

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ON NIGERIAN LANGUAGES: IGBO CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Language attitude refers to people's perceptions, evaluations, and reactions to language use and to speakers based on their linguistic behaviour. In every speech community, there is a desire to maintain loyalty to the indigenous language, preserve it, and protect it from the influence of other languages. This paper examines the negative effects of the English language on Nigerian languages, using the Igbo language as a case study. The findings reveal that factors such as religion, education, and government policies promote the use of the English language at the expense of the Igbo language. The study also found that the adverse effects of English on the Igbo language include language shift, language endangerment, borrowing, loanwords, code-mixing, and code-switching. The paper concludes by proposing strategies for addressing the negative attitude towards the Igbo language and promoting its preservation and revitalization.

Keywords: Language Attitude, Negative effects, Igbo language, Nigerian languages, foreign language,

INTRODUCTION:

English lives alongside Nigerian languages, interacts with them and adapts itself to the Nigerian environment. The use of English has negatively influenced different Nigerian languages, including Igbo. Going by the criteria proposed by linguists, Igbo language could be considered today as an endangered species. It has been established that Ndi Igbo are gradually abandoning their mother tongues in preference for English in such contexts as official documentation, mass media, especially the newspapers and even in the homes, where some Igbo parents discourage the use of Igbo language as a means of communication.

The Igbos are people principally located in Southeastern Nigeria, West Africa. They also extend to parts of Edo and Delta regions of Nigeria. The Igboland covers Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Abia State and part of Delta. The Igbo population is unevenly distributed. The bulk of it is concentrated along Onitsha, Enugu, Orlu, Okigwe and Mbaize geographical axis. The Igbos speak Igbo language, one of the speech communities in the Kwa family of the Niger-Congo family. About 18 million people speak Igbo, making it one of the three major languages in Nigeria, surpassed only by Yourba and Hausa (Williamson and Blench, 2000), Crozier and Blench (1976) classified Igbo as Benue-Congo-Igboid while a recent classification by Williamson and Blench (2000) classified Igboid as a sub-branch of the West Benue-Congo branch of the Proto-Benue Congo. The West Benue-Congo languages correspond to those of the former Eastern kwa.

The attitudes of the language owners and the government of a nation determine whether a given language will survive among the co-existing ones or not. It is on this note that this paper aims to create awareness on the negative effect of English language on Nigerian languages - the Igbo case study, the negative effects of attitudes of the Igbos towards their language, factors that influence language attitude, the need for change so as to save Igbo and other Nigerian languages from being endangered or going into extinction.

TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Many indigenous languages, including Igbo, are endangered in a diglossic environment. Simmons (2003) observes that change in the amount of use of each language overtime may indicate changes in the speakers socio-linguistic environment or changes in the speakers' expression of their desired identity. It may also indicate changes in access to learning and using a particular language.

The high or low status accorded languages influence to a large extent the attitude of language users in the nation in question. The attitudes may range from negative to positive attitudes. It is in line with this that Othman and Bashir (2000:449) while quoting Johnson (1973:167) observes that community language attitudes denote the positive-negative evaluation of individual languages or group of languages with regard to such dimensions as loyalty, prestige, utility, cognancy or aesthetics.

Based on the foregoing, we can see that to find out the language attitude associated with different languages, we must check the value that people place on these languages. Finding out the value placed on these languages will help know whether the language users are loyal to their language and whether they have high prestige for their

language or not. These are reflected in how the people use the language, so the attitudes of people towards a language can be favourable or unfavourable.

Fisherman (2001) suggested two theoretical viewpoints to language attitude studies - The Behaviourist theory and the Mentalistic theory. Rene and Muysken (1987:16) said that "the mentalist view considers attitudes as an internal mental state which may give rise to certain forms of behaviour. While the behaviourist view posits that "attitude must be studied by observing the responses to certain languages, ie. to their use in actual interaction". Given these two viewpoints to the study of language attitudes, we adopted the behaviourist approach in this paper because language use deals directly with society and different domains of interaction.

THE STATUS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA:

The English language occupies a pride of position in Nigerian society. The official status of English, as stipulated in the constitution or other documents, determines the position of English in such a country as Nigeria. The language provision for education in the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which grant 'official status' to English may have contributed immensely to the importance attached to knowledge and use of English in Nigeria.

While English is a lingua franca in Nigeria used in both national and international communication, Igbo (like Hausa and Yoruba) is also used as a lingua franca for regional communication. It is difficult to state the exact number of Nigerians or Igbo people who speak English, but this number has been put at between 12 to 20 percent of the over 120 million Nigerians. English is infact taught as from the later part of primary education. And as from the secondary school to the university, all subjects, including, sometimes, the local languages, such as Igbo are taught in English. With the constantly expanding educational programmes in Nigeria and Igbo land, there are more speakers of English among the younger ones than the older ones. The teaching of English even at the kindergarten and early nursery schools is now enough attraction for parents to send their children to such schools. Aliyu Mohammed succinctly puts it thus: English occupies a unique place in Nigeria educationally because of its significant role and status in national life. English is sociolinguistically important in Nigeria, despite its colonial origin, having become, over the years, both the language of official business and a vital link language between the various ethnic groups in the country. It is also pedagogically significant as the language of instruction in virtually the entire school system...

Accordingly, a good pass in English has become mandatory for transition from primary to Junior Secondary School, from JSS to SSS and for admission to all levels of higher education in the country.

SOME FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGE THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN IGBO LAND:

RELIGION: Closely related to the factor of education is religion. Igboland which is Christian dominated and more exposed to Western education has a larger number of speakers of English than the Muslim dominated North, which is often described as being educationally disadvantaged. In most churches English is used as the language for service while the sermon and a few announcement may be interpreted in Igbo.

URBANISATION: Nigerian urban centres attract a high concentration of educated people and institutions, which will likely have influence on the people's mode of social interaction. These urban centres offer greater employment opportunity and are associated with modernization, also attract people from other ethnic groups and foreigners alike. In contrast, rural areas are inhabited mainly by older and poorer people and are associated with backwardness and a strong adherence to tradition.

Other factors that determine language use in Nigeria in general and Igbo society in particular is also dependent on such variables as the mode of discourse, audience and the topic. Much of written communication literature, letter writing, minutes of meeting, invitation cards, journalism etc is done in English. Among the Igbo English is associated with sophistication and progress.

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON LANGUAGE:

Government policy affects the choice and use of a particular language in a country. English language is the official language in Nigeria. Nigerians in general and Igbos in particular display positive attitude towards this 'chosen' language. Since the language serves as a means of carrying out official functions, so the people are forced to use it to fit in. it is also chosen as a medium of training skilled man power.

INCENTIVES AND PERSONAL INTEREST:

When the users of a particular language are given incentives for using a particular language, it will encourage them to remain loyal to the language. Also personal interest enhance the use of a particular language. In Igbo land, incentives like employment, higher education, scholarship etc helps to fan personal interest of the people especially the youths in the use of English language.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ON IGBO:

Language is seen as a mark of ethnic identity but the Igbo people seem to forget this as shown in their attitude towards using their language, which has affected the language negatively in no small measure as portrayed in the following ways:

Attitude of Igbo Language speakers:

According to Irono (2005:31) "The negative attitudes of the Igbo towards their language manifest in the way they use their language, both spoken and written forms. They think that the language is lexically poor for meaningful discourse and documentation.

Language Shift:

Njemanze (2007:41) says that language shift refers to the change of a community's language in favour of another one. This is seen in most informal settings in Igbo land, such as traditional marriage ceremonies, funeral ceremonies (funeral orations).

Parent's inability to speak/teach Igbo Language to their Children:

This is seen in most Igbo English bilingual homes, most parents prefer to use English for communicative purposes rather than Igbo in their homes which are informal setting.

In some secondary schools in Igbo land, the students are forbidden from speaking Igbo. Odoemene (2006:133) notes that:

In such schools, one would see inscriptions such as "Vernacular languages is prohibited in this class..."

Code Mixing and Switching:

Some Igbo speakers are unable to produce a complete sentence in Igbo without code-switching. This group, popularly referred to as "**Engligbo**" (a blend of *English* and *Igbo*), comprises Igbo-English bilinguals and has become increasingly common.

Nwadike (2008:19) holds that switching from Igbo to English is very common among the Igbo who cannot finish a sentence without switching over to English. Some domains noted by the researcher includes homes during informal interaction, in rural Igbo speech communities by preachers during preaching, in radio houses during Igbo programme e.g. "ka oha malu" done in the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Enugu also seen among Igbo teachers during Igbo lessons, seminars etc.

Borrowing/Loan words:

Obvious evidence of the negative effect of English on Igbo is the large number of vocabulary items which can be traced to loans or loan translation. Some of these words are so old that the average speaker may not recognize them as having their origin in English. Some of them are listed below.

Igbo Loan Word	English Original
Windo	Window
Radio	Radio
Chingom	Chewing gum
Bokeeti	Bucket
Kop	Cup
Waya	Wire
Lampu	Lamp
Korota	Coal tar
Roba	Rubber
Suga	Sugar

Writing System:

There is this disconnection between the written and the spoken form of the Igbo language. In Igbo, we spell and write as we pronounce words but people violate this rule by anglicizing the words. This can be seen in the spelling of Igbo names and places.

Names of Places:

Wrong way	Correct way
Awka	Oka
Onitsha	Onicha
Nsukka	Nsuka
Awgu	Ogu
Enugu	Enugwu
Owerri	Oweri
Anambra	Anambara/Anambala
Orlu	Olu etc.

Names of People

Wrong way	Correct way
Udeh	Ude
Ibeh	Ibe
Edeh	Ede
Nwafor	Nwafo
Okafor	Okafo
Orji	Oji
Nworgu	Nwogu
Okoh	Okoko etc.

In the above, we can notice the violation of Igbo phonotactics. Igbo does not allow consonant clusters (unless in borrowed words) but we can see that in words like 'Nworgu', 'Orji', 'Awgu', 'Nsukka', 'Awka' etc.

The problem of standard dialect: There has been a long standing cold war between the Onitsha Igbo and Owerre Igbo in respect of a central Igbo dialect.

Further more, inconsistency in writing some of the Igbo words like Ulo ogwu, ma obu etc. Some people are of the view that these words be written separately like ulo ogwu, ma obu while others think they should be written together as written above.

Lack of production of quality literacy materials in the language:

The negative attitude toward the reading of texts and other materials written in Igbo have made some writer who had interest in writing Igbo texts and materials to stop since they could not get many readers.

Alienation of the people to their language:

An Igbo child is unable to communicate with a villager. An Igbo child is an alien amidst relatives. According to Njoku (2004), it is a fall-out of the sustained colonial campaign that everything African is evil.

Inadequate time given for the learning of Igbo on the primary and secondary school time table.

The rejection of the Igbo language course by Igbo speaking students at the Universities, except it is considered as the last resort.

The negative effects of all the above findings have made many people to conclude that Igbo is an endangered language. Iwuoha rightly summarized it thus:

The Igbo language has been recording fewer original speakers over the years than is healthy for the language and the culture.

A more alarming warning is issued by a recent United Nations Report which indicates that going by the rate of its (Igbo) decline, Igbo language may be extinct in the next 50 years.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The paper has highlighted some of the negative effects of the continued use of the English language on Nigerian languages, with particular emphasis on the Igbo language. In conclusion, the study reiterates that the attitudes of the Igbo people towards their native language are not encouraging, as reflected in the way they speak, read, write, and transmit the language to younger generations. Based on the findings, it is evident that language users play a crucial role in the survival, endangerment, or extinction of their language. The study concludes that the current state of the Igbo language clearly indicates both its present condition and the direction in which it is heading, underscoring the urgent need for deliberate efforts to preserve and revitalize it.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To save Igbo from the sad situation of being endangered, we recommend the wake-up calls by Igbo scholars like Ejiofor (2008);

1. Parents should make it a rule in their house that Igbo be spoken.
2. Igbo should be made a compulsory subject in both Primary and Secondary Schools in Igbo speaking areas.
3. State and local governments should take the responsibilities of at least subsidizing teaching and reading materials as a way of encouraging learners.
4. Igbo authors should publish their works in Igbo or translate them into Igbo.
5. works in Igbo should be adapted into films to further bring the language closer to the people.

It is noteworthy to mention that Nnamdi Azikiwe University has enhanced the status of Igbo language by making it a general studies course. Students are therefore compelled to offer Igbo language in year one. We recommend that other institutions of learning should borrow a leaf from UNIZIK.

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