

HOW ENDANGERED IS IGBO LANGUAGE?

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Abstract

Several of the world languages are endangered since they are at the risk of falling out of use as their speakers die out, abandon their language or shift to speak another language (cf. Ani, 2012). At a glance however, it seems illogical to assume that Igbo, a language spoken as one of the major languages in Nigeria by a population of about 17 million indigenous native speakers is an endangered language considering its status as one of the major indigenous languages, and also one of the major languages of literature, education, and commerce. Using the factors which have been identified by UNESCO in 2003 within which languages can be assessed for endangerment; this paper examines how endangered Igbo appears to be and notes that Igbo language is actually being endangered not only by the factors which led to the prediction of its extinction by the UNESCO Advisory Committee on Languages, but also other factors which include Igbo speakers' exceptionally strong receptivity to change and globalization. It is also noted that even though Igbo is being endangered, it not yet endangered to the point of extinction in the nearest future as predicted by UNESCO Advisory Committee on Languages. Our position here is based on random vocabulary test on some Igbo speakers' use or non-use of some Igbo indigenous nouns in their conversations in Igbo. The paper rather establishes that what is happening to Igbo is a gradual non-utilization of some of its vocabulary items used in day to today communication and that this ugly trend can be reversed if such vocabulary items are reintegrated into usage by the Igbo speakers themselves.

1. Introduction

Language endangerment is real and it is a phenomenon which is continuing through space and time as many languages continue to fall out of use and are being replaced by other languages that may be more widely used for economic or socio-political reasons within the region. Any language, with a community of speakers whether large or small which is being replaced in usage/ speech of the community of speakers by any other language or languages is an endangered language, a language which has the potential of becoming extinct sooner or later. Some endangered languages are no longer being learned by new generations of children or by new adult speakers; these languages will become extinct when their last speaker dies. It has been widely and severally predicted that up to 90% of the languages of the world may be displaced by dominant languages (e.g. English, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Indonesian, Arabic, Swahili, and Hindi) by the end of the 21st century, thus reducing the present number of almost 7,000 languages to less than 7009 (Brenzinger and De Graf 2006). Language endangerment is not affecting the languages of a particular culture or race. In fact, it is very pervasive phenomenon, spreading and affecting the languages of the tribes of Papua New Guinea, Aboriginal peoples of Australia, the native peoples of the Americas, the national and tribal minorities of Africa, Asia, and Oceania and marginalized European peoples such as the Irish, the Frisians, the Provençal and the Basques (cf. Brenzinger & De Graf 2006). The characterizations of language endangerment can come in two major ways;

the limited number of *speakers* who use and identify with a particular language as part of their cultural heritage and also the shrinking *functions* and domains into which the language is being used. Thus, a language may be considered to be endangered because there are fewer and fewer speakers who claim that the language is part of their own cultural heritage and still, hardly use it and are also, not interested in passing it on to their children and can on the hand, be endangered because its use in time and space within its speech community is reducing especially in day to day activities closely associated with particular social or communicative functions. However, as rightly observed by Brenzinger and De Graf (2006), the size of a linguistic group does not always matter and therefore, endangered languages are not necessarily languages with few speakers even though small communities are more vulnerable to external threats. The viability and vitality of a language is primarily a function of the positive attitude of its speakers towards their linguistic heritage which they manifest by being faithful to their language, thus ensuring that the language is transferred from one generation to another. Brenzinger and De Graf (2006) further cite the example of the Suruaha, a small Indian community (in Amazonia, Brazil) with a population of approximately 150 members (including the children) and yet were confidently and functionally monolingual as at the time of first contact with linguists. The Suruaha situation is a sharp contrast to many other languages with large population of indigenous speakers that do not transmit their languages to the young generation thereby gradually causing their language to lose flavor in mind of the younger generation thus, putting such languages among the committees of endangered languages.

The present paper is aimed at examining the phenomenon of language endangerment as it affects Igbo especially given the prediction of its extinction by the UNESCO Advisory Committee on Languages. In doing this, the paper tries to evaluate Igbo language level of endangerment based on the factors which UNESCO in 2003 has identified within which languages can be assessed for endangerment. Furthermore, a mini vocabulary test is carried out to ascertain Igbo speakers' use or non-use of some Igbo indigenous nouns in their conversations. Part of the findings of the paper is that Igbo is being endangered but not yet endangered to the point of extinction in near future in the sense predicted by UNESCO Advisory Committee on Languages. Based on the vocabulary test , the paper Igbo further establishes that Igbo is gradually losing some of its vocabulary items used in day to today communication and that this ugly trend can be reversed if the vocabulary items are reintegrated into usage by the Igbo speakers themselves. The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 is the introduction. Section 2 highlights some of the reasons for language endangerment while section 3 provides an overview of the evaluation of language endangerment. While section 4 provides an overview of the linguistic situation in Nigeria section 5 discusses the endangerment phenomena of the Igbo language .

2. Reasons for Language Endangerment

As been highlighted on the huge literature (e.g. Brenzinger & De Graf 2006, Austin & Sallabank 2011, Grenoble & Whaley 1998) on endangerment, the reasons for language endangerment may include:

- (i) external forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural, or educational subjugation
- (ii) internal forces, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language or by a general decline of group identity
- iii) when communities with different linguistic backgrounds live side by side; the communities that do not enjoy the same prestige in contact situation may acquire proficiency in the

language of the dominant group, relinquishing their culture, including their language and may decide to adopt the language and culture of the dominant community.

Brenzinger & De Graf 2006 further state that statistical data related to language use illustrates the extent of the phenomenon of language endangerment. According to them, about 97% of the world's people speak about 4% of the world's languages while on the other hand; about 96% of the world's languages are spoken by about 3% of the world's population. Also, while 85% of about 7,000 languages of the world are spoken in only 22 countries and some of the countries are home to large numbers of different languages. These countries include Papua New Guinea (900 languages), Indonesia (about 700 languages), Nigeria (more than 500), India (about 400), Cameroon (almost 300), Mexico (almost 250), Zaire (more than 200) and Brazil (more than 200). They note that these countries are highly heterogeneous linguistically and only few languages in them have significant numbers of speakers while very few languages are assigned official status and yet with large numbers being threatened by extinction. The consequences of language endangerment and language extinction are unimaginable. The loss of a language is the same as the loss of the culture the language carries together with social and cultural disruptions. The unquantifiable intangible heritage embedded in the language disappears and a substantial contributor to linguistic diversity is forever lost. Similarly, when a community loses its language, it often loses a great deal of its cultural identity at the same time including the spiritual and intellectual life which are experienced and expressed through language. The spiritual and intellectual life experiences obviously include prayer patterns, belief systems, myths, ceremonies, technical vocabulary, etc. The loss of these knowledge systems in an extinct language does not implicate the extinction of the speaking community. However, the entire knowledge system if it is to survive at all, is repackaged in the new language which has absorbed the speakers of the dead language with different words, sounds, and grammar. Thus, traditions are abruptly lost in the process and replaced by the cultural and linguistic habits of the more powerful group.

3. Evaluating Language Endangerment

UNESCO categorizes language endangerment into five levels, which are safe languages, vulnerable languages (not spoken by children outside the home), definitely endangered languages (children not speaking), severely endangered languages (only spoken by the oldest generations), and critically endangered languages (spoken by few members of the oldest generation, often semi-speakers). Krauss (2007), using an alternative scheme of classification, classifies languages as 'safe' if it is considered that children will probably be speaking them in 100 years; 'endangered' if children will probably not be speaking them in 100 years and 'moribund' if children are not speaking them now. Brenzinger & De Graf (2006) summarizes the following factors which UNESCO in 2003 identifies, can be used to assess language endangerment thus:

- a) ***Degree of endangerment***
 - i) Intergenerational language transmission
 - ii) Absolute numbers of speakers
 - iii) Proportion of speakers within the total population
 - iv) Loss of existing language domains
 - v) Response to new domains and media
 - vi) Material for language education and literacy

(b) Language attitudes and policies

- (i) Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official language status and use
- (ii) Community members' attitudes towards their own language

(c) Urgency of documentation

- (i) Amount and quality of documentation

Lewis, Simons, & Fennig (2013) also capture the same factors thus:

- The speaker population
- The number of those who connect their ethnic identity with the language (whether or not they speak the language)
- The stability of and trends in that population size
- Residency and migration patterns of speakers
- Information about the use of second languages
- Language attitudes within the community
- The age range of the speakers
- The domains of use of the language
- Official recognition of languages within the nation or region
- Means of transmission (whether children are learning the language at home or being taught the language in schools)
- Language endangerment affects both the languages themselves and the people that speak them.

As has been noted earlier, as communities lose their language they often also lose parts and sometimes their entire cultural traditions which are tied, embedded and conveyed by their language. These may be songs, myths and poetry that are not easily transferred to another language. This obviously in turn will affect their sense of identity, resulting in a weak and an incoherent social cohesion since their values and traditions will be replaced with new ones. The loss of one's language may also have negative political implications as some countries confer different political privileges on ethno-linguistic bases equating ethnicity with linguistic identity. The implication of this situation being that communities that lose their language, also lose political relevance and legitimacy.

4. Overview of the Linguistic Situation in Nigeria

There are hundreds of languages spoken in Nigeria. The official language of Nigeria, English, the former colonial language, was chosen to facilitate the cultural and linguistic unity of the country. Communication in English language is much more popular in the country's urban communities than it is in the rural areas (comprising about three quarters of the country's population). The other major languages are Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio, Edo, Fulfulde, and Kanuri. Nigeria's linguistic diversity is a microcosm of Africa as a whole, encompassing three major African languages families: Afroasiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger-Congo. The official language in Nigeria is English but with three official indigenous regional languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) which are also referred to as 'major' by virtue of the population of their speakers and the geographical areas covered by the speakers. Hausa is spoken by about 20 million people in the North, Yoruba, spoken by about 19 million in the west, and Igbo, spoken by about 17 million people in a part of the south east. In addition to these three major indigenous languages, there are about 400 'minor' languages

(Crozier/Blench 1992,) which Egbokhare, Oyetade, Urua and Amfani (2001), have reduced to 113 language clusters. They used a mutual intelligibility criterion, in a preliminary report which was aimed at simplifying the current complex linguistic picture deriving from previous genetic classifications of these languages. With the reclassification, some of the non-major languages have some degree of official status in their locality and are even used as lingua franca (e.g. Efik, Ibibio, Edo, Fulani, etc). Still sandwiched within the network of major and non-major indigenous languages is the Nigerian Pidgin English which also enjoys the status of an unofficial national lingua franca. Whereas the minority languages in the Nigerian context are languages that are spoken by the minority ethnic groups, the major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) are spoken by the three major ethnic groups. The languages spoken in Nigeria, on the bases of UNESCO's categorization can also be classified as safe, vulnerable (not spoken by children outside the home), definitely endangered (children not speaking), severely endangered (only spoken by the oldest generations), and critically endangered (spoken by few members of the oldest generation, often semi-speakers).

4.1 Nigerian Languages and the Phenomenon of Endangerment

Crozier & Blench (1992), and more recently Blench (2012), which records 489 languages for Nigeria, with about 200 of these being severely endangered and 20 moribund languages. In fact, going by UNESCO's latest predictions, most Nigerian languages including Igbo are under the dangling axe of extinction. UNESCO, in 2012 has warned that the number of these indigenous languages is dwindling by the day, overwhelmed by the influence of foreign languages, especially English and French. Nigerians speak in tongues, but no more in their mother tongues and this is largely due to the influence globalization and its aftereffects. While the attitude of many Nigerian adults towards their culture is reprehensible, what is happening to the younger generation as far as mother tongue is concerned is both alarming and discouraging. For many children born and raised in the cities by elite Nigerian parents, they are not interested in their mother since it has become increasingly the norm for such children to have their first tongue in English. This fact is made worse by the fact the parents of such children send them to private primary and secondary where the pupils and students are not taught in any Nigerian languages but in English. It is even a punishable offence in some public and private schools to communicate within the school premises in any Nigerian languages which are even termed as vernaculars.

4.2 Igbo Language and its Usage

Igbo refers to both the language whose indigenous speakers live in the southeastern states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and parts of Delta and Rivers States. It is indigenously spoken by an estimated population of about seventeen million people. Within the Igbo speech communities, there are scores of regional dialects though the exact number of these dialects is not yet known. Emenanjo (1977) lists some of these dialects to include Aniocha, Ogwashjukwu, Asaba, Ika, Agbo, Kwale, Abo, Enuani-Ibusa, Enuani-Ilah (Delta State), Onitsha, Idemili, Nnewi, Oka Aguata, Agulu (Anambra) Wawa, Enugu, Udi (Enugu), Okigwe, Mbanjo, Obowo, Etiti, Orlu, Isu, Osu, Oru, Ideato, Owerri, Mbaise, Mbieri (Imo) Abakiliki, Iza, Izii, Afikpo (Ebonyi) Umuahia, Bende, , Ohafia, Ohuhu, Arochukwu, Abiriba, Ngwa, Ukwa (Abia) and Ikwere (Rivers)



Map showing Language Groups of Nigeria, Adapted Ulamm

The dialects of Igbo share a considerable degree of lexical items, a variety of phonological, morphological and syntactic features and as well, a great deal of mutual intelligibility. They also form part of the richness and fascination of Igbo as a language, and creating a promising future, for Igbo studies requires adopting a positive attitude towards its dialects (Igwe 1999); hence, the dialectal variations should not be seen as an obstacle towards improved scholarship in Igbo studies, but as a rich and valuable asset (Anyanwu 2007).

Since all Igbo dialects derive from one proto-Igbo language, they share lots of phonological, grammatical and lexical features. Yet, as would be expected they also differ in certain phonological, lexical and grammatical ways. These differences however, do not inhibit effective communication or mutual intelligibility. It must be stated however, that the differences among the dialects are sometimes, a matter of the frequencies with which certain features occur rather than completely different ways of saying things. The Igbo dialect variations are in the areas of phonology, lexicon and syntax as outlined in (Anyanwu 2013).

5. Igbo and the Phenomenon of Endangerment

The number of active indigenous speakers of Igbo is thinning down. From Abia to Enugu, from Anambra to Imo and to Ebonyi, indigenous speakers increasingly seek knowledge not in their mother tongue but another man's tongue, thus relegating their language and culture to a secondary status. Apart from the pressure imposed by Nigerian Pidgin English, a popular medium of communication among the teeming masses, the use of English has made many native speakers of Igbo to water down the essence of the language through code-switching

Azuonye (2002:4) in his discussion of Igbo and the phenomenon of endangerment notes that the key determinants of language endangerment and death in the UNESCO Red Book are by no means restricted to minority languages of Africa or elsewhere. He notes that the five basic parameters applied in designating the present state of several languages as "endangered" or "seriously" endangered for example, in the UNESCO Red Book on Endangered Languages apply very much to Igbo. Azuonye (2002:5), further outlines six symptoms which thrust themselves rather forcefully as indications that Igbo is a very seriously endangered language. These symptoms are:

- (1) Reduce speaker competence
- (2) Rapidly decreasing child competence.
- (3) Repressive language policies in colonial boarding schools.
- (4) Intense code-switching and code-mixing coupled with an unbridled language shift.
- (5) Assimilation into new language such as pidgins and creoles
- (6) The depletion of the population of monolingual elderly.

As rightly observed by Azuonye (2002), the bilingual environment in which English has established itself as the language of opportunity and upward social mobility has created an increasingly large body of new homes in which parents unwittingly speak more English than Igbo to their children and as a matter of fact, Igbo is not spoken at all in such homes. Azuonye (2002) points out that the social context of Igbo today is one in which speaker competence is impaired right from the home and that the state of affairs has drastic consequences for child competence and intergeneration of Igbo language proficiency. Ani (2012) has also observed that the fact that Igbo language instead of gaining communication height in the hierarchy of language is currently moving in the downward trend in the comity of human languages is drawing increase concern amongst individuals and scholars within the Igbo nation and beyond. Okoye and Onwuegbuchunam (2011) have similarly noted that you can hardly see an Igbo speaker make a statement without code switching. They observe that Igbo speakers' attitude toward their language is the major factor to its under-utilization. Okoye and Onwuegbuchunam further note that inferiority complex affects Igbo people in the use of their language while they feel proud speaking other language like English, Hausa, Yoruba and feel shy speaking their own language or dialects. For Anyaegbuna (2012:30) the new wave of hybridized Igbo through the integration of English and Igbo language which is popularly known as "Englilgbo" is the worst form of adulteration that is currently experienced in Igbo language. He observes that this is more damaging because children easily pick it and turn it into a popular slang amongst the populace.

The schools in the Eastern part of the country where Igbo is spoken are also contributing in the violent attack on Igbo. Many private primary and secondary schools have become the order of the day and many parents who have come to accept that private schools as the place their children's learning need could relatively be better attended to. Most of the private schools do not have teachers who teach Igbo language while others who have teachers in the subject ban their students from

speaking the language with school hours. As noted by Igboanusi (2008), though Igbo is taught, learnt and examined in Igbo as a first language from the primary school level to the tertiary level of education with books written on different aspects of the language, (including literary works) several recent negative developments (such as dwindling interest in the language as a first language, declining population of students who apply to take degree or certificate programmes in the language, non-accreditation of the language by the National Universities Commission (NUC) in some universities, and language attitude problems) have prompted some researchers to associate the Igbo situation with language endangerment. These observations point to the fact that the number of active indigenous speakers of Igbo is thinning down. From Abia to Enugu, from Anambra to Imo and to Ebonyi, indigenous speakers increasingly seek knowledge not in their mother tongue but another man's tongue and based on the UNESCO criteria, the followings signs of endangerment are very obvious.

5. Signs of Endangerment in Igbo

5.1 Intergenerational Transfer of Igbo is Getting Weak

The most commonly used factor in evaluating the vitality of a language is whether or not it is being transmitted from one generation to the next. The younger generation of Igbo speakers are clearly losing their language; therefore, the transmission of the Igbo language from generation to generation is seriously threatened. Though Igbo is spoken in some families as the first language, it is restricted to homes where the children interact with their parents and close relatives. The importance attached to English has made English to be regarded as a language of prestige in that it carries a certain potential for economic benefit. A shift from Igbo language has however been noted in many urban families, where many parents are now introducing their children to English language as the first language rather than Igbo language. This is mainly due to the belief that English language is the language of educated and enlightened persons. There is a feeling among many Igbo people though, faulty in our perspective, that ability to speak English language rather than Igbo language is in itself acquisition of knowledge. Also, among Igbo speakers, there has been an increase in the number of middle income earners who take their children to schools that primarily use English, the language of instruction right from early childhood education.

5.2 Compared with the Number of Igbo Speakers and the Actual Population of the Speakers within the Total Population is reducing

Igbo is one of the three major languages spoken in Nigeria. It has been noted that Igbo is spoken by an estimated population of between 20 and 25 million people. About 17 million of this number constitutes indigenous speakers. In recent times, Igbo has started losing ground. Parents, especially younger parents now use English in their everyday interaction with their children instead of Igbo and this has led some children to be semi speakers of Igbo language, thereby reducing the population of the speakers of Igbo language. As a result some vocabularies are gradually fading away since they are not frequently use in interaction. A majority of Igbo indigenes are not proficient in their mother tongue and cannot speak it with competence.

5.3 The Existing Domains for Igbo Usage is Shrinking

There was a time when Igbo was the language of the ethno-linguistic group of the Igbo for interaction, identity, thinking, creativity and entertainment and was actively used in all discourse domains for all purposes. Urbanization has had tremendous impact on the use of Igbo language.

Many primary school pupils now attend private schools where English is used as the medium of instruction. In fact, right from the primary school level, pupils are taught in English. Many are unable to speak Igbo language and are, therefore unable to tell folk tales, stories, riddles and jokes in their languages (Igbo). It is a common knowledge that English is now dominating most of the domains in Igbo speech communities. In most social gathering (e.g. burial ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, religious worship in churches, etc) English takes a dominant place while Igbo may be used to interpret what is being said.

5.4 Igbo is not increasingly Breaking New Grounds or Creating New Domains of Usage

Though Igbo language is being used in some new domains, a large percentage of Igbo speakers accord the English language and media programmes in English more prestige and respect than they do to the Igbo language and its media programmes. In the media, Igbo language programmes are allotted insufficient airtime because of the poor commitment of its speaker towards their linguistic heritage. In education, Igbo is supposed to be the language of instruction in early education but there is no commitment to this. Igbo is taught and learnt from primary to tertiary but because students who offer Igbo in School Certificate Examination or get admission to study Igbo are laughed to scorn or looked down upon, speaking and writing of Igbo language has greatly declined. Igbo language is not frequently used in the translation of leaflets of some products produced in Nigeria, the leaflets of Nigerian products especially in the area of medicine are not written in Igbo or other indigenous language but rather in English and French. It has been observed however, that some leaflets of beverages produced in Nigeria are written in Igbo and some other indigenous language in Nigeria. In the State Houses of Assembly where Igbo is spoken and where all the members are also Igbo, the businesses of the house are conducted in English.

5.5 There is still the Need for more Materials for Education and literacy in Igbo

Though a lot of books have been written on Igbo language, many more materials for language education and literacy are required in the language. There is also the need for more materials in literacy tradition with grammar and in everyday media in Igbo language.

5.6 Governmental and Institutional attitude towards Igbo language is still Poor

The Federal Government of Nigeria has a positive statement about the Nigerian Indigenous languages but, has not taken significant steps to ensuring the practical realization of the language policy statement as enunciated in the National Policy on Education.

5.7 Igbo Indigenous Speakers generally have Poor Attitude towards their Language

Some Igbo speakers support maintenance of Igbo while some are indifferent about the language and may even support its extinction, resulting from their attitude towards the language. Nigerian Pidgin English has virtually become the language in most homes of illiterate and semi-illiterate families especially in the urban areas while some elite Igbo people use Standard English as the only means of communication in their homes with the erroneous belief that they are educationally, socio-economically empowering their children.

5.8 Igbo speakers' Exceptionally Strong Receptivity to Change

The Igbo by their nature are traders and travelers who take business outside their indigenous speech communities. In their new host communities where do their trading their initial communication begins with English or Nigerian Pidgin English and they later try to become linguistically inclusive

with their host communities by learning the language of their host, which will provide them with better trading prospects. The long term effect of the situation is that the traders get involved in apparent neglect of their indigenous language (Igbo) to the extent that by the time they visit their indigenous speech communities; their speech will be characterized by overwhelming evidence of code-mixing of Igbo and English. This automatically influences the speech of even those who permanently reside in the indigenous speech communities.

5.9 More and Quality Documentation still needed in Igbo

Though some amount of grammars, dictionaries and text exist in Igbo, only a few audio and video recordings exist in the language.

6. Igbo Vocabulary Test

Most speakers of Igbo despite their level of education get involved in code-mixing especially in predominantly Igbo based constructions. That is, there is hardly any sentence rendered in Igbo by most Igbo speakers which is not laced with chunks of English words. The code-mixing phenomenon is a reflection of the attitude of apathy of Igbo speakers towards their Igbo even when the English words used in the code-mixed expressions have equivalents in Igbo. Again, this practice, which for most times is an unconscious activity, has had the negative implication of continuously shrinking the functional domains of Igbo language usage while expanding that of English. In order to check the vitality of an aspect of Igbo vocabulary and also to have a glimpse of the degree to which some of the vocabulary items have diminished in the speech of the speakers, some speakers in Aba metropolis were given a vocabulary test. Aba is the commercial nerve centre of Abia State, Nigeria. As at 2006 Aba had an estimated population of 1,520,900 and more than 90% of the population is Igbo which makes the city linguistically homogenous. A total of 384 Igbo speakers (192 males and 192 females) from the age 18 to 60 years formed the representative population of Aba metropolis. The Aba metropolis basically consists of two Local Government Areas, Aba South and Aba North and some parts of Osisioma Local Government Area. The two Local Government Areas were divided into ten clusters for ease of administration of research instrument which is oral face to face interview. The ten clusters are Opobo junction cluster, 7UP bottling Company cluster, Aba Main Park cluster, Ngwa Road cluster, Azikiwe Road cluster, Faulks Road cluster, Umungansi cluster, Abayi cluster, Ariaria Market cluster and Port Harcourt Road cluster. The number of respondents per cluster is 38 (19 males and 19 females) except for the Ariaria cluster which consists of 42(21 males and 21 females) respondents. The accidental sampling method was used to select the respondents within each cluster on a first come-first serve basis. They were presented with a list containing 260 Igbo nouns and their equivalents in English. They were further orally asked to answer 'yes' or 'no' whether they use each indigenous Igbo noun or its English equivalent any time such a word comes up in their day-to-day interactions done in Igbo language. The result of this vocabulary test is shown in the table that follows (table 1) while the highlights of the result are summarized in table 2.

S/N	Word Group	Number of Items in the Group	Total Number of Respondents	Average Percentage of those that use the Igbo words	Average Percentage of those that do not use the Igbo words
1	Words for Body Parts	34	384	78%	22%
2	Words for Foods and Vegetables	23	384	54%	36%
3	Birds' names	9	384	71.4%	28.6%
4	Words for Greetings	3	384	10%	90%
5	Family/Kinship words	18	384	39.2%	60.8%
6	Words for Telling Time	6	384	25.8%	74.2%
7	Words for Insects/Pests	7	384	45.7%	54.3%
8	Names for some Animals	12	384	54.4%	45.6%
9	Names for some Reptiles	9	384	83.4	16.6%
10	Names for some Artifacts	34	384	21.3%	78.7%
11	Words for Colors	7	384	22.9%	77.1%
12	Words for some Fruits	10	384	50.7%	49.3%
13	Words for Instruments	5	384	42%	58%
14	Words for some Furniture	4	384	33.3%	68.7%
15	Words for Kitchen Utensils	8	384	84%	16%
16	Words for General Place Names	10	384	59%	41%
17	Names for Persons/Occupations	22	384	53.5%	46.5%
18	Names Deities	2	384	100%	0%
19	Words for Jewelries	3	384	51%	49%
20	Words for Water bodies, mountains	11	384	81.8%	18.2%
21	Words for Naira denominations	9	384	0%	100%
22	Building/Carpentry Materials	10	384	38%	62%

A summary of the highlights of the Vocabulary Test Result

The vocabulary test as shown on the above table vividly captures the vitality ratings of an aspect of Igbo vocabulary items. The values of usage as summarized in the table show that an aspect of the Igbo basic vocabulary (body part words) is still very vibrant in usage. This has a 78% usage. This is also true for words for kitchen utensils, words for water bodies and deities which have usage of 84%, 100% and 81.8% respectively. However, ten out of the twenty-two word groups surveyed, have less than 50% usage. Even within the ten word groups with less than 50%, five groups have a usage of less than 30%. More shocking is the fact that the total average usage of the entire twenty-two groups of words is 49.9%. This simply shows that of the twenty-two groups of words, it is roughly only half of the population sampled that uses the indigenous Igbo words. This shows evidence of indigenous Igbo vocabulary neglect by the Igbo speakers.

7. Conclusion

This preliminary study is just one of the several studies raising alarm on how fast Igbo is heading towards endangerment. Based on the mini vocabulary test, it is obvious that Igbo is vulnerable and may head towards serious endangerment. The language is experiencing a gradual non-utilization of some of its vocabulary items used in day to today communication and that this ugly trend can be reversed if such vocabulary items are reintegrated into usage by the Igbo speakers themselves.

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