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### Ìgbò Language and Culture Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

**Ikonne, Ugochi Happiness, Ph.D**

National Institute for Nigerian Languages,  
 P.M.B 7078 Aba, Abia State, Nigeria

[ikonneugo@yahoo.com](mailto:ikonneugo@yahoo.com)

+2347067972992/ +2348056434468

#### Abstract

In this paper, we are going to discuss the status of Ìgbò Language and Culture in the past (i.e. yesterday), presently, (i.e. today) and apparently predict the future (i.e. tomorrow) with the view to draw the attention of the Ìgbò to the level of neglect and endangerment the Ìgbò language and culture are facing. The Ìgbò language and culture would be reviewed from the pre literate era of the igbo to the present dispensation. It concludes that the Ìgbò should be encouraged to adopt a positive attitude towards their language and culture, speak the language and work with it, manifest their rich cultures and get their children to do the same. Beside these, certainly, there will be no Igbo language and culture tomorrow. Again, schools should be encouraged to implement the mother tongue/ language of the immediate community MT/LIC medium policy at the appropriate levels of education. The Ìgbò should shun and dismiss the fallacy that the Ìgbò language is not complete or defective of any language function. The Ìgbò should be proud to showcase the most conspicuous aspect of their culture which includes the language, naming system and mode of dress.

**Key words:** Ìgbò Language, Ìgbò culture, yesterday and today

#### Introduction

The term 'Ìgbò' is a generic one. It is used to refer to three different concepts. In the first place, Ìgbò refers to a place or geographical location called Igboland. Igboland is located in the Eastern part of Nigeria comprising states as Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo, part of Delta, Rivers and Cross Rivers States. Secondly, Igbo refers to a people; the occupants of the territory called Igboland. And finally, Ìgbò refers to a language spoken by the people; the occupants of the Igboland.

In the scheme of things in Nigeria and globally, Ìgbò is recognized. Ìgbò is one of the three major tribes in Nigeria (The others being Hausa and Yoruba). Before the advent of the whites in Nigeria, the Ìgbò spoke no other language than theirs (Ìgbò Language), They had no other culture than theirs (Ìgbò Culture). This was their status irrespective of their neighborhood with other tribes.

Language and culture are interwoven and inseparable. Language is the vehicle that drives the culture of a people. Language is the engine that runs the cultural transmission industry. When language is lost, the culture is lost, the culture is lost and the people follow. The ancient ones knew this and took advantage of the language and handed over the culture from one generation to another.

People argue today that Ìgbò language is not compete and try to buttress their points using frivolities like the absence of terminologies needed to describe some new concepts and the likes. The question is, where did the Ìgbò language fail our forefathers in the preliterate Ìgbò society? Absolutely nowhere. Language is basically or primarily spoken or oral. All languages irrespective of their status (local or a world language as English) is basically spoken. Speech is an equal beginning for all languages. Writing is a recent phenomenon. Before the advent of the whites, Ìgbò had no writing system like many other languages. So, there were no documentations. No texts, etc. However, during this period, Ìgbò Language, literature and culture were orally transmitted. Because the language and culture were one and the same, there were no institutions set apart for teaching the young ones and the strangers the language. This does not mean that the teaching of the language was neglected but rather intensified as the teaching took place everywhere; in the house, farm, on the playground, the market square, during moonlight plays etc. Systematic instruction in the language was not given but children observed skills and techniques as well as their parents and elders' habits.

Through reinforcement and examples, children were gradually initiated into their linguistic community. Children were taught the history, literature and geography of their land through stories, songs and legends. Mathematical concepts were taught by asking children to count, add, subtract and divide and in practical terms. They were taught to observe and interpret their environment by the names and species of plants, trees, animals, birds, insects, etc as well as the description of the appropriate periods of the seasons of the year. Children were taught the philosophy and ideology of their people through proverbs, idioms, anecdotes, riddles etc. Other aspects of the socialization like respect for elders, authorities, custom and tradition were embedded in the language and practical examples. Language is so vital in man's life that there is hardly any situation where language is not involved (Yusuf 2011).

### The Ìgbò Language Yesterday

Discussed hereunder are the formal functions of language as listed in Anyanwu (2007). This with the bid to buttress the fact that the Ìgbò Language did not fall short of any of these functions in the pre literate era of the Ìgbò society.

#### Functions of Language

- a. **Informational Role:** This is the most important function of language. It is used to pass information from one person to the other. Didn't the Ìgbò harness this potential in Ìgbò Language during the pre literate era? Who devised the town crying system of communication in the rural communities? Didn't they give, obtain information, make enquires in Ìgbò language? What about the '*ḷj̣u ạ̀ṣè*' (*investigation*) during marriage contracts? What about '*ḷj̣u ạ̀ṣè*' from the Dibia (divination)? What about the '*ḷṭu ọ̣ṃu*' and '*ọ̣ẓi ọ̣ṃu*' (*litigations and seeking redress in the shrines and at other traditional quarters*)?
- b. **Expressive Role:** Language serves as a means by which one can express emotions, feelings, or attitudes towards one another or even expression of state of affairs. Didn't the ancient Ìgbò use Ìgbò language to woo and conquer their spouses? Didn't they express anger, hatred, disappointments, disagreements, surprises, etc. what about their

exclamations, swearword? etc. these were achieved in the Ìgbò language during the pre literate periods.

- c. **Phatic Role:** Language is used as a means of establishing contacts and relationships with other people within one's speech community. Didn't the ancient ones use Ìgbò to greet and exchange pleasantries such as; I saala chi/I boola chi? (Good morning), Ndi ulo gi kwanu? (How is the family), Efe gi amaka (Your dress is beautiful) etc. How about making one comfortable in a situation that would have been otherwise embarrassing for instance, Mr. 'A' sneezes violently and Mr. 'B' says "*ńdu gi*" (*bless you*).
- d. **Directive Role:** Language is also used to influence the behavior or attitude of other persons as in issuing orders, commands, or making request. Didn't our forefathers, elders and authorities issue orders in Ìgbò Language and received compliance? What of those that were given severe punishments such as excommunication, banishment etc. Were these not proclaimed and communicated in Ìgbò language?
- e. **Ideation Role:** Language is used as a means of controlling or seeking compliance of the forces of nature in consonance with the peoples' beliefs and faith. This is what happens in prayers, incantations, libations, some rituals. Were curses not proclaimed on people or relieved from people in Ìgbò language? Were prayers not said in Ìgbò? Didn't the Ìgbò conduct incantation, libation, and invocation of ancestral spirits in Ìgbò language? Were not people initiated into '*òkónkò*', '*Ékpè*', *Mmụnwú* cult in Ìgbò Language? Were not people dedicated to the gods in Ìgbò language like the *Njókú*, *Mmààjì*, etc. (*names given to male and female respectively who are dedicated to the god of yam in Ngwa-Ìgbò society*).
- f. **Performative Role:** Language can be used to bring about sudden change in the state of affairs in the real world as soon as the utterance is made. For instance, a man and a woman can be living and doing things together but it is only the day they are pronounced married by their kin's spokesman, by the priest in the church, or by the registrar in the court that they become husband and wife. A child could be having bath from the day it is born but it is only the day the priest pronounces him baptized that he is baptized. One can be languishing in detention for years, but it is only the day the magistrate/judge sentences one to a term of imprisonment in the law court that the person becomes a prisoner. Didn't all these and similar things take place in Ìgbò language?
- g. **Ludic Role:** Language is used for amusement and entertainment. Didn't our fathers sing in Ìgbò language, beautiful songs, lullabies, war songs, dirge, folksongs, ballads and even the satirical songs that were meant to criticize and correct social ills?

Now that we are convinced that Ìgbò Language was a sufficient communicative tool yesterday, let us take an overview of Ìgbò culture yesterday.

### **The Ìgbò Culture Yesterday:**

Permit me to give a little insight of what culture means. Anthropologists such as Taylor (1871) defined culture as; 'That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, law, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society. Ruth Benedict, an American anthropologist defined culture as, 'a pattern of thinking and doing that runs through the activities of a people and distinguishes them from all other people'.

Corroborating the anthropologists, a document on Nigeria's Cultural Policy in 1988 describes culture as,

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

During a World Conference on cultural policies, a declaration was adopted that,

Culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. It includes, in addition to art and literature, ways of living together, value system, tradition and beliefs (UNESCO 2002).

Culture can be summarized as "peoples' way of life", peoples' everything, an imperative on people, implying that no human can exist without it. The culture of a people is their existence; it is learned, not innate (Ohaike and Ikonne 2007). The construct 'culture' is no culture unless it is manifest. It manifests in a people's religion, language, philosophy, music, dance, drama, architecture, political organization, and morality (Anyanwu 2006). Perhaps, until Nigeria hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Black Festival of Arts and Culture, otherwise known as FESTAC 77, featuring dances, music, creative arts of the black people, the idea of a black man's culture may have been nebulous to the outside world. As we can see, culture is often co-terminal with race or ethnicity; hence, we talk of the Yoruba culture, the Ìgbò culture or the British culture as distinct from the Hausa, the America, India or others.

Culture is significant in the sense that it ascribes identity to a people. The way one speaks, dresses, behaves etc obviously point to the person's culture. It is the mirror in which the past is seen and the pillar on which the present is sustained. A nation without a culture is non-existent in itself. A people without culture are considered non-existent themselves (Ejiofor 1984). Ndi Ìgbò, like all other ethnic groups had enviable culture and traditions which they believed, respected and preserved before the new dawn. Some aspects of Ìgbò culture in the pre literate era are hereunder discussed.

**a. The Belief System:**

In those days, there used to be a '*chi*' a god respected and worshiped in every community. They believed that the '*chi*' protected them and guided their every step. It also regulated their moral principles and their communal government was largely based on the dictates of the *chi*. There were the *chi igwekaala* of Umunneoha, Ala Ogbaga of Chokoneze, Nnemiri Ihie, Mkpuruakpoukwu of Amuzu, Ala Obizi of Ovuokwu, and many other powerful gods in Igboland. The people revered them and worshipped them in earnest, with the hopes of rewards and punishment for their actions in social life, good neighborliness, help to fellow man, stealing, murder, incest, witchcrafts etc. They even sought redress in times of hurt, from the *Chis*. For these and many more, our forefathers had endearing stability.

**b. Naming System:**

The spiritual or religious inclination of Ndiigbo manifest in all they do. Whatever the Ìgbò do rotates around the *chi*. This is apparent in their names. It is a well known fact that the traditional Ìgbò names are thoughtful and thought provoking. And so Ndigbo bore names like; Chinenye (God gives), Chibudo (God is peace), Chibuzo (God is the way), Chizomam (God save me), Onyinyechi (God's gift), Nnamdi (my father lives),

Azuogu (after the war), Nwigwe (child of god of the sky), Nwaeke (child born on Eke market day), etc. All these names were given based on the belief system and circumstances surrounding the birth of a child.

**c. Ìgbò Customs and Tradition:**

Strands of traditions and culture include modes of dressing, marriage practices, festivals, leadership, hospitality and communal living.

- (i) **Dressing:** Popoola (2000) reveals that dressing like religions and languages in Nigeria, is unique to regions. The modes and styles of dressing constitute one of the ways of identifying a people. Culture, races, communities, bodies, societies etc are easily recognized by their mode of dressing.

In those days, Ndiigbo did not joke with their traditional regalia. Women maintained the two layer wrapper of George or Ukpo, with the blouse and hair gear or scarf. The men wore their jompa, with their plain George wrapper, their cap and staff or walking stick. Titled men had their attire or costume full of royal splendor. The Ìgbò tradition costume distinguished Ndiigbo from other people in any gathering.

- (ii) **Marriage:** The society relies on marriage for procreation. Marriage was sanctimonious in the Ìgbò traditional society and as such, a child out of wedlock was out of it. Marriage was therefore viewed as an institution, a human affair, which by its nature, is ordained towards the well being of the spouses and the conservation of human species. The traditional marriage in Igboland was the highlight of human's life as the parents will have the opportunity to provide and transfer some cultural expectations to the bride and groom. Payment of dowry and all other marriage protocols were observed before the man and woman were proclaimed husband and wife.
- (iii) **Leadership:** Ndiigbo appreciate and adore achievement and success attained through hardwork. Attainment of success by hardwork was like climbing an Iroko tree which is seldom done and when it is done, calls for celebration. Right from the pre-colonial era, Ndiigbo are known to be so highly democratic that the choice of the Eze (king) is strictly based on honesty, transparency, accountability and fairness of judgment, no matter whose ox is gored. Chieftaincy titles were either honorary or hereditary. They are earned not bought. The Eze and titled men were the true custodians of Ìgbò culture. All constituted authorities were revered and obeyed.
- (iv) **Festivals:** Festivals occupy a vital place in the Nigerian society. Every ethnic group celebrates one thing or the other from time to time. It is a period of home-coming and a meeting of kith and kin. In those old days, the various versions of the yam festivals (the iriji and ikeji), the Ofala as it is called in some parts of Igboland, the Aja oru of Ovuokwu/Ovungwu, the ikoro of Mbutu, the Ekpe of Nsulu, the Ohafia War Dance etc were cultural festivals that pulled Ndiigbo together and made them outstanding.
- (v) **Hospitality:** One amiable attribute of the Ìgbò is the Spirit of hospitality. It does not follow whether the host is poor or rich. He wants to be of good help, treating his guest with dignity and respect. This attribute of Ndiigbo is epitomized in Chinua Achebe's description of the coming of the Whites in

Igboland. It is the hospitality virtue of the Ìgbò that earns them the slogan “o huru obia gbawa nkwa (egwu)” (one who welcomes his guest with a dance/excitement).

#### d. **Philosophy of Life:**

Our values and worldview constitute our ideas about what principles should guide our social interaction and social relations generally. Core Ìgbò values include:

- (i) **Respect for Human Life:** In those old days, human life was of great value. People did everything to preserve life. Killing of self or others i.e. suicide or murder was a taboo. Anybody who committed suicide caused unimaginable grief to his kinsmen and folk. The gods would have to be appeased before the body of the deceased would be accepted into the shrine or evil forest. On the other hand, anybody who committed murder was banished for good. The birth of a new child was communally celebrated. The value for life made it a taboo to terminate pregnancy or abandon a baby.
- (ii) **Death:** In the traditional Ìgbò society, death was respected. The Ìgbò sees a bond between life and death. Hence a clean death of a man at ripe age was celebrated and given a befitting burial while the death of an unclean one like one who committed incest or practiced witchcraft was termed ‘onwu ojoo’ (bad death). Such was thrown into the evil forest.
- (iii) **Old Age and Wisdom:** Old age was respected in the traditional Ìgbò society. The old, on account of their age and experience are believed to have some spiritual powers. They are courted for their blessing, and revered for the potent curses. The death of an old person is viewed as an increase in the ancestral membership, the guardian spirits of the people.
- (iv) **Hard Work:** In the traditional Ìgbò society, wealth did not come in dreams, nor affluence by chance but by dint of hard work. Source of wealth was critically scrutinized before it is accorded recognition.

#### **Ìgbò Language and Culture Today**

We would recall that we said earlier that language is primarily spoken or oral; that writing is a recent phenomenon. The history of Ìgbò handwriting is traced to the whites who colonized and evangelized Africa. To them, African education was primitive because there were no documentations and everything was orally transmitted. This oral status of African language posed serious difficulty to the whites in their business of evangelism.

It is against this backdrop that they decided to develop handwriting for African Languages (Ìgbò inclusive). The journey from orality to the written status of African and Nigerian Languages (Ìgbò inclusive) is a distant one. The history would be spared here for fear of gaining volumes. Although, it was a herculean task for the missionaries, the summary is that Ìgbò language has been reduced into writing today. Apart from the success reckoned with in codification of Ìgbò language, Ìgbò language has been standardized and modernized for utilization in all spheres of life; education, commerce, technology, entertainment, communication, /media, politics, religion, etc.

Igbor language has been developed to do more for us today than it did for our forefathers yesterday but unfortunately, the potentials of this language were harnessed more yesterday than

it is today. And the question comes, why do we do less with our language today than our fathers did with it yesterday?

A lot of factors have been blamed for this relegation of Ìgbò Language. Civilization, modernization, Western Education etc. are all blamed for the fate of Ìgbò language today.

### **Ìgbò Language in Homes Today**

The threat Ìgbò language faces today started in homes with the native speakers. Ndiigbo show negative attitude towards their language especially the Elites; the professors, doctors, teachers etc. Language attitude indicates how an individual feels and thinks about his/her language (Njemanze 2007). Parents do not communicate with their children in Ìgbò Language. Even those who claim to be promoters of the Ìgbò language do not speak the language to their children and neither do they encourage their wards to make a career in Ìgbò Language (Study Ìgbò in higher schools). Elites disqualify and dismiss domestic staff for not being able to speak impeccable English to their wards.

Many Ìgbò elites are illiterates in Igbo language. They can neither read nor write the language. Where they make efforts to speak Ìgbò at all, they speak 'Engliigbo' (codemixed) the type or version of Ìgbò Language described by the Ìgbò popular Musician, Late Oliver De Coque' when he sang:

*Onye choro isu oyibo ya suwa,  
Onye choro isu Ìgbò ya suwa  
Onye asula o gbara Ìgbò gharii,  
Anyi achozzighi ingligbooo!*

Meaning: speak English if you Wish, Igbo if you wish but not the adulterated (code mixed).

To illustrate how incompetent many Igbo elites are in their Mother tongue, if for instance, a whole environment is under seize by hoodlums and a good Samaritan among them decides to save lives by dropping into each person's hand a piece of information written in Igbo describing how to escape through a hidden exist in that environment, how many of the elites would take advantage of that gesture. Apparently very few would. This is because, very many are illiterates in the Ìgbò language.

Igbo elites shamelessly apologize to the public that they cannot speak Igbo. Such quickly come to the rescue of their wards with the excuse that 'Junior does not speak Igbo'. Many parents will say about their children 'they understand but they don't speak the language'. Tell me how they will speak when you don't. What do you expect from the children when greeting are said in English, family devotions conducted in English, every other instruction and interactions at home are done in English? How would they see any virtue or take pride in their language?

The illiterate parents are about overtaking the elites in their quest for English medium in the homes. Where do we go from here?

### **Igbo Language in Churches Today**

This is one place Igbo language has been relegated to the background. Today church services are conducted in English irrespective of where it takes place. Funeral services are conducted in English even in the remotest part of Igbo land. At best, the services of an interpreter are employed. Ìgbò people no longer pray in Ìgbò language. That is the reason why we have people praying "as our faces are different so our problems are different". I wonder how many people here these days can read the Igbo Bible and sing the Igbo hymns.

### **Igbo Language in Our Schools Today**

The History of language education in Nigeria is traced to the Europeans missionaries who in addition to propagation of Christianity offered western education. In their effort to offer formal education, they made an early discovery that, “the African child was best taught in his native language” (Hair 1967 in Ikonne, 2006)

Following this observation, the church missionary society (CMS), a major stakeholder in African mission (Nigeria inclusive) and education, issued a report in 1816 that, ‘instructions in the early years in primary education shall be in local languages and nothing more (Osokoya 1987 in Ohaiké & Ikonne 2004)

This report was reinforced by the 1922 reports of the Phelps-stokes commission which revealed that “African Formal Education was non-functional and inadaptible” and recommended among other things, ‘the use of indigenous languages for the beginning of education’. It is against this background that the British government issued a report in 1923 and 1941 respectively that, ‘a child should not move to higher class unless he has made a good grade in mother tongue’.

In spite of these early views of the missionary, the indigenous elites believed and spread the fallacy that it was better and more esteemed to train persons in English than in indigenous languages (Taiwo 1980 in Ikonne 2006). For such reasons, English medium stood ground in schools for many years after independence.

However, following heightened agitations in the parliament and other relevant quarters over the insistence of English at the detriment of indigenous languages, Federal Government of Nigeria began to take interest in the language issues. In 1977, Government issued an official document titled, National Policy on Education (NPE).

The National policy on Education (NPE) provided predominantly among other things, the language policy for the nation. Government in appreciation in the importance of language in the educational process, in preservation of culture and in national integrations and unity provided for mother tongue(MT) education captured in the following statement, ‘government will see it that the medium of instruction for early primary school would be Mother Tongue (MT) or Language of the Immediate Community (LIC) and at later stage, English’ (NPE 1977, revised 2004).

This language provision of the NPE for the beginning of education has pedagogical justifications. Studies have shown that the language in which education is given to the child makes a huge difference in the way he/she receives education. NERDC (1971) reveals that, ‘Nigerian children will develop in curiosity, manipulative skills, spontaneous flexibility, initiative, industry, and manual dexterity if they are taught through the use of mother tongue’.

This was confirmed by Ife Experimental project called the Ife SYPP which found among other things that;

Primary education in MT leads to more permanent literacy and numeracy; it leads to faster and more rounded development of cognitive, affective and manipulative skills, primary education in mother tongue has a greater surrender value and makes the child a better adjusted citizen in the community (Fafunwa et al 1989 cited in Ikonne 2006).

Other scholars have lent credence to the language policy for the initial literacy. For instance, Chumbow (1990) observed that the child learns better and develops faster cognitively if he/she is taught in his/her MT continuously over a period of time. The reason is that the child uses his

MT/LIC to categorize his environment, i.e. naming of objects, describing of actions, ideas, attributes etc. This implies that the mother tongue helps the child in molding his early concepts in life (Awoniyi 1985).

Chumbow also noted that 'education in an appropriate medium provides the knowledge, skills and values necessary for a man to become an effective agent of 'change' and this is achieved if effective communication takes place between the teacher and the learner'.

Obialor (1990) corroborating Chumbow, rightly pointed out that, 'if a child must learn well at school, grasp the basic concepts and be able to make progress in the later life, the environment (language) in which he begins education must not be strange to him'.

Olagoke (1979) apparently had the language policy in mind when he argued that;

The point however is that the best medium for teaching the children at the initial stages of their education is their MT, and it is after a firm linguistic foundation has been laid in it that there should be a change to the use of English medium at all stages.

Olagoke supported Sharama (1975) who argues that, 'no foreign language can take the place of a native language and no system of education can afford to disregard the native language without serious detriment to the mental development of the child'.

Reinforcing Sharama's, Okonkwo (1986) (cited in Anyanwu and Ikonne 2007) emphasized that, 'any education system that disregards the first language of the child will automatically be contributing against the mental and social development of the child'.

UNESCO (2003) confirms through years of research that, 'children who begin their education in MT make better start and continue to perform better than those for who school starts with new language. They not only acquire strong initial skills, but also acquire second language faster when it is introduced later in their educational cycles.

The potency or efficacy of mother tongue medium in the development of literacy and numeracy skills in children is proved by the UBE PEP11 research conducted in Abia state (Emenanjo et al. 2003).

Despite all the findings in favour of mother tongue education, what is the situation today? Igbo language is one of the three major Nigerian languages, well developed, taught as school subject from primary education through tertiary education. Despite this jumbo status ascribed to it as one of the national languages in Nigeria, it occupies a pitiable position in the school system.

In the first place, the language provision of the NPE which stipulate that Igbo language (like the other two major languages) be used as a medium of instruction in pre-primary and early primary education. In virtually all the primary schools, Igbo language is not taught at all as a subject, let alone constituting the medium of instruction. In secondary schools, the subject is treated with indignation. Students choose it to make up for the subject requirement for O'Level external examinations and many schools move on without Igbo teacher.

In tertiary institutions, very few people enter for Igbo. Aziza (2010) laments that majority of those who register to study our local languages do not come willingly. They are usually those who have been rejected by other departments and are unwilling to wait another year for admission into the programme of their choice. Such students make the teaching and learning of Igbo language difficult and uninteresting. The lack of interest in Igbo language has resulted in the dearth of Igbo language teachers. Where there are no interested and motivated students

to train, good and quality teachers cannot be produced. In all the tertiary institutions where Ìgbò language is studied, there is scarcity of Ìgbò language lecturers.

It is even more worrisome to observe that the few people who the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) or even university degree in indigenous languages have refused to teach them. They prefer to teach their second teaching subjects like English, French, Social Studies etc. or find jobs in banks or other establishments where their training is not required.

### **Ìgbò Language in Communication Entertainment and Film Industry Today**

Ìgbò language has been shown the exit door in the media today. Apart from the news otherwise referred to as 'Akuko Uwa' in our radio and television stations, and perhaps a few other programmes like 'Nti Nara Rie', all other are transmitted in English. World Broadcasting Stations like BBC, Voice of America, radio France, Radio Germany, Radio South Africa etc have slots for transmission in Hausa but none for Ìgbò language. Independent Television Industries in Nigeria like DAAR Communications, DSTV etc, have had channels for Hausa, Yoruba and some other Nigerian languages but Ìgbò is lagging behind.

Furthermore, other major tribes in Nigeria have newspapers in their different languages except the Ìgbò. For instance, Hausa newspaper titled 'Gakiya Tafi Kabo' exists, available Yoruba newspapers include; Alariya, Oodua, Alaroye, Iriri, Akede Oduduwa (Ejiofor 2008). The only Ìgbò newspaper, 'Ogene' published in 1976 by Star Printing and Publishing Company died a natural dead. It is pleasant to state here that the National Institute for Nigerian Languages, Aba, Abia State of Nigeria now produces newspaper in the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Ìgbò Yoruba).

It is disheartening that people hardly create adverts in Ìgbò language any more. Adverts are natural ways of popularizing, preserving and facilitating language usage.

I still remember the advert on 'Rin' tablet soap,

'Aka ncha Rin, Rin, aka ncha mara mma,  
O na-asapu akwa ocha, ocha, ncha Rin amaka'

Many Ìgbò radio dramas like 'Ojemba', 'Igiririndu', 'Icheku' etc have gone moribund. In the Nollywood, Igbo has gone under too. The Ìgbò actors and actresses set the pace in the movie industry but their movies are not produced in Igbo language. Shortly after the production of 'living in bondage', 'Ikuku' and few other Igbo films, the Igbo film producers decided to produce in English. (This is the reason the DSTV African Magic (the English Channel) is dominated by the Igbo actors and actresses. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) (2006) cited in Ejiofor (2008) reveals that 44% of Nigerian films (Nollywood) are produced in English, 31% in Yoruba, 24% in Hausa and 1% in Igbo. However, it is worrisome that the majority of these English films are produced by Ndiigbo. Similarly, appraisal of the music and entertainment industry reveals that while the Hausa, Yoruba and other tribes in Nigeria produce songs /music in their languages, the Igbo musicians float. Their productions are neither indigenous nor foreign. It is for such situations that Ejiofor (2002) asked; 'The Igbo language, is it a tongue without a mouth? Surely, it looks like a dying language of a living people'.

### **The Igbo Culture Today:**

#### **a. The Belief System**

As though it is only in Igboland that civilization and Christianity came. The present day Ìgbò are after strange gods. They abandoned their *chis*, made no sacrifices to them, and did not think of them as anything but artifacts. The relegation of the *chis* became

complete with the embracing of foreign politics enforced by colonialism. The cherished communal values of brotherhood, family ties are now of little value to Ndiigbo.

Modernity, commerce and other contacts add to the influx of foreign people and ideas and in-roads are made into our cherished culture. Even the morality- regulating gods are sold as works of art to foreigners who ostensibly value them more than we do. We are left with greed, avarice, and clamour for strange gods and values. Although, societies are bound to change, we want to believe that the Igbo communities seem to value other people's culture more than theirs. We are neither close to nature, to the land nor to our gods anymore. All that revolves around the *chis* are today considered fetish.

#### **b. The Naming System Today.**

For practical purposes, the Igbo are murdering their language and consequently their culture. The well-thought-out Igbo naming system has been bastardized. What could be possibly offensive in Oluebube, Mmeri, Amarachi, Chidiebube, Chiagoziem, etc that today we can only bear, favour, Amblessed, Miracle, Prosper, Success, Praise, Gospel, Providence, Marvelous and the likes. Today, after parents had given Igbo names to their children, either they or their children repent later and anglicize the names or denounce them completely. I had a funny experience some time ago when I visited my cousin in his new location. I spent hours asking around when in the real sense I was at the right place. The reason being that nobody knew him by the name I was calling. My cousin had repented, changed his first name and took our grandfather's silent name.

These days, people no longer want to maintain family names. Wives bear their husband's first names, so also children, their fathers' first name. In this era of foreign names, these are the kind of names the Igbo bear; Glory Peter, Favour Praise, Eucharist Gospel, Amblessed Johnson etc. and they will ask, does it matter? Let us give an illustration that determines whether it matters or not.

"Nigerian children, basically Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba travelled in a boat and incidentally the boat capsized and sank with all the occupants. Then rescue teams made up of Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba were alerted, despatched and charged to rescue the children by their names only. The Hausa must rescue Hausa children only, the Yoruba and the Igbo respectively. Meanwhile all the children were alive when the rescue teams arrived. The Hausa rescue team, rescued the Jumais, Aishas, Halatus, Audus, Usmans, etc. All the Hausa children were rescued. The Yoruba rescued all the Bimbos, Tokumbos, Seyins, Idowus, Alabas etc and all the Yoruba children were rescued. The Igbo team could only rescue five people namely, Nnenna, Uju, Emeka, Obioma and Chinyere. They went home rejoicing that only five Igbo children were involved in the incident. Hours later, it was announced that about 500 Igbo children who were involved in the accident drowned. The drowned are the Mary Jones, Favour Peter, Ruth Paul, Angel Praise, etc. Who is to be blamed for this loss of lives?"

#### **c. Mode of dress today:**

All through the colonial rule, the Hausa/ Fulani and Yoruba never flirted with the idea of adopting the western mode of dress. They stuck to their flowing gowns. It is the Igbo that still prefers suit even in the scorching African sun. As for the contemporary Igbo woman, hers is the skimpy, semi-nude provocative dress of the West. And the young find succor in Yankee dressing. The new (Pentecostal) churches will almost jeer at a member who puts on Jompa, two-layer wrapper etc. They have a special day for African dressing service.

**d. Marriages today:**

Today young men and women live as husbands and wives without formal introduction to the parents. Payment of dowry and other marriage protocols are neglected. Single parenthood is an innovation and broken homes are also common in Ìgbò society today.

**e. Festivities:**

The Argungu fishing festival is an annual event in Sokoto. The Egungun festival in Yoruba land is eagerly awaited yearly. The Eyo festival of Yoruba land is now an international event drawing active participants from all over the world every August. But here in Igbo land, the Iri ji, Ike ji, Ala Obizi festivals and the Ohafia War Dance face stiff opposition from the Christian religion. They are fetish. One wonders what Ndiigbo will bequeath to their future generation.

**f. Leadership:**

Today, the Ezeship is contested, Chieftaincy titles are bought. Our custom and traditions are now in the custodian of those who know next to nothing about the culture of the land. That is the reason, they commit sacrilege.

**g. Respect for Human Life:**

Today, this value is lost. People go into ritual killing, assassination and cold blooded murder for flimsy reasons. The contemporary Igbo societies even have illegal nursing and maternity homes where children born out of wedlock are taken care of and sold later on.

**h. Death:**

The era of throwing people who died unclean death into the evil forest is gone. Today, with the proliferation of mortuaries, anybody that dies irrespective of age or cause and the quality of his life is dumped in the mortuaries awaiting befitting burial.

**i. Old Age and Wisdom:**

In those days people rallied round the old to seek counsel and wisdom. The old dished out wisdom in proverbs. In those days, such was the esteem of orators that children were encouraged to keep the company of elders in order to learn the uses and meaning of proverbs. On the contrary today, any child who displays the admirable quality of speaking in proverbs is derisively called a village champion by his peers.

**j. Hard work:**

Today, unlike the yester years, hard work is no longer highly rated. Shady short-cuts abound to acquire wealth without sweat. All kinds of malpractices are flagrantly displayed in the society; money, property etc. are taken from legitimate custodians at gun points! Where do we go from here? I ask again.

### **Igbo Language and Culture Tomorrow**

If nothing is done to change the current trend, certainly, there will be extinction of the Igbo language and culture in the near future. The embodiment of culture is language. Cultures are transmitted using language. Language also binds the society together. A people without a language may be dumb animals. To preserve the God-given identity, one's mother tongue must be preserved and nurtured. The language must be spoken, written, chanted in, praised in and worked with. It is the pivot of culture. Language is the most endearing artifacts of culture.

Except it is forced by conquest or by superior members or by social, economic and political domination to give up their language, a people can always have their history traced through their language (Sidi 1996 in Obioma 2010). A situation that causes one to give up one's language, voluntarily, should be viewed in all its severity.

In conclusion, the Ìgbò are encouraged to adopt a positive attitude towards their language and culture, speak the language and work with it, manifest their rich cultures and get their children to do the same. Beside these, certainly, there will be no Igbo language and culture tomorrow. Again, schools should be encouraged to implement the MT/LIC medium policy at the appropriate levels of education. The Ìgbò should be encouraged to dismiss the fallacy that the Ìgbò language is not complete or defective of any language function. The Ìgbò should be proud to showcase the most conspicuous aspect of their culture which include the language, name and mode of dress.

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