a society. Language has long been recognized as the primary medium for the transmission of culture, serving as a mirror of a people's way of life. Globalization promotes increased integration and interconnectedness among countries worldwide. However, studies have shown that the world's linguistic and cultural diversity has been threatened by the forces of globalization, particularly in its contemporary form of cultural globalization. This paper examines the effects of globalization on the Igbo language and culture. The findings reveal that globalization has negatively affected the Igbo language, fashion, lifestyle, music, arts, food patterns, and educational practices. The paper concludes by proposing strategies for preserving the Igbo language and culture to prevent the erosion of this invaluable cultural heritage.

Keywords: globalization, Acculturation, Igbo language, cultural globalization, communication.

INTRODUCTION

One of the earliest most popular and important forms of human communication is language. Every society has always found its own way of communication among its members. It is called a code with which they talk to and understand each other (Wardhaugh 2000 Fronklin Rodman and Hymans 2003:3). Thus all aspects of human socialization including culture, history, religion, ideology, patriotism etc. at the early stage of human existence have been expressed through the oral medium of language.

The emergence of Western civilization and education enshrined western culture and religion, this cultural contact or in its most recent form 'cultural globalization' has eroded our indigenous culture as well as the language of its transmission. It is generally accepted that every country or race of people should strive to align itself with others, with regards to fashionable trends across the globe. Nigeria has shown undoubted zeal in her efforts to catch up with the rest of the world in her journey to scientific, technological economic and other forms of advancement hence globalization is perceived from the viewpoint of the march towards modernization.

The resulting effects is acculturation as cultural values and morals authentically Africans have been thrown overboard in their march towards modernization. At this junction, the pertinent question should be; Is globalization a curse or blessing to the Igbo man? The paper attempts to answer this question henceforth through the following arrangement. The relationship between language and cultural globalization, ways of making Igbo language relevant in the era of globalization and conclusion.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Language is a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preserving culture. Language plays a central role in the life of individuals, it is a lever for cultural and economic growth and links man to all that is life. Our indigenous languages constitute a very important aspect of this process, this is why the national policy on education (2004:8) pays a great deal of attention to the following values;

1. Respect for the worth or dignity of the individual.
2. Faith in man's ability to make rational decisions.
3. Shared responsibility for the common good of society...

Language is one of the most significant system in any culture. Language gives access to the social experience and accumulated knowledge of generations that have gone before and projects into the future. Without language events have no meaning or value, events do not have history, it is language that provide meaning and process to culture, language is power.

The national cultural policy (1988:5) defines culture as:

'The totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, aesthetics and religious norms and modes of organization, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours'.

Language and culture are inextricably linked, Fulgence (2003:14 cited in Ndimele 2004:68) fully summed it up by saying that "A language is more than just a tool of communication... it is a channel of values, tradition and culture, a language is a whole way of looking at reality, at life". There are some expressions, deep feelings and strong sentiments that are hard to express in a language other than the native one. The relationship between language and

culture cannot be overemphasized in the framework of any given society.

Alder (1977:22) maintains that they are so closely related that one couldn't understand one without the knowledge of the other, hence Igbo culture refers to those socially transmitted patterns of behaviour characteristics of Igbo people. This course involves the Igbo language. In the same manner, we can refer to German culture and the Germans, Finnish culture and the Finns, Yoruba culture and the Yoruba people, Japanese culture and the Japanese etc. in this respect, people are identified by their culture and the behaviour of a group of people is reflected in the culture. Overlap in cultures makes it possible for us to talk of Western culture as opposed to African oriental culture. Within western culture, one can proceed to differentiate into European, English, German, French culture etc. When a foreign culture is embraced by an indigenous culture, it is called acculturation.

ACCULTURATION IN THE ERA OF CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION

Countries all over the world have one form of culture or the other for which they are known. African countries have richly endowed culture and are therefore multicultural. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic culture of which 'Ndi Igbo' is one and yet within the Igbo race, each community has some cultural trait which are peculiar to it.

Acculturation in a complete sense revolves round the adoption of element of one culture by a different cultural group. The elements of culture adopted can be in form of mode of dressing, music, and art, religion, language or behaviour. These elements imported into already existing culture may have different meaning or lack the subtleties of the original cultural context. The definition of acculturation vary depending on the vintage point of the discipline of the definer. Use of the concept of acculturation appears as early as 1880 (Powell, cited in Herskovits, 1938), but the earliest classic formulation comes from Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936):

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent change in the original culture patterns of either groups (P.149).

In the 1954 formulation by the Social Research Council (SSRC, 1954), acculturation was defined as "... culture change that is initiated by the conjugation of two or more autonomous cultural systems ..." (P, 974).

Communication is a significant determinant of acculturation. Gudykuorist and Y Kim (1984) best summarize communication and acculturation thus: "At the heart of the interactive acculturation process is the communication process linking strangers to the host cultural milieu". The ultimate aim of globalization is to reduce the world to a global village via communication, and possibly return humanity to Babel where one or two languages will dominate international contact. Proponents of globalization have continued to emphasize its benefits to the human race, particularly as it concerns increased access to information and knowledge. There has been the fear that globalization fosters acculturation and portend great danger to cultural and linguistics diversity of the people of this earth. Maduka (2004) in his own criticism states that "...what globalization has achieved is to make Africa a cultural satellite of Europe".

The phenomenon, globalization tends to give the impression that the entire world is being hurried towards a precipice, there is rapid alteration and shift in ideas and people's ways of life, culture and language. Old and cherished values are upstaged almost overnight. Primordial heritage is rendered obsolete, everything has a new appeal and intricately interrelated and bonded together in change. Globalization like a bush fire has certainly taken its toll on the Igbo man and his entire way of life.

THE IGBO LANGUAGE SITUATION IN THE ERA OF CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION

The English language has been enthroned as the language of globalization through the media, IT, satellite television and other means. Jubril (2004) captures the scene when he said "English dominates diplomacy and business and is the language used on 52% of all websites... confusion is now becoming roughly organized for all world languages especially those virtually identified as endangered, moribund, dying, depraved or even dead".

The Igbo speaking community can be classified into five (5) geographical zones, what Onwujeogwu (1972) refers to as the Igbo Culture Area (ICA):

1. Northern Igbo falls in two (2) subgroups:
 - (a) Awka to Nri group
 - (b) Nsukka to Onitsha group
2. Western Igbo - Agbor, Kwale, Aboh, Illah, Asaba, Isele-Ukwu
3. Southern Igbo - Orlu, Okigwe, Umuahia, Ngwa, Owerri, Diobu etc.
4. Eastern or Cross River Igbo - Okigwe, Umuahia, Ngwa etc.
5. Northern-Eastern Igbo - Abakaliki, Izzi, Okosi etc.

The Igbo language is felt in every part of Nigeria and is one of the three (3) major languages. The Igbo tribe constitute about 20% of the population of Nigeria. They are overwhelming Christians in the present age, they are very industrious people. At the coming of the Europeans, education because a very high mark of social status. Igbo

language stands on a reeling pathway to extinction resulting from both internal and external factors of globalization. The urge for identification with the global language has resulted to the desertion of Igbo in favour of the dominant language - English. People acquire languages that are most relevant to their social needs, the aim is to achieve universality in communication and interaction. Foreign language and culture is fast becoming the exclusive preserve of education, science, communication, technology, and official government activities. In the process of acquiring universal language, some languages are dropped or neglected.

The Igbo language is experiencing a lot of threat from English language. The modern or educated Igbo man tends to adapt more to the English language and culture, this shift affects his language use as there is a greater adaptation to the use of I.C.T, the Igbo language is seen as inferior and less prestigious. The language attitude of the speakers of Igbo has been influenced and patterned after that of the western world. Blending of Igbo and English languages (code switching/mixing) to achieve better communication is becoming very fashionable amongst the Igbo speakers.

The Igbo youths prefer the use of English language among their peer groups, the course of study chosen at the tertiary level has nothing to do with Igbo, because they assume that Igbo has nothing to offer to the global world of modernity, lack of interest in the Igbo literature is on the increase.

Fishman (1991) advocates that one way of maintaining an endangered language is by that language to be used at home, in recent time, even that role is threatened as most Igbo parents now speak English language with their children at home and indirectly coerce visitors to their homes to speak to their children in English.

Cultural and social activities which hitherto were conducted in Igbo now find English language encroaching on these domains. Such areas include; traditional marriage ceremonies award of traditional honours and recognitions, traditional title taking, child naming ceremonies, house warming ceremonies, new-Yam festivals, masquerades festivals, age grade festivals, Ofallas, Umunna/Umuada meeting etc. the popular argument is that there is need for the use of a language of wider communication (English), widely understood by the different parties and visitors involved in such occasions.

The music and movie industries have witnessed the dominant influence of acculturation, popular Igbo movies and music are gradually dying off, leaving the stage for the westernized movies and music.

The force of acculturation is greatly evidenced in the eating habit of Ndi-Igbo. Food are no longer wrapped in native leaves but packed in disposable packs that most often changes their taste. People no longer eat with bare hands but cutlery sets. Healthy eating habits have been replaced with fast foods, junks, natural drinks or juices replaced with soft drinks, wine, beer, alcoholic drinks, etc. diseases like obesity, cancer, diabetes etc is the order of the day.

The Igbo beautiful native attires and adornments have been replaced with westernized dress code. The youths go about half naked throwing decency to the winds, high level of promiscuity is now the order of the day.

The communal life i.e. the extended family system has been abandoned for the nuclear family system involving the father, mother and the children. In short 'Ndi Igbo' is no longer their brothers' keeper!

The list is endless but there is urgent need to preserve the Igbo language from being swallowed up by acculturation in this era of globalization. The only way forward is to harness the limitless potentials of globalization rather than lose our valued heritage through selfish social inclinations.

WAYS OF MAKING IGBO LANGUAGE RELEVANT IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

It is obvious that the Igbo language is not playing any major role since it has failed to function effectively as one of the official languages of Nigeria. The answer to this is not far fetched. For a language to become internationally valuable and attractive, it has to be backed by political, economic and technological power. The number of people speaking a language as the mother tongue does not matter, but the power behind the language does Fulgence (2003:14, cited in Ndimele 2004 : 66) summoned it up thus:

Language is like any other living organism. As such it follows the rule of any other living organism namely, starting, living, growing older and finally dying or changing into something different.

The first step is, there has to be the political will to put in place some kind of policy that spells out the details and procedures for integrating ICT into the teaching/Learning of Igbo and other Nigerian languages. We can have for instance, not only language-specific websites on internet but also satellite television channels dedicated to, say the Igbo languages for the millions of Igbo speakers at home and in diaspora. Example is Indian's Simputer Project.

IT resources such as shoebox and Microsoft excel and access software can be used for building up of the necessary database for dictionary making in Igbo language, Dr. Uwe Seibert of the summer institute of linguistics and the University of Jos, Jos Nigeria, has an excellent website on Nigerian languages.

Speech synthesis project can be beneficial to local languages like Igbo, example is the on-going one for Yoruba (Tunde Adegbola of TIWA system in Ibadan, Nigeria). Enrichment of language through computer-mediated communication (CMC) in Igbo language e.g. e-mail, text messaging, online chats, list servers, bulletin boards

among others.

IT resources can be exploited in preserving our rich cultural heritage, like festivals. Different ceremonies, the fairy tales and moonlight stories can be animated as cartoons for our children.

CONCLUSION

The paper has extensively examined the status of the Igbo language in the era of globalization and concludes that the Igbo people are undergoing a process of acculturation, as evidenced by changes in their social practices, food, dressing, language, and culture. The study calls on the Igbo people to adopt a more positive attitude towards their language and recognizes the need for a radical reorientation of their value system. Although globalization has been described as a two-edged sword, this paper adopts the view of Okeh (2003, p. 4), who describes it as "a friend, but a friend we must watch with caution." Therefore, while embracing the opportunities offered by globalization, the Igbo people should critically evaluate foreign cultural influences rather than accepting everything uncritically in the name of cultural globalization.

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