

The Genealogy and Motivation for *Igbongo*

Chinasa Patience Okpala

Abstract

There is an evidence of secret variety in many of the worlds' languages. For diverse reasons, people create secrete language or code among their peers or group. This study examines the genealogy and motivation for *Igbongo*. Social identity theory was used and Snowball Sampling was adopted. It was gathered that there is no consensus on the origin of *Igbongo* but that *Igbongo* is an ancient Igbo invention. The result shows that *Igbongo* is fallout of a high mastery of the standard language on which it is based. In other words, individuals were so versed and proficient in their Igbo language or dialect that they were able to modify it to suit their purpose. On the motivation for *Igbongo*, the respondents used *Igbongo* for reasons of fun, secrecy, bragging and gossip. However, the majority of the respondents used *Igbongo* to conceal information as well as distance non-speakers of the language. The implication of this finding is that there are various reasons why people use the variety across Igbo communities. It is note-worthy that this language has survived despite advances in technology, the influence of Western culture as well as globalisation. This survival is a demonstration of the fact that *Igbongo* is a variety of Igbo with various socio-cultural functions in the community. Although the speakers of *Igbongo* are few, it is suggested that this language be codified and further research conducted on it to fathom its uniqueness, in terms of phonology.

Keywords: Igbo, *Igbongo*, Secret language, Insertion, Concealment

Introduction

One of the characteristics of language is dynamism and flexibility. For different reasons, people manipulate spoken language to meet their needs at any point in time. The reason for the manipulation may be for fun, concealment of information, ego and so on. In attempt to conceal certain information and to have fun, people create what is regarded as

secret language, secret variety or language game. This creation is not used in everyday conversation rather; they are used among friends for a particular purpose to talk about other people who are not in their group. Crystal and Robinson (2015) submit that every language user can alter his vocabulary very easily. This means that every user can create new words and invent new meanings from the existing words and cease to use some words or use them to mean certain things. In other words, all languages can be manipulated. In order to create secret code, new rules that will guide the structure of the potential language are stated by the group. The new inventory follows the agreed patterns. New variety can be formed through insertion, shortening, or alternation of the existing words or parts of words. Language users can as well conceal their feelings in form of linguistic deception (Crystal et al 2015). However, Igbo language is no exception, hence, the creation of *Igbongo*.

The term '*ngo*' means diagonal, complicated, narrow, or not straightforward. While the prefix '*Igbo*' means language. Therefore, *Igbongo* can be viewed as a secret variety of Igbo language created by adulterating the existing Igbo structure through the insertion of clitic(s) (tu/tu/ru/ru/zu/zu) in-between the syllables of the existing Igbo words (standard or dialects) with the intension of excluding the untrained ear(s). Considering the aim of the creation, *Igbongo* is classified as a secret variety of Igbo language. The classification is based on the fact that anyone who is not knowledgeable in *Igbongo* needs training to understand it. Unfortunately, this secret variety has not attracted the attention of the Igbo scholars and Nigerian scholars in general. Consequently, it is scarce to see written literature or any form of documentation on this variety. For this reason, we shall focus our discussion on what western scholars have written on secret language.

The Concept of Secret Language

Secret variety according to Demisse and Bender (1983) is a system of manipulating spoken words to render them incomprehensible to the untrained ear. This language as they further expatiate is similar with cant, cryptolect, jargon or argot which is employed by a group to exclude or mislead people outside the group. Borowsky and Avery (2009) refer to it as 'Language Games'. Language games as they opine "are primarily used by children to disguise their speech from others". They use it to talk

among themselves without comprehension by adults or by other children who are not in their group (Day 2013). In Philippine, courting adolescents couples have difficulty achieving physical intimacy as they are closely watched by their chaperone; hence they use secret languages to gain verbal intimacy (Cooklin 1956, cited by Day 2013). In some cultures, secret language such as language of the Cuna Indian in Panama is mostly used for entertainment rather than for concealment (Scherzer 1970 cited by Day 2013). This type of language usually begins with adding new rules to native language (Day 2013). Contrastively, Fontana (2011) is of the opinion that most secret languages are not true languages at all, rather they are ciphers. According to him, “a cipher keeps the word order and structure of the original language, but either replaces the words with new ones, or changes them by some transformational rule”. He further asserts that this will stop people who do not know the secret from understanding what the person is saying. However, whether it is called cipher, secrete code, secrete language, secret variety or language game by linguists, the obvious fact is that they have systematic structure and the purpose is mostly for the exclusion of non-members. Monster (2015) gave the following examples of secret language:

i. Eggy-Peggy

This type of secret language is derived by adding “egg” before each vowel.

Example:

Meggary heggad egga leggittle leggamb. ‘Mary had a little lamb’

ii. Gree

This is derived by adding “gree” to the end of every word.

Example:

Marygree hadgree agree littlegree lambgree. ‘Mary had a little lamb’

iii. Na

Add “na” to the end of every word.

Example:

Maryna hadna ana littlena lambna ‘Mary had a little lamb’

iv. Skimono Jive:

Add “sk” to the beginning of every word.

Example:

Skmary skhad ska sklittle sklamb ‘Mary had a little lamb’

It is noted that the common difficulty with language games or secrete language is that they are usually passed down orally, and with varying spellings.

Methodology

The study is predicated mainly on the qualitative approach. *Igbongo* has no specific setting or geographical area of the Igbo community where it is spoken. The number of people who speak *Igbongo* is inferably indeterminate. Out of the population of the speakers, 20 participants were selected from the entire population. The 20 respondents were from different Igbo states. There is no equal sample because we couldn’t get the required number of participants from every state at the time of this study. The age and status did not also balance because of the same challenge. The sampling technique adopted is the snowball sampling. The major instrument employed to source data is interview: oral interviews and telephone conversation.

Profile of Respondents

VARIABLES	CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY	%	TOTAL
Gender	Male	9	45	100
	Female	11	55	
	Total	20		
Age	25 – 35 yrs	11	55	100
	36 – 45 yrs	4	20	
	46 – 60 yrs	5	25	
	Total	20		
Marital Status	Single	12	60	100
	Married	8	40	
	Total	20		
Occupation	Trading	7	35	100
	Working	9	45	
	Schooling	4	20	
	Total	20		

VARIABLES	CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY	%	TOTAL
State	Anambra	6	30	100
	Imo	4	20	
	Enugu	5	25	
	Abia	3	15	
	Ebonyi	2	10	
	Total	20		

Out of the respondents, 6 were from Anambra, 5 from Enugu State, 4 Imo participants, 3 Ebonyi and 2 from Abia State. All the respondents were drawn from the three age groups (25-35, 36-45 and 46-70). The total number of interviewees is 8 women and 12 men across the Igbo state.

Data and Analysis

Here we present the sociological analysis of data and actual findings on the origin of this peculiar secrete variety use by Igbo despite the fact that the speakers have their unique dialects sufficient for interaction. It also sheds light into the reason the variety is used across Igbo communities irrespective of dialectal disparities.

The Form and features of *Igbongo*

Igbongo is formed by adding clitic(s) within a word, thus breaking its natural form. *Igbongo* occurs in restricted environments in a word or strings of words. Based on our observations, the significant feature realized in this variety of the secret Igbo variety is the affixation or the insertion of “*tu/tu, ru/ru, mu/mu, zu/zu or ti/ti*” in-between syllables of a word or at word-initial position. It is worthy of note that the application of *Igbongo* marker does not alter the semantic aspect of the words in which it is affixed or inserted. Another significant feature of this language is the processes of its affixation. The five varieties below are identified in *Igbongo* and their constructions are based on the same principles. Let us consider the following examples:

Ebee ka i na-aga?

- i. Tu/Tu Igbongo**
Etubee tuka i tuna atuga? ‘Where are you going to?’
- ii. Ru/Ru Igbongo**
Erubee ruka i runa aruga? ‘Where are you going to?’
- iii. Mu/Mu Igbongo**
Emubee muka i muna-amuga? ‘Where are you going to?’
- iv. Zu/Zu Igbongo**
Ezubee zuka i zuna-azuga? ‘Where are you going to?’
- v. Ti/Ti Igbongo**
Etibee tika i tina atiga? ‘Where are you going to?’

Ana m eje ahia

- i. Tu/Tu Igbongo**
Atuna tum etuje atuhia ‘I’m going to the market’
- ii. Ru/Ru Igbongo**
Aruna rum eruje aruhia ‘I’m going to the market’
- iii. Mu/Mu Igbongo**
Amuna mum emuje amuhia ‘I’m going to the market’
- iv. Zu/Zu Igbongo**
Azuna zum ezuje azuhia ‘I’m going to the market’
- v. Ti/Ti Igbongo**
Atina tim etije atihia ‘I’m going to the market’

Esighi m nri

- i. Tu/Tu Igbongo**
Etusitughi tumu nturi ‘I did not cook food’

- ii. **Ru/Ru Igbongḡ**
Erusirughi rumu nruri 'I did not cook food'
- iii. **Mu/Mu Igbongḡ**
Emusimughi mum nmuri 'I did not cook food'
- iv. **Zu/Zu Igbongḡ**
Ezuszughi zum nzuri 'I did not cook food'
- v. **Ti/Ti Igbongḡ**
Etisitighi tim ntiri 'I did not cook food'

O sichaala nri tupu m aḡia

- i. **Tu/Tu Igbongḡ**
O tusituchaatula nturi tututupu
tumu atubia 'He has finished cooking
before I came'
- ii. **Ru/Ru Igbongḡ**
O rusiruchaarula nruri raturupu
rum arubia 'He has finished cooking
before I came'
- iii. **Mu/Mu Igbongḡ**
O musimuchaamula nmuri
mutumupu mum amubia 'He has finished cooking
before I came'
- iv. **Zu/Zu Igbongḡ**
O zusizuchaazula nzuri
zutuzupu zum azubia 'He has finished cooking
before I came'
- v. **Ti/Ti Igbongḡ**
O tisitichaatila ntiri titutipu timi
atibia 'He has finished cooking
before I came'

In the above information, the only noticeable difference in the interrogative and affirmative sentences is the clitic added at either word initial, final, or in-between a word; their meanings remain the same. Each of the categories is derived from the sound that is associated with the variety. Their structures still remain unchanged.

The Origin of *Igbongo*

In this section, the result of the respondents' opinions regarding the origin of *Igbongo* is presented and analysed. The question posed to respondents was simply to state the period when the variety started among Igbo communities. The responses were grouped into five categories, on the basis of content. The data sourced through oral interviews are presented and analysed below.

Category 1

Amaghị m mgbe o bidoro (Respondent 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5)

Translation: I don't know how it started.

Amaghị m mgbe o bidoro. Ihe m ma bu na etolitere m hu na-umuka na-asu ya, m soro ha saba. ' (Respondent 6)

Translation: I don't know when it started. All I know is that I grew up to see children speaking it, and then I joined them.

Amaghị m mgbe o bidodo mana onye obula no n'ulo anyi na-asu ya. (Respondent 7)

Translation: I don't know when it started but everybody in our house speaks it.

Amaghị m mgbe o bidoro kama na amutara m ya n'onu nna m mgbe m pere mpe. (Respondent 8)

Translation: I don't know when it started but I learnt it from my father when I was small.

Nne ee, agaghị m asi gi na m ma mgbe asusu a bidoro. Amutara m ya n'uloakwukwo. O buladi nne na nna m amaghị asu ya. (Respondent 9)

Translation: I won't tell you that I know when this language started. I learnt it in school from my friends. Even my parents couldn't speak it.

Agara m Aba hụ na ndị enyi m na-asụ ya wee si ha kuziere m. O nweghi ihe ọzọ anyị ji ya eme na abughị ikpori ndụ. (Respondent 10)

Translation: I went to Aba and saw that my friends were speaking it so I told them to teach me. We only use it for fun.

Amaghị m mgbe o bidoro ma mgbe m pere mpe, ana m anụ ka ụmụaka na-eme 'tusa-tusa'. Amaghị m etu ha si mụta ihe ahụ maobụ onye kuziiri ya ha. (Respondent 11)

Translation: I don't know when it started but when I was small, I used to hear children saying 'tusa tusa'. I don't know how they learnt the thing or who taught them.

In category 1, eleven respondents who represent a significant majority of the overall participants reported that they did not know when *Igbongo* started. The first five respondents flatly submitted that they were ignorant of the origin. The sixth respondent reported that although he did not equally know when it started, he heard children using the variety and he joined them. The seventh respondent also admitted that he did not know the source, although all the members of his household speak *Igbongo*. The eight respondents also admitted ignorance of the source of *Igbongo* but he learnt it from his father when she was a child. The ninth respondent modestly agreed ignorance of the source but claimed that he learnt it from his friends in school and not from his parents because they lacked proficiency in the variety. The tenth respondent equally submitted that he learnt *Igbongo* from his friends when he travelled to Aba. The eleventh respondent also claimed ignorance of the source but reported that his first contact with *Igbongo* took place when he was a child and overheard his fellow children using the variety.

There are three facts evident in this result: first, all the respondents were knowledgeable about the existence of *Igbongo* as a variety of Igbo even though they did not know the source. This knowledge is a pointer to the fact that the *Igbongo* had gained some ground among Igbo communities. The second observable fact is that the respondents actually learnt it before they gained good proficiency in it.

The fact that they learnt it is suggestive of the fact that the variety was different from the conventional Igbo they acquired from birth. It is interesting that no respondent reported knowing *Igbongo* from birth. All of them claimed that they encountered the variety at one period or the other in their lives. The third observable fact is that the respondents came across *Igbongo* through different sources: children, family, friends and parents. This is a testimony that *Igbongo* is patronized by different categories of people, irrespective of age and social status. However, among the sources, it is apparent that children were the ones mostly involved in the learning of the variety and eventual transmission to others.

Category 2

A sị na o bidoro mgbe a na-anụ agha. (Respondent 1)

Translation: They said that it started during the war.

Anụrụ m na ọ malitere mgbe a na-anụ agha. Na n'oge ahụ, ndị mmadụ na-agbapụ n'ụlọ ha gbaga obodo ọzọ ebe ha na-agba ọsọ ndụ. Na ndị a gbagara ọsọ be ha meputara asusu Igbo ọzọ ka ndị be ha na-eji ya na-akpakọrị n'etiti onwe ha iji wee mee ka ndị gbataara ọsọ agha be ha ghara ịdị na-anụ ihe dī aña ha na-ekwu n'ihì na ha na-atụ ụjọ na ha nwere ike ịbụ sabo. Ndị gbatakwaranụ ọsọ ewepụtakwa nke ha ka ha wee na-akpakwa ihe ụfọdụ na nzuzo n'obodo ha gbagara ọsọ agha. N'uzọ dī etu a, ha niile na-asụ Igbo mana ọ bụ ndị nọ n'otu na-asụ nke ha na-asụ ga-aghota. Ma nke a egbochikwaghị ha ịsụ Igbo izugbe ma ọ bụrụ na ha chọọ ikwu ihe meturu onye ọbụla. Mana ọ bụrụ na e tinye "tu/tu ma na-ekwu okwu ọsịsọ, onye ọbụla na esoghi n'obodo ma ọbụ otu na-asụ ya agaghị aghota. (Respondent 2)

Translation: I learnt that it emerged during the war. That during the period, people abandoned their homes to avoid getting killed. That the host communities devised another means of communication that is different from the proper Igbo to conceal certain issues from the strangers in their communities whom they thought might be saboteurs. The migrants on the other hand also

created their own versions to be able to have their own privacy in their host villages. In this case, they all speak Igbo language but only the speakers belonging to the group that use a particular version would understand. It doesn't prevent migrants and the host community from communicating in standard Igbo when they want to share some general information. With the application of the marker /tu/tu/ coupled with rapid speech involved in this code, anybody who is not among the community that uses any of the varieties would find it difficult to understand.

In the above category, we have a view different from those in category one. The two respondents under this group reported that *Igbongo* was created during the war. The first respondent just stated that it started during the war. However, his response shows that even he himself is not convinced of what he heard concerning the source of *Igbongo*. He is just on a neutral ground in repeating what he heard. The second respondent who claimed to be educated on the origin of *Igbongo* narrated the history as she was told. She claimed that *Igbongo* started during the war because there was need for privacy between the migrants and their host community. In her submission, both the migrating group and the host community invented or played with Igbo words for reasons of exclusion. She also reported that not only that people inserted different sounds in the syllables of words, but also that the secret code involves rapid speech which also contributes to its incomprehensibility.

The two respondents in this category were siblings; therefore, there is a probability that they had the same orientation on the source of *Igbongo*. However, it is noted that *Igbongo* cut across the entire Igbo community, and so, there may be a possibility that *Igbongo* really started during the war. This is because no members of the same community could be said to have migrated to the same community during the war. The logic from what the second respondent reported may be that the migrants and the host communities created different versions, and after the war, they got back and rejoined with the members of their communities. Every group that migrated to another community used a variety different from the ones spoken by others. As a result of this, *Igbongo* became diverse and cut across Igbo communities and the varieties

are used by groups of people rather than particular communities or towns. No community can be said to have only one variety, rather, different groups within a community use separate varieties.

Category 3

Hee, o teelanu. Echetaziḱwaranu m ya. Nne, amazighi m ka e si asu ya. O teela anyi sudebere ya makana ndi niile anyi na ha nasu ya mgbe ahụ agbasachaala gaba oruonyibo, o wezighi onye ya na ibe ya na-ahu. I ma na o bughị mmadu niile ma asu ya. Mana a sụbakwa ya ugbu a, aga m echeta. (Respondent 1)

Translation: Hee! It has been long. I no longer remember it. I can no longer speak it. It has been long I spoke it because among all of us that were speaking it, everybody has travelled out of the village. We no longer see each other. You know that is not everybody that speaks it. But if someone speaks it now I will remember.

O nweghi ka m si mata etu o si bido. Naani ihe m ma bu na ndi ogbo m na-asu ya m soro ha suba. Aputara m uwa hu ya. O nwere ike ibu n'aka ndi mgbe gboo ka o bidororo. (Respondent 2)

Translation: I don't have any idea how it started. All I know is that our mates were speaking it so I joined them. Maybe it started from the ancient people

O bidoro gboo gboo. (Respondent 3)

Translation: It started in the olden days.

The respondents in category three reported that *Igbongo* started in ancient times. The first respondent in this category suggested that it is a very long time she spoke the variety and consequently had lost proficiency in it. Underlining her position is the fact that *Igbongo* is a variety sourced from antiquity. The second respondent denied knowledge of the source but suggested that it could probably be traced to the ancestors. In the same

vein, the third respondent claimed that the variety had its origin in antiquity. The implication of these submissions is that despite the effect of time, with its erosive and depreciating tendencies, the variety had managed to survive.

Category 4

Mgbe anyị pere mpe ụmụnne m na-asụ ihe ahụ mana eche m na ọ bụ nkwugheri ka ha na-ekwugheri. (Respondent 1)

Translation: When we were small, my siblings were speaking that thing but I thought they were blabbing. I didn't know it was a language.

Ọ dị m ka ọ bụ ụmụaka mebere ya maka na ọ bụ ụmụaka na-asụ ya mgbe ahụ. M onwe m mụtakwaara ya mgbe m pere mpe. (Respondent 2)

Translation: I think the children created it because they are the people using it. I also learnt it when I was small.

Ọ bụ ụmụaka malitere ya.

Translation: Children started it. (Respondent 3)

In this category, the respondents suggested that *Igbongo* was an invention of children in Igbo communities. The first respondent in this category was of the opinion that during childhood days, his siblings spoke the variety and he thought they were speaking gibberish. Underlying this position is the subtle suggestion that the variety was constructed or contrived by his siblings. The second respondent submitted that the variety was probably invented by children, based on the fact that it was children that spoke it at the time. The third respondent bluntly claimed that the variety was started by children; in other words, the origin of the variety could be traced to children. The obvious implication of this result is that children created I *Igbongo* across Igbo communities.

Category 5

Hmmmm. Ọ dighi m ka o nwere onye bidoro ya iche. Ọ di m ka ọ bu ndi noro ha arokwaa nke ha na-asu. I ma na-asusu a bara uba. Etu a m no ugbu a, mu na ndi enyi m nwere ike irokwa nke anyi malite suwa ya. (Respondent 1)

Translation: Hmmmm. I don't think anybody in particular created it. I think every group or click created their own version. You know that this language is numerous. As I am now, I might decide to create one with my friends and we will start using it.

In this category, the sole respondent posited that no particular individual invented *Igbongo* but that different groups created their own variety of *Igbongo*. To strengthen his position, he claimed that he could gather some of his friends and they can create their own variety different from others. The merit of this position is that *Igbongo* is diverse across Igbo groups and that it is subject to creativity. Consequently, it is not the exclusive preserve of anybody or group.

On the whole, it is apparent that there is no consensus among the respondents on the origin of *Igbongo* as a variety of Igbo. What is generally agreed upon is the fact that *Igbongo* is an ancient Igbo creation. What could be deduced from this result is that the secret Igbo variety is fallout of a high mastery of the main language on which it is based. In other words, individuals were so versed and proficient in their Igbo language or dialect that they were able to modify it to suit their purposes.

The Socio-Cultural Motivations for *Igbongo*

In this section, the result of the oral inquiry on the reasons behind the invention of *Igbongo* is discussed. The respondents were simply asked to provide reasons why they use *Igbongo* during interaction instead of using their dialects or the standard Igbo variety. Their responses are grouped into four categories presented below with discursions..

Category 1

Ọ bu ihe anyi ji egwuri egwu. (Respondent 1, 2, and 3)

Translation: It's something we use to play.

Anyị ji ya egwuri egwu jirikwa ya na-akpa ihe nzuzo. (Respondent 4)

Translation: We use it to play and to discuss secret issues. The respondents in category I reported that they used *Igbongo* as a pastime or game. The four respondents submitted that they used the variety as a play thing among other children. This is to suggest that they were able to manipulate their dialects in such a way that it became fun. It should be noted that the variety was a thing of fun to the respondents when they were children. The fact is that the sound of *Igbongo* is naturally funny and it is possible that children had devised several games around it for the purpose of provoking laughter.

Category 2

Anyị na-asụ ya ma ọ buru naanị mụ na-umunne m na-akparị. (Respondent 1)

Translation: We speak it only when I and my siblings are discussing.

Mụ na umunne m niile na-asụ ya. Anyị na-asụ ya ma ọ buru na anyị achoghị ka ndị ezi nụ ihe anyị na-ekwu. (Respondent 2)

Translation: I and all my siblings speak it. We speak it anytime we don't want the outsiders to understand what we are saying.

Mgbe anyị pere mpe, anyị na-eji ya eme ka ndị ezi ghara ighota ihe anyị na-ekwu. (Respondent 3)

Translation: When we were little, we used it to prevent outsiders from understanding what we were saying.

Anyị na-asụ ya ma ọ buru na anyị achoghị ka mmadụ nụ ihe anyị na-ekwu. (Respondent 4)

Translation: We speak it when we don't want another person to understand what we are saying.

Anyị na-asụ ya ma ọ bụrụ na anyị achọghị ka ndị ọzọ nụ ihe anyị na-ekwu. (Respondent 5)

'We speak it when we don't want other people to understand what we are saying.

Anyị na-eji ya ekwu ihe anyị na achọghị ka onye ọzọ nụ. (Respondent 6)

Translation: We use it in discussing something we don't want another person to understand.

Ọ bụ asụsụ e ji ekwu okwu a na-achọghị ka ndị ọzọ nụ. (Respondent 7)

Translation: It is a language that is used to talk about something that is not meant for the hearing of others.

Anyị ji ya ezo ihe anyị na-achọghị ka ndị ọzọ nụ. (Respondent 8)

Translation: We use it to conceal what we don't want the outsiders to hear.

In this category, the respondents reported that they used *Igbongo* to conceal information from other people or to discuss secret matters. The first two respondents who are siblings in this category were of the opinion that they used it among their siblings during interaction when they did not want outsiders to understand what they were discussing. This is a suggestion that they did not use it during interaction with others. The implication of this is that they used *Igbongo* as a secret code to discuss secret matters. The same reason was advanced by respondents 3-8. Essentially, the variety was used by the respondents for private interactions, thus it was a tool used to exclude other people who might be present.

Category 3

Anyị ji ya akpa nganga mgbe ahụ. I ma na ọ bughị onye ọbụla na-aghọta ya. (Respondent 1)

Translation: We were using it to massage our ego that time. You know it's not everybody that understands it.

Mgbe anyị pere mpe, anyị na-eji ya eme ka e wee si. Ọ na-atọ anyị uto na anyị na-asụ ya ma ụmụaka ndị ọzọ amaghị asụ ya. (Respondent 2)

Translation: When we were little, we used it to show off. It gives us joy that we could speak what other children couldn't speak.

Ebe mbụ m nuru ya bụ n'Ihiala, n'ikwu nna m. Ebe ahụ, onye ọbụla na-asụ ya ka asụasụ Igbo. Ma mgbe anyị lotara Okija, anyị chọputara na ndị mmadu amaghị asụ ya. Ya mere anyị ji malite iji ya eme nganga ma jirikwa ya na-ekwu ihe anyị kwesiri ikpa na nzuzo n'ihu ọha n'ihu na ha anaghị aghota. (Respondent 3)

Translation: The first place I heard it was in Ihiala, my paternal home. Almost everybody including children and adults speak and understand it and they use it like normal Igbo language. But when we got back to Okija, we noticed that people could not speak it. So we started using it to show off as well as discussing private matters in public because they won't understand.

In this category, the three respondents suggested that they used *Igbongo* to brag and massage their ego. The first respondent in this category suggested that they used it to brag because they were the only who could use the variety in their clan. Since most Igbo were not versed in the variety, the few that were proficient in it felt superior in the presence of the non-initiates. The second and third respondent provided a similar reason; they were happy that they knew how to speak it while others did not, and so used their proficiency to show off. The implication of this result is that the respondents used *Igbongo* as a status symbol in their communities.

Category 4

Ọ dị m ka ọ bụ asiri ka e ji ya akụ. (Respondent 1)

Translation: I think it's used for gossip.

E ji ya akụ asiri (Respondent 2)

It is used for gossip

The respondents in category 4 were of the opinion that *Igbongo* was essentially employed in interaction for the purpose of gossip. The first respondent in this category thought that the variety was probably used for gossip while the second respondent was certain that *Igbongo* was used for gossip. This result is sequel to the second observation, that the variety was used for discussing secret matters. However, in this instance the use is adverse since gossip has a negative connotation. The understanding here is that *Igbongo* could be used to talk negatively about someone even when the person is physically present in the setting. This is to suggest that the subject of the gossip does not understand *Igbongo*.

On the whole, it is evident that the respondents used *Igbongo* for reasons of fun, secrecy, bragging, ego and gossip. However, it could be deduced from the data that the majority of the respondents used *Igbongo* to conceal information as well as distance the non-speakers of *Igbongo*. The implication of this finding is that there are various reasons why people use the variety in Igbo communities. This is also an indication that the language variety has socio-cultural functions in the Igbo community.

Conclusion

So far, this study has discussed both the origin and the reason people use *Igbongo*. It was discovered that there are divergent views on the origin of *Igbongo*. Some of our participants were those who did not have any idea on the source of *Igbongo*. Others suggested that it was invented during the war. Some others claimed that the variety was created by children. Yet another group upheld that it was conventional without been associated to a particular community. In terms of the motivation for *Igbongo* there were several reasons why the respondents employed *Igbongo* in interaction. It was observed that the major reason for using the secret variety was to conceal information. Aside hiding information, some speakers use it as a means of distancing the unknowledgeable speakers; while other groups use it to gossip, show off and for fun. This study has exposed a very important secrete variety of Igbo language which has never attracted the attention of Igbo scholars over the years. This secrete variety is a modified Igbo form created to suit the socio-cultural needs of its speakers. It is a secret variety that is understood only by individuals who have learnt it. It is worthy of note that just like every other prestigious

language like English, Italian, French, German, Sweden, Greek, Cantonese etc, Igbo language also has a secret language that is systematic. This is a demonstration of the fact that the Igbo have been able to re-create their language for other purposes. It should also be understood that Igbo did not borrow the idea of creating a secret language from the countries mentioned above. Evidently, this is a part of language universals, which is a trait shared by languages all over the world.

As a result of the peculiarity of *Igbongo* coupled with the interest the speakers and non-speakers have in it, it is the submission of this study that this Igbo variety is worthy of documentation for the purpose of preservation. Presently, the variety is endangered because there are very few Igbo who are proficient in it in the contemporary Igbo society; even among the speakers, some are no longer as proficient in the variety as they used to be while others have forgotten it entirely. The case for the maintenance of *Igbongo* is underlined by the fact that it plays socio-cultural roles in the society.

Reference

- Borowsky, T. and Avrey, P. (2009). Dhochi: A Dhohuo Language Game. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, Vol. 29, pp. 169-194.
- Crystal, D. and Robinson, M. (2015). *The Penguin Dictionary of Language*. England: Penguin Books.
- Day, S. R. (2013) *On Learning Secret Language*. Retrieved November 20, 2016, from <https://www.theseconlang.com/check/day>
- Demisse, T. and Bender, M. L. (1983). An Argot of Addis Ababa Unattached girls. *Language in Society*, Vol. 12.3. PP. 339-347.
- Fontana, D. (2011). *The New Secret Language of Symbols: An Illustrated Key to Unlocking Their Deep & Hidden Meaning*. Retrieved November 3 from <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/240894/the-new-secret-language-of-symbols-by-david-fontana/9781786782274/>.
- Monster, F. (2015). *Secrete Languages/ Mystery Messages*. Retrieved October 15 from www.Factmonsters.com/.../AO769354.html.