

**INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND THE
PRESERVATION
OF AFRICAN VALUES; THE IGBO EXAMPLE**

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Abstract

Language is not only a medium of communication but also a matrix through which the culture, value, norms and mores of a people are transmitted. Unfortunately for the African, the Indigenous Language of the continent were as a result of European Imperialist motives subjected to a series of distorting and negative influences. Most indigenous African Languages were, therefore imperiled and thus, endangered by the imposition of several European Languages such as English, French, and Portuguese among others. Notwithstanding, some of these indigenous languages have continued to struggle for survival in the face of these threats. The Igbo Language is one of such languages that has been seriously jeopardized and still continues to trudge on. This study therefore appraises the roles of the Igbo language in the task of preserving the values of the Igbo people. Data for the study came largely from secondary sources. The descriptive and analytic methodologies were utilized. The position of the study is that conscious and sustained awareness is needed if the Igbo language is to survive and remain relevant in the preservation of African values. Some recommendations on how this is to be achieved are contained in the study.

Introduction

Language is the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way. It is a system of Communication used by a particular country or community to express one's mind, feelings and emotions. Language has many definitions as different people see and understand it.

Language is generally defined as a system with which social groups co-operate and interact which helps in the formation thoughts and feelings. In this regard Africa has a very rich heritage of what past generation of African people thought, did, experience and passed on to their children. This heritage forms a long line which links African forefathers and mothers with their descendants who now feel proud of it. In the biblical era nobody told Moses that he was a Hebrews at his strange home but this was impacted through language and communication from his mother tongue. Therefore the primary aim is communication which is the process by which information is passed between individuals, organizations communities and nations. Language ensures unity, togetherness and development.

Indigenous: Naturally existing in a place or country rather than arriving from another place. It means that anything indigenous is not imported rather it exists and handed over from generation to another.

Indigenous Language: "An indigenous language is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people, often reduced to the status of a minority language. This languages would be from a linguistically distinct community that has been settled in the area for many generations" (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

Indigenous language: is a language of a particular group of people occupying an area uses to communicate within themselves which is passed from generation to another. They are famously known of such language by other communities around them.

Anumudu (2014) states that indigenous language is synonymous with native language, mother tongue and first language, .a language that is original to a people, native to a locality and part of its culture is considered to be an indigenous language. In this regard, any language that can be Located in Nigeria having a speech community and speakers is an indigenous language. Adeniyi and Richard (2006) Cited in Anumudu (2014) asserts indigenous Language as the various native languages spoken in Nigeria, the Language that is original to the people. Indigenous language can be summed up as the language of a particular group; the mother tongue which is acquired and not learnt. It belongs to the owners of the group. It is not learnt as a second language (L₂) by them. It is the Language into which they are born and they do not require another person to teach it to them except one who knows it and speaks the language as well.

The child acquires this language automatically, and it becomes his most proficient.

Preservation: according to English Dictionary means the act of preserving, care to preserve, keeping from destruction, decay or any ill. Preservation also means keeping safe from destruction to maintain intact for future use and to keep things as it is in its original state.

Preservation of African Values

In discussing the African values, the writer narrows down the discussion to Igbo values according to Longman Pocket English Dictionary (2008, P. 592) states values as the amount that something is worth, to think that something is worth a lot and to say how much something is worth.

Value: It means worth, outcome and desirable principles or ethical norms and standard, an individual, organization, communities or Nation focuses on, in molding and judging their conducts in all aspect of life.

Nigeria like other African Nations and Igbo in particular focuses on

Morality of right and wrong which aids the need for keeping Harmony and love for the welfare of the society.

Iheruo (2014, P. 224) states moral value in Nigeria which includes Humanity, Goodness, Kindness, Hospitality, Charity, Chastity before marriage, Respect for parent and Elders as well as men and women of Honours, Dignity of labour and Hardwork. Iheruo quoting Gbadegesin (2014, P. 225) writing on culture values made reference to Metaphysics of man, respect for elders, hospitality, brotherhood, sacredness of life among others as some of the cardinal African values before the advent of western culture and civilization.

The Role of Indigenous Language in the Preservation of African Values

The writer has asserted that through the means of language the culture of a people is transmitted. The writer also enumerated both the cultural and moral values of Africa, Nigeria and Igbo nation in particular. For this values to be preserved, indigenous language need to play a major role.

The concept of Igbo values include;

- Sanity of Human Life
- Respect for Parents and Elders
- Hospitality
- Chastity before Marriage
- Kindness

The Sanctity of Human Life

The Igbo believe that life is too precious. They value human life more than anything. This avails in the naming of a child with indigenous language e.g. Ndunagum – Life is Hunger, Ndukaku - Life is greater than wealth, Ndubuisi – Life first, Egbuchulam- Don't terminate my life etc.

Igbo made them to obey the Law of God that says: “Thou shalt not

kill” but kills whoever that threatens the life of the entire community. Indigenous language in naming of a child in Igbo land inculcates moral behavior and makes the present and future generations not to engage themselves in Kidnapping and Armed Robbery or conducts that will destroy life.

Respect for Parents and Elders

Respect is showing a feeling of like to someone, sacred things or places. The respect of parents and elders is one of the norms, moral and values parents and elders of the family or community inculcates into their children e.g. Greetings, Truthfulness, Obedient, Hardworking etc. These norms and values are inculcated into their children through the indigenous language.

Through indigenous language, parents and elders tell tales of the origin of their land, legend, myth and folktales to entertain them at moonlight. It is also believed that the ancestor in the land of the dead hears the indigenous language of their people in the land of the living.

Hospitality

According to Hornby (1989,P. 603) friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guest or strangers especially in one's own home”. The Igbos and famously known for their hospitality to strangers.

An Igbo man who travelled to a strange land where he was stranded unknowingly was saved on hearing a name bearing an Igbo Language Chimuanya meaning:- My God is Awake, immediately rush to the man Chimuanya, greeted him with their indigenous Language and he responded. Chimuanya took the lost stranger to his house. This act of hospitality shows that indigenous language plays important role in hospitality.

Chastity before Marriage

Chastity before marriage is one of the highly valued norms on the side of a woman in African Nigerian Society at large and Igbo in

particular. A young lady who is found undefiled in marriage is a credit to the parents and entire family because it attract respect and gifts from the husband of the lady to her parents to show appreciation for inculcating good norms and values in their daughter for not losing her virginity. All these are done through communication with indigenous language.

Kindness

Longman pocket English Dictionary (2008, P.298): Defines kindness as helpful, caring and wanting to do things that make other people happy. Kindness is one of the norms and values of the Africa, Nigeria and Igbo in particular hold in high esteem. In caring and helping others or doing things that will make people happy, indigenous language is needed for easy communications and understanding between the helper and the helped.

Findings

From the outlook of things, the writer finds out the following:

- Igbo values are Neglected
- Parents no longer use mother tongue as first language (L1) to their children.
- Our norms and values are gradually being replaced by Western values.
- Youngsters no longer give adequate respect to parents and elders.
- Parents no longer teach their children the norms and values of the land.
- Lack of knowledge of the legends and myth of the land makes it very difficult for some children to express their indigenous identity.
- Indigenous language is no longer taught in schools especially in private schools.
- Children in urban areas cannot tell folktales in their indigenous language.
- Parents and elders shy away their responsibilities of teaching the youths the cultural heritage, the dos and don'ts

of the Igbo Land.

- Some Igbo traditional rulers find it very difficult to make use of indigenous language in speeches without addition of English language let alone using indigenous proverbs in their speeches.

Recommendations

We have seen that values are conceptually recognized, emotionally charged, shared in common, taken seriously, and that they act as norms of judgment. It is also clear that values as such are not goals or objectives of societal action and thought. People use values as norms and criteria that point the way to goals and objectives. For this our great and most cherished values to be inculcated to our young ones through the indigenous language, the following Recommendations were made

- The Translation of the national constitution in our indigenous languages to reach the citizens at the grassroots.
- Every Igbo person should as a matter of traditional obligation make more use of Igbo language in his daily communication and interactions with fellow Igbo people.
- Admissions, scholarships and jobs should be offered to those who studied our indigenous languages to encourage others.
- Media Houses both print and Electronic should be encouraged to establish and publish newspapers, drama, plays and news cast in indigenous languages.
- State Assemblies should use our indigenous languages during meetings.
- Churches should make use of indigenous languages during worship and other religious ceremonies.
- To make the indigenous language teaching compulsory from creche to tertiary institution in Igbo land
- Teachers of these indigenous languages to write Igbo books and poems for Nursery and primary schools.

- Seminars and workshops should be done on indigenous language for students and teachers of the language.
- Encouraging people to express themselves in public with the indigenous language since everybody has freedom of expressions and not English speakers intimidating anyone.
- Igbo people in Diaspora should speak the indigenous language to their children with proverbs, Igbo stories and poems.

Conclusion

Africa, Nigeria, and indeed the Igbo Nation lay much emphasis on good moral behaviour, and continue to teach it to her citizens as a guiding line and principle. Such moral values like honesty, the sanctity of human life, respect, hospitality reverence, obedience to law and order, truth, trustworthiness and a whole number of them have been stressed over time as appreciable values in our society. For these values to be inculcated to our young ones early enough, indigenous language plays a major and vital role.

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