

ENHANCING IGBO LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR A STABLE IGBO NATION

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Abstract

The Igbo nation is fast losing her good attributes as a result of “civilization”/globalization. Though this is not peculiar to Igbo but we seem to have fallen headlong into it at the detriment of our rich cultural heritage. All the negative attitudes that only found expression in the dark have found existence in broad day light. As a result, instability, insecurity, fears e.t.c are all over the land. It is on this premise that this paper set out to look into how we can retrace our root through the instrument of enhanced Igbo Language education to regain a stable Igbo nation that we all hope and pray for.

Consciously or unconsciously, different people at different times and settings have come up with this mind bothering question. Is Igbo an endangered specie? One may request for clarification with regards to which of the two is being referred to i.e. the Igbo nation or the language?

Whichever way one chooses to look at it, one will still arrive at the same answer. The Igbo nation refers to one of the nationalities that make up the polity known as the Nigerian state. They occupy the geographical region of Nigeria called the South East and some parts of the South South. The people as well as their language are referred to as Igbo. Therefore, calling for clarification does not actually arise because, there can be no people without their language nor can there be a language without its speakers. Usually, people are identified by their language, hence, whatever touches the eye affects the nose too.

However, in the last two decades, there has been a growing concern over the seemingly

neglect or outright disregard of Igbo language by the indigenes and non indigenes alike. For instance, almost every young Igbo home prefers to operate in English language except of course, where the young parents are not so exposed to English or Western education. Majority of these parents choose to enroll their children in private Nursery / Primary schools where the medium of instruction from day one is English. This is even in violation of the national language policy as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (1981 revised) which recommends the use of mother tongue or the language of immediate environment up to the third year in primary schools as medium of instructions.

This has in no small measure, contributed to the fast pace at which the culture and all the good attributes for which the Igbo man is noted is being eroded. As a result, all manner of vices like; armed robbery, kidnaping, assassination, prostitution, indecent dressing, disrespect for elders, even begging by healthy men and women e.t.c. which hitherto were very rare among the Igbo have become a way of life for some people. Hardwork and uprightness are no longer encouraged; an indication that something has gone wrong with the way of life of the Igbos. Consequently, fear, insecurity, instability e.t.c. are seriously observed in the environment, hence, the need arises for us to go back to the basics, trace our root and culture through the medium of enhanced Igbo language education.

Language

Language because of its complex nature, roles, usages e.t.c. has attracted so many definitions and descriptions. Wilson (1972)

described language as “a body of words or systems for their usage common to a people of a certain geographical area with the same cultural and traditional affinity”. Bamigbose (1976) saw language as “a medium of communication by voice that uses the arbitrary symbols in conventional ways with conventional meaning”. Also, Onyishi (2001) asserted that language is man’s most important gift, the vehicle for communication and a good instrument for thought and creativity”. He further stressed that for a nation to develop, its indigenous language must be promoted and used.

Infact, language is an attribute of man (species specific). It separates man from the other animals. It is as important to man as the air he breaths. Remove language from man and he is as good as non existent. The language which a man speaks forms parts of his identity and at the same time his cultural embodiment.

Education

Education is widely recognized as a veritable tool that addresses the issues of illiteracy, ignorance, conflict, health, population, human rights e.t.c. It is expected to equip the individual effectively from birth through life to function effectively in the society within the acceptable norms and culture of his/her people. Encyclopedia Britannica quoted in Adebayo (2001) views education as “the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of a society. In this sense, it is equivalent to what social scientists term socialization or enculturation... Education is designed to guide him in learning a culture, moulding his behaviour in the ways of adulthood and guiding him towards his external role in society”. Adebo–Lawal (1982) also emphasizing the significant role of education saw education in the society as that which “trains their minds, widens their mental horizons and enables them to see things in proper perspectives. He further stressed that the effect is to lift man from his primitive

form to one of enlightenment, from illiteracy to literacy e.t.c.”.

Igbo Language Education

Institute of Education, University of Ibadan (1981) quoted in Onyishi (2001) defined language education as “training users of language in the language skills and helping them to develop these skills to the fullest in order to carry out the act of oral and written communication effectively”. With this as our reference point, by extension, Igbo language education should involve train-speakers/users of Igbo language in the acts that would enable them to operate meaningfully and effectively in Igbo language in the various language skills of; listening, speaking, writing. It will also inculcate in them the acceptable standards and way of life of the Igbo people. All these are possible because it had been established that language is culture and culture is language. This implies that what you have in the culture of a people is wholly loaded in the language. The significance of Igbo language in the stability of the Igbo nation therefore, cannot be overemphasized. As Igbo mans principal means of expression, its cultural norms and values cannot find appropriate expression in another language.

Achieving a Stable Igbo Nation Through Enhanced Igbo Language Education

There is no gainsaying that Igbo language and culture are fast ebbing away. Many scholars of Igbo extraction and well meaning sons and daughters of Igbo like Ejiofo (2009) have continued to bemoan this situation. The solution to the problem is not far fetched. Umo (2001) stressed that “for skills, knowledge, attitudes and culture of a group to be properly transmitted to the learner, they must be conveyed in a language”. Igbo language is not an exception. Every aspect of Igbo language has many things to offer. For instance, the literary genres in Igbo are vast with knowledge and

skills. From the prose and drama, one is exposed to various skills and many ways of doing things. The dramas expose one to various characters, their attitudes both good and evil and the attendant implications of every act. Poetry in addition to all these, imparts the art oracy, evoke strong emotions and sense of appreciation.

Folk tales are other aspects that are very vital in Igbo language education. It abounds in pedagogical as well as didactic lessons. Some of them teach simple arithmetic, items identification, ability to reason fast e.t.c. A tale like the one below teaches arithmetic and ability to think or reason fast:-

Story teller: Olee anu new ukwu ino oo?
Audience: Nwe ukwu ino
Story teller: Ewu nwe ukwu ino oo?
Audience: Nwe ukwu ino
Story teller: Ezi nwe ukwu ino oo?
Audience: Nwe ukwu ino
Story teller: Nkita nwe ukwu ino oo?
Audience: Nwe ukwu ino
Story teller: Okuko nwe ukwu ino oo?
Audience:
Story teller: Which animal has four legs?
Audience: Has four legs.
Story teller: Goat has four legs
Audience: Has four legs
Story teller: Pig has four legs
Audience: Has four legs
Story teller: Dog has four legs?
Audience: Has four legs
Story teller: Fowl has four legs?
Audience:

In the story above, one is expected to think fast and chorus the response if it is appropriate but, when it is inappropriate, you keep quiet. If any person responds wrongly, he/she would be

laughed to scorn and he will learn it immediately from that experience. Other language forms that embody good values and attitudes of the Igbo people are the idioms, proverbs, metaphors, ironies e.t.c. Infact, they serve as great documentary tools for culture and folk wisdom. Whenever they are employed in any discussion, the essence could be for any of the followings;

1. Caution to abstain from evil or warning signal
2. Motivation for greatness
3. Honour to whom honour is due
4. Gratitude/Appreciation
5. Rejection of evil early enough
6. Advice for unity e.t.c.
7. Morality

We are Going to Explore Some Igbo Proverbs to Show These

Caution to Abstain from Evil: Igbo culture abhors evil so much. As a result, there are expressions which are used in Igbo language to caution one another any time a wrong attitude/behaviour is suspected. For instance, when an adult suspects that a young person is beginning to follow a bad group, may be robbers, such expressions as the ones below are uttered.

1. Nwa ewu ga – epu mpi, ekwu kakwaa ya akaa. (The young goat that wants to develop horns, let its skull be strong). This proverb implies that one must brace up to bear the consequences of his actions.
2. Ukwu na – aga warawara, anya na-aga warawara na-ahu ya. (The leg that moves sharply is seen by the eye that moves sharply). This is used to express that nothing is hidden under the sun, that the act is already known.
3. Ekweghi ekwe na – ekwe n’ute ekwere. (One who refuses to listen /

agree, listens/agrees on palm front mat). This suggests that the end of such an act is death.

Motivation for Greatness

The Igbo believe so much on one working out his "salvation". Cheap gain or bread of idleness is never encouraged. There is utmost belief in the dignity of labour. Therefore, expressions that promote hardwork abound such as:

1. Aka ajaaja na-ebute onu mmanu. (Muddy hand bring oily mouth). This shows that every good effort has its good reward.
2. Onye mechaa nwankwu, ya tenuo. (whoever tends the young palm tree, let him tap it and drink). This simply is encouraging sowing and reaping.
3. Nku onye kpara n'okochi ka o nanya n'udu mmiri. (The firewood one collected in dry season is what he uses in rainy season). This also implies that what one sows, is what he will reap.
4. Nwata kwochaa aka, o soro okenye rie ihe (if a child washes his hand, he eats with the elder). Anyone who attains greatness receives honour.

Honour to whom honour is due; Igbo people are a very organized and orderly people. They have good regards for constituted authorities and also for age. Violation of any of these is seriously frowned at, hence, such expression as;

1. Onye fee eze, eze enuo ya. (Whoever honour the king will be king). This simply advices obedience to authority.
2. Nwata bulie nna ya elu, ogodo ya ekpuchie ya anya. (If a child lifts up

his father (scornfully) his clothe will cover his eyes). Due consequences awaits every act of disobedience.

3. Nwanyi lelia di ya, ike akpoo ya nku. (If a woman disregards her husband, her bottom will dry up). These advices that a woman should not disrespect her husband.

Gratitude / Appreciation for Goodness

Igbo do not take ingratitude lightly. They appreciate any favour received and expect to be appreciated. Consequent upon this, we find expression such as;

1. Uta gbatara elekentioba, ya re ogu mkpuruaku (the bow that shot elekentioba (type of swift flying bird) let it take twenty arrows). This implies that whoever achieves great feat, should receive great reward.
2. E too onye na nke o mere, o mekwa ozo. (if one is praised for what he did, he does another). Appreciation motivates one to continue doing good.

Rejection of evil early enough; Igbo people to the best of their ability, try to avert evil early enough, hence, such expressions as:

1. Kwoo mmiri ka o di n'ogbugbaona. (Drain the water when it is ankle deep). Make hay while the sun shines.
2. E mee ngwa emeghara odachi. (If it is done quickly danger will be averted). A stitch in time saves nine.

Advice on Unity/Oneness and co-operation.

A very popular saying amongst the Igbo is that "Igwe bu ike" implying that unity is strength. In furtherance to this, we have such proverbs as;

A nyukoo amiri onu, o gbaa ufufu, (when people urinate together on a sport, it foams). This implies that joint effort avails much.

Infact, we can go on and on this. A good mastery of language has got a lot to offer the individual in particular and the nation at large. With effective Igbo language education, preservation, continuity and transmission of Igbo culture is guaranteed and a stable Igbo nation is eminent.

Conclusion

So far, we have been able to have an exposition on the possibility of using enhanced Igbo language education to achieve a stable Igbo nation. Indeed, Igbo language has great stock of cultural norms, values and attitudes that one can imbibe to be able to live a meaningful, contributory, successful and happy life in the society. It therefore, becomes pertinent to alert such individuals who feel that learning and or speaking Igbo is archaic to have a rethink. While one has “a whole world” to loose for not speaking Igbo, he gains a lot more by speaking it. When one internalizes the wise sayings that are loaded in the idioms, the proverbs e.t.c, he/she has but only one option – to be a good member of the society.

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