CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND IDENTITY: THE EMERGING ISSUES OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE IGBO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN A POST COVID-19 ERA IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Igbo language is the language of the Igbo people spoken mostly in the eastern PART OF Nigeria. It is pertinent to study Igbo language because culture and language are attached to man's identity and human interaction. This is why the Federal republic of Nigeria laid emphasis on learning the three major Nigerian languages as a means of preserving their people's culture. However, Igbo language has some challenges facing its teaching and learning. The problems of tone, diacritic mark, varieties of dialects and poor use of instructional materials have been identified as factors that inhibit the repositioning of Igbo language as Igbo man's identity. The outbreak of covid-19 pandemic challenged the educational system across the world and forced education to shift to an online mode of teaching. The availability of online teaching technology has created a growing interest in the learners thereby calling on the Igbo language teachers to embrace the new strategies in teaching and learning Igbo language in order to preserve their culture and identity. This paper discussed the technological strategies for increasing interest of people in learning Igbo language in post covid-19 era. It recommended online teaching strategies for effective delivery of online instruction in Igbo language in a post covid-19 classroom, thus, as well as employment of qualified ICT-compliant teachers.

Keywords: Culture, diversity, identity, language, covid-19, technology.

Introduction

Culture is a dynamic and complex whole that includes language, knowledge, belief, art, morality, law, custom and all other abilities and habits acquired by any member of a given society. From this point of view, culture contains practically everything that makes human a social being. Consequently, cultural identity brings all that is common to the members of a group, such as rules, norms and values that one shares with one's community. Nadjo (1985) cited in Mesmin et al (2008) defined cultural identity as the identifying mark of fundamental values proper to an ethnic group, which uses them to create bond, and to which each of its members relate, a steady spring from which every member drinks continuously which all must know, in a certain sense, how to desert in order to acquire through dialogue with other cultures that makes one cultivated.

Nadjo (1985) sees language as a "Society's Interpretant'. Language plays a role in the cultural identity of an ethnic group and enable a fullness of expression, because it delinates membership in a community: 'I am of this language' 'this is my language', as one often hears.' Lecante (1997) asserts that it is language that binds individuals to a traditional ethno-cultural group that parents choose to pass on to their children, this signifying that they continue to belong to the group, even if they are (relatively) detached

geographically. Education is the powerhouse to the development of any language; hence, any society that plays with the education of its citizenry will obviously experience snail speed in development. Language is the pillar or even the root, of culture. Blanchet (1998) asserts that:

> Dynamic development is impossible unless there is global approach that associates the two centrifulal and centripetal forces, and that reconciles something that can be seen paradoxical; relation and distinction, politico-economic development and cultural roots. Moreover, those who oppress, exploit and exclude know this too well. It is not by chance that they simultaneously marginalize a people's language and this people outside of the world of political and economic exchange, taking at the same time cultural, economic and political power. On the one hand, in order to emerge, affirm itself, live and survive, a people must cultivate its specific language.
>
> Alienation is ethymologically and profoundly the act of "being foreign to oneself. This is what happen to a person or a community that loses its language, its culture, its original vision of the world and its creative potential. Freeing oneself from alienation is remaining or re-becoming oneself, drawing from one's cultural identity a vital drive, going back to one's roots (pg.45).

This declaration justifies the main reason for Igbo language speakers and teachers should teach their language to their younger generation. It is from this, before initiation ceremonies take place, that cognitive function is born. Igbo language spoken in the south eastern part of Nigeria is studied in schools as a subject alongside Hausa and Yoruba languages since its inception as a school subject in Nigeria, the teaching and learning of Igbo language has been bedeviled by many challenges like poor use of instructional materials, poor teaching methods, attitude of the speakers of the language, the nature of the language. The outbreak of covid-19 forced education to shift from the conventional way to online mode of teaching and learning. This trend has increasingly affected the Igbo man's identity. It is believed that speakers who embrace the identity of a particular community will engage in positive identity practices, while those who reject will use negative identity practices to distance themselves from it Bucholtz, 1999 cited in Umo (2013). In Nigeria, language and intangible heritage, have long been ignored or ridiculed by intervention that confuses economic growth with development, accumulation with equitable sharing, and force with power, in projects designed by those incapable of speaking the language of the people who are affected yet not even consulted. Just as we cannot develop a person whom we fail to understand, and with whom we neither can nor wish to communicate. To a large extent, this explains the failure of all the development projects and processes not fueled by local language and knowledge. These sorts of projects are in effect little more than pretexts and slogans – declarations of good intentions rather than real tools for promoting the well being of individuals, be they humble or well off (Mesmin et al., 2008).

This paper therefore seeks to expose the variable that makes it difficult for Igbo man to identity him/herself with the language and try to bring in technology ideas that will reposition the language to wear a new look in harnessing the diversities and bringing out the Igbo man's identity in the post-covid-19 era. The factors to be discussed below are poor

use of instructional materials, nature of Igbo language, poor teaching method, attitude of the speakers of the language. This paper will also highlight some of the technological strategies for increasing interest of people in learning Igbo language in a post-covid-19 era. The importance of the teacher will also look into the problems associated with the using of technological devices in teaching and learning of Igbo language and also conclusions and recommendations.

Nature of Igbo Language

Culture and Cultural Identity

Culture simply put, is the peoples' ways of life. Adedimeji, (2006) defines culture as a whole complex which include knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. In other words, culture is an all embracing entity without which progress in society would remain a mirage. The basis of development is culture and any community that aims at progress without its culture is only deceiving itself by engaging in self-immolation because most developed societies are great by virtue of having great confidence in their culture, promoting and enhancing it as a spring board for progress.

The Igbo people have a solid, justifiable and progress-oriented culture that are taught in schools but the nature of Igbo language constitutes problems to Igbo scholars. The reason is that despite culture being one of its components, language and literature are also incorporated. This is why Okeke (2001) cited in Umo (2003) confirmed that the scheme of work drawn from Igbo language curriculum has never been finished in any particular year due to its nature. Furthermore, Igbo language is marked with complex system of tonation in distinguishing meanings and grammatical and phonological relationships in a wild range of dialectal variations which creates problems both to foreign learners who study Igbo as L2 (second language) and to the owners of the language who study it as L1 (first language). Igbo language is a language that has many speech variations that is, it has many varieties in spoken form from which is recognized by user of different social communities. These variations are referred to as dialects.

Dialect is a term used to describe features of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation of a language. The dialects of Igbo are many and are appreciated by their users as they serve them in their cultural, political, economic and other social functions. Oluikpe (1979) sees dialect as a sum total of the linguistic features which identify people from different parts of a language community. A language community can adopt a dialect which is distinct from other dialects.

Table 1: Six Igbo Dialectal Interpretation of some English concepts

S/N	Concepts	Udi	Nsukka	Onitsha	Mbaise	Ohafia	Ikeduru
1.	Cloth	ehwe	ekwa	efe	efe	ṅwaji	uwe
2.	Spoon	ngaji	ngaji	ngaji	ngaji	nkom	ngaji
3.	There	-	hube	ebeni	ngaahụ	ebeọrị	ebe ahụ
4.	Now	now	nwoshia	kịta	ugbua	ugbua	ugbe
5.	Hand	eka	eka	aka	aka	aka	aka
6.	Body	ahụ	eshi	arụ	ahụ	ahụ	ahụ
7.	Orange	oloma	orome	oroma	epe	ujiri	epe
8.	Compound		iheezi	iro	mbiri ezi	ezi	edzi

The multiplicity of dialects implies that even within a particular language, there exists many dialects which pose a great problem for the teachers. This is because no teacher can learn all the dialects and be able to teach in any locality. Therefore, the issue of a child hearing a home dialect distinct from one in which he is taught at school poses a threat to him learning the standard language. Umo (1996) asserts that the heterogeneity of the class pupils' dialect makes it absolutely impossible for the teacher's dialect to suit all the members of the class. This is why Emenanjo (1978) claimed that Igbo is a difficult language, because it is a tone language and exposes itself to various dialects. Taiwo (1980) asserted that the Nigerian languages, like other African languages through international settings are deficient in expressing concepts, ideas, thought, skills, and techniques which western education has introduced into modern Nigerian Education. Nwokedi (1984) in Umo (2003) observed that Igbo language does not have established writing, not to talk of meta language. The deficiency limits the use of any one Nigerian language as medium of instruction and as a means of communication in handling many more societal phenomena.

Concept and tone mark	Meaning
Ákwà	Clothing
Ákwá	Cry
Àkwà	Bed/bridge
Àkwá	Egg
Ísí	Head
Ìsì	Blindness
Ísī	To cook
Ísì	Smell
Ígwé	Sky
Ígwē	To grind
Ìgwè	Crowd
Ígwè	Rod/iron
Òké	Rat
Ókè	Boundary
Òkè	Share
Óké	Male

Therefore, it is pertinent that all the Igbo scholars should work together in harnessing the various difficulties encountered by the scholars in the areas of diacritic marks, tone and variation in dialects.

Diacritic Mark

1. Udo – rope
   Udo – peace

2. Ọlụ - work
   Olu – neck

3. Ukwu – waist
   Ụkwụ - leg

4. Ọjị - kọla
   Oji – dark (black)

5. Iko – cup
   Ịkọ - to cultivate

6. Izu – native week
   Ịzụ - to buy

7. Imi – nose
   ịmị - to suck

8. Isi – to cook
   ịsị - to say (gossip)

Poor Use of Instructional Materials

Instructional materials are those materials used by a teacher to simplify their teaching. These materials include both visual and audio-visual aids and could either be concrete or non-concrete. They are essential since they help the teacher and learners avoid overemphasis on recitation and rote learning that can easily dominate a lesson. Kadzera as cited in Bernard (2015) asserts that these instructional materials bring life to learning by simulating students to learn. The use of instructional materials in the classroom has the potential to help the teacher explain new concepts clearly, resulting in better student understanding of the concepts being taught.

It is held that good teaching resources can never replace the teacher but the teacher uses them to achieve their teaching and learning objectives. Some of the instructional materials necessary for effective teaching and learning Igbo language include the chalkboard, map, charts, pictures, diagrams, cartoons, radio, television, cassettes. Lockheed (1991) says that instructional materials are critical ingredients in learning and that the curriculum could not be easily implemented without them. Similar sentiments are shared by Steel (1983) who asserts that relevant instructional materials enable the learners to have a clear understanding of the subject matter.

Sampath (1990) graphically explain that people learn more through the sense of sight and hearing compared to other senses. It is observed that the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the teaching and learning of Igbo language has not been fully impacted compared with that of English language. This makes the Igbo children to loose grip of their language. For instance, Yoruba and Hausa languages have slots in DSTV (Digital Satelite Television); whereas prominent Yoruba and Hausa movie stars promotes their languages, the Igbo movie stars left the African Magic Igbo channel (AM Igbo) to be run by

only upcoming movie stars. Reason being that English movies make them more popular; this makes the Igbo children loose sight of the Igbo proverbs and idioms.

If the Igbos can take up the challenge of showcasing their films in their own language especially in this post covid-19 era, our children's interest will be reviewed. Teachers of Igbo language should use those Igbo home movies to draw their lessons home and also encourage the students to watch them instead of watching only foreign films and programs which does not help them to build up their Igbo vocabulary.

Table IV: Percentage of what is learnt using different senses

Senses used when learning	% of what is learnt
Taste	1.0
Touch	1.5
Smell	3.5
Hearing	11.5
Sight	83.0
Total	**100.0**

Source: Sampath (1990)

Sampath also notes that we remember more when we see hear, say and do.

Table V: What is remembered from learning activities using different senses

Learning Activities	% of what is remembered
What we read	10%
What we hear	20%
What we see	30%
What we see and hear	50%
What we say and do	80%
Total	**100%**

Source: Sampath (1990)

The implication here is that for more knowledge to be internalized, more of the learner's senses have to be simulated other than hearing alone. In teaching and learning, the various senses can be simulated through the use of audio-visual materials. The instructional materials help the teacher and the learner to avoid overemphasis on a particular topic.

It is clear from the above views, that instructional materials are essential for effective teaching and learning of Igbo language. In this post covid-19 ear, it is essential that the curriculum planners review the Igbo language curriculum to include the use of different technological techniques in impacting the knowledge of the learners thereby bracing up to the global challenges, and increasing the interest of learners in learning the language.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT): An Ease to the Teaching and Learning of Igbo Language

One of the most destructive characteristics which set humans apart from other creatures is the highly evolved mode of communication termed 'language' (Badiyeni, 2008) in Abonyi (2021). Language serves as a tool for conveying functional meaning through interaction and communication. Language is the carrier of culture and culture is the content of language. Language is even regarded as the product of culture, as Muir (2007) asserted that language is just one of the various cultural products. The Igbos of southeast Nigeria speak the Igbo language which is one of the speech communities in the kwa-sub family of the Niger-Congo family (Greenberg, 1949 cited in Nwadike 2008). The Igbo language is estimated as having a

population of between 18 and 27 million native speakers (Lewis, 2009). Not all of these speakers however reside in the Igbo home areas. Igbo language is characterized by a variety of dialect which necessitated the adoption of a standardized orthography known as the standard Igbo. Omeje (2019) in Abonyi (2021) defined the standard Igbo as that which is used and understand by all Igbo speaking people irrespective of dialectal differences. It doesn't matter which part of Igbo land you came from to understand the standard Igbo. It is a combination of many Igbo dialects hence no person or group can lay claims to it as the original speakers of the standard form. It is the Igbo that teachers use in teaching the language since its adoption as a school subject.

The importance of Igbo language in Nigeria education system are numerous. It gives the people sense of unity, identification and belonging in a multicultural and multilingual society like Nigeria (Omeje, 2019). If the internet contains signs of acculturation, which is a powerful tool for promoting culture. The internet as a tool and a network, the internet allows Africa (Nigeria and Igbo people inclusive) to open itself up to the world, export culture and interact with other sensibilities and culture. It is also necessary that Igbo scholars develop a writing that perfectly renders the tonalities and etymology of Igbo language making use of existing orthography to allow Igbo language to benefit through research programmes incorporating them into local media to look for sponsorship and encourage the training of local or international seminars and workshops.

Corona virus is a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) as severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). A novel coronavirus covid-19 was identified in 2019 in Wuhan, China. The disease affects different people in different ways. The mode of transmission is human to human.

Human beings are social animals which means that they are dependent on each other to their needs. In schools, teachers and students interact using language. The use of language makes it possible for human beings to communicate effectively. However, the use of oral or verbal communication by human beings has its challenges due to the fact that it requires the physical presence of two or more at a time.

The advantages of teaching Igbo language in Nigeria's education system are numerous. The federal government of Nigeria recognized three major indigenous languages to be studied in schools. They are Hausas, Igbo and Yoruba (FRN, 2013). The federal government of Nigeria in National Policy on Education (NPE, 2013 as revised) stated that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. The aim is to promote and preserve peoples' culture. In this way, Igbo language emerge as an academic discipline to be passed by students and pupils before graduation. The use of online resources in language teaching has brought about remarkable improvements and promotion in the skills and method of language learning. Though the curriculum planners would not be able to transform all of their school curricula into online resources overnight yet innovative solutions by schools can only help to deal with the pandemic (Liguon & Windler, 2020) in Abonyi (2021). Online teaching helps to connect students to information and helps them to generate a dialogue with their teachers and other students on a course. It also helps students and teachers build professional networks that connect them to communities beyond their environment. It also enables more collective social learning. Making use of mobile phones, laptops, computers and other online devices, enhances learners' creativity and performance in language learning. It widens the learners' research horizon since information is one click away from him. Therefore, adopting online teaching and learning in this post covid-19 era will bridge

so much gap in Igbo language teaching and learning as learning has shifted from the conventional method as a result of covid-19 pandemic. Online teaching and learning will make the Igbo student grounded in his/her learning activities. Teaching a child in his native language helps the child to develop his cognitive skills faster.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Language is man's identity. By implication, Igbo language is Igbo man's identity. Conserving Igbo language and cultural identity is an urgent project must be accompanied by considerable effort to conserve and enhance the linguistic heritage of the Igbo people. The Igbo scholars should try and document all the slight phonological word differences existing in the dialects and absorb them in central Igbo, in solving the dialectal problems. In order to address the problems of tone, Igbo language should be taught like Yoruba whereby, some Igbo words that have the same spelling can be taught putting "tone marks".

All the educational institutions should make the teaching of Igbo compulsory at all levels. Also, all the department of linguistics and other Nigerian languages is our universities should encourage interdisciplinary approaches with foreign language departments in the institution in the area of translation. The advantage of these approaches is that they would create great awareness of Igbo language, culture and tradition which in turn, will showcase Igbo scholars and non-Igbo scholars for proper identity. Making Igbo cultural unity one of sharing rather than one of similitude is a large scale endeavour. Igbo scholars grouping themselves, supporting institutions, action plans, road maps, theories and models should be used by all stakeholders in Igbo language if we wish that Igbo language and cultural identities remain relevant in the millennia to come. Proper use of relevant instructional materials should be varied and not limited to textbooks and chalkboard as used in conventional method of teaching. The introduction of online teaching and learning in this post-covid-19 provide great opportunity for language teachers to enhance their teaching and learning process. It also helps in updating their knowledge and improves their lesson planning for quality teaching. There should be continuous training and retraining of teachers by organizing seminars and workshops for the teachers of Igbo language on the use of mobile phones, laptops, computer devices and other technological devices in the teaching and learning of Igbo language.

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