

Language Attitudes of Igbo Speakers: A Comparative Study of Igbo People at Homeland (Awka) And in Diaspora (Lagos)

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Abstract

Language attitudes refer to individuals' beliefs, evaluations, and emotions towards their native language, other languages and its usage in various social contexts. By comparing the language attitudes of Igbo people at home and in diaspora, this research aims to investigate various domains influencing language attitudes among Igbo people in their homeland such as Awka metropolis and Igbo people residing in diaspora communities such as Oshodi in Lagos. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods such as a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview to collect data from 300 participants: 150 participants in Awka and 150 in Oshodi from Anambra and Lagos States respectively. In order to gather insights into the participants' language attitudes, perceptions of language vitality, language use patterns, and the challenges associated with Igbo language maintenance, a questionnaire was administered to 300 sample population while a semi-structured interview was administered to twenty participants who were randomly selected from the sample population. The findings reveal that the majority of Igbo people in diaspora share similar positive attitude with Igbo people in their homeland towards their language and culture, although they face challenges in maintaining it due to the influence of the dominant English language and culture. Various reasons were identified as the challenges these speakers have in maintaining the Igbo language when communicating, such as limited knowledge of some Igbo words, lack of properly trained teachers to teach Igbo language effectively, parents preference to the English language, dialectal differences etc. In order to preserve and promote the Igbo language both in the Igbo homeland and among diaspora communities, the study, recommends that: parents should expose their children to the Igbo language and culture at a very tender age, there should be development of more books, audio, video materials, and online resources to teach and learn Igbo language, awards or sponsorships should be granted to winners of quiz competitions organized in Igbo language and many more.

Keywords: language attitude, Igbo language, Igbo speakers, diaspora, language preservation.

Introduction

Language attitude is the feelings people have about their own language or other languages. It is a sociolinguistic phenomenon which holds the view that an individual's or a community's attitude toward their own language or other languages will affect how they learn and use a language. According to Jendra (2010), these feelings may be positive or negative, and when someone learns or speaks a language and his/her attitude is positive, the attitude will be followed by good action and indicates a good result in studying the language or speaking the language. In contrast, the negative attitude will be followed by negative action. A learner or speaker with a positive attitude towards a language or a dialect will try to speak the language/dialect fluently and frequently with their friends.

However, some language speakers have positive attitude towards their language but act negatively, while some language speakers have positive attitudes towards another language and exhibit a negative attitude towards their native language. Igbo native speakers on the other hand, are also part of those who have a positive attitude towards learning and speaking the English language (Nwankwo, 2018 and Ukpokolo 2017). The Igbo people are known to be travelers and are scattered in different parts of the country and outside the country. Many Igbo people were born outside the Igbo land and they have lived so many of their lives outside the Igbo land for years without visiting their home town, when they visit

it is usually for a short period of time. As a result of this, so many of them living outside their homeland have a penchant for picking up other people's languages and they to show off by speaking the host community's language when they travel to the Igbo land or whenever they travel back to their base. Nwadike (2008), therefore, maintained that many Igbo parents do not want their children to speak Igbo, for instance, some Igbo parents at home especially in rural communities try to impose the use of English language on their children as a means to show off that their children attend good schools compared to other children in their community even when the child is more comfortable using his/her mother tongue or home language. Diaspora Igbo children on the other hand, hardly speak the Igbo language too.

As a result of this, the language is currently facing a decline in usage and popularity, particularly among younger generations and since reading and writing in Igbo is not very widespread in many urban areas, Igbo is often replaced by Nigerian Pidgin English and English which implies that Igbo speakers are typically bilingual in English or even multilinguals. Multilingualism which refers to the ability to speak or use multiple languages is a common phenomenon among Igbo speakers especially those in diaspora. Multilingualism can present a challenge to the preservation and development of the Igbo language, as well as other languages around the world. The use of multiple languages can result in the gradual decline of less widely spoken languages, as people shift towards using more dominant languages (Agbedo 2019; Harison 2021). In the case of Igbo, there are several factors that contribute to the challenge of preserving the language. For one, Nigeria, where Igbo is spoken, has over 500 different languages, and English is the official language of the country. This means that Igbo competes with other languages, as well as English, for use in education, government, and other important domains. (Agbedo, 2011). In addition, the use of English and other languages in media, entertainment, and popular culture contributes to the gradual decline of Igbo language usage among younger generations, thereby making the Igbo language to be vulnerably endangered (UNESCO, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

The language attitude of Igbo speakers towards the Igbo language is generally poor and as a result there is a decline in the use of the Igbo language by its speakers especially among the youths (Osiberoha 2020 and Emeka 2019) which has made the language to be endangered (UNESCO, 2003). By comparing the language attitude of native Igbo speakers in diaspora and those in their homeland, this study is geared to find out which group of Igbo speakers is more affected, that is, if it is the group of Igbo speakers in diaspora or Igbo speakers in their homeland that is affected by this negative attitude to the Igbo language that has brought about the decline in the use of the Igbo language.

Purpose of the Study

Igbo people in diaspora may have adopted different cultural values and beliefs compared to those in their home which may affect their attitudes towards the Igbo language. The general purpose of this study seeks to compare the language attitude of Igbo speakers in diaspora and those at home.

Specifically, this study seeks to investigate:

1. the level of competence Igbo speakers in diaspora and homeland have on the Igbo language.
2. the domains of language used by Igbo speakers in diaspora and homeland.
3. how Igbo speakers in diaspora and those in homeland feel about their language.
4. to identify the challenges faced by Igbo speakers in diaspora and in homeland in maintaining and promoting the Igbo language.
5. ways to preserve and promote the Igbo language by Igbo speakers in diaspora and homeland.

Research Questions

1. What level of competence do Igbo speakers in the diaspora and homeland have on the Igbo language?
2. What are the domains of language used by these Igbo speakers?
3. What are the opinion of Igbo speakers in the diaspora towards the Igbo language compared to those living in their homeland?
4. What are the challenges faced by Igbo speakers in the diaspora and homeland in maintaining and promoting the Igbo language?

5. What strategy can be used by Igbo speakers in diaspora and homeland to preserve and promote the Igbo language?

Attitude

Attitude according to Baker (1992) denotes either a positive or negative reaction or feeling toward a 'person, object or issue'. An attitude is a hypothetical construct which is not directly observable but can be inferred from observable responses (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). Gardner (1985) as cited in Addisu (2020) claims that attitude is an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinion about the referent. According to him, attitude is an inference which is made on the basis of a complex of beliefs about the attitude object. It is the sum of a man's instinct and feelings, prejudice or bias, perceived notions, fears, threats and convictions about any specified topic. Attitudes are cognitive (i.e. are capable of being thought about) and affective (i.e. have feelings and emotions attached to them). Attitudes vary in degree of favourability/unfavourability, predisposes a person to act in a certain way, and are learned, not inherited or genetically endowed.

Language Attitude

Ryan and Giles (1982) defined language attitudes as attitudes that people have towards others speaking different languages from them, as well as towards speakers of the same language but who have different social and regional variations. It is also defined as a feeling, reaction or emotional disposition towards an idea, concept or phenomenon (Baker, 1992). Ngidi (2007) defined language attitude 'as strong positive or negative emotions experienced by people when they are faced with a choice between languages in a variety of situations or are learning a language'. Language attitude according to Agbede (2011) can generally be classified as either positive or negative. If positive, its users then to choose it as a medium of interpersonal exchanges in most communicative events, but where it is negative, it leads to language shift which provides a ground for language endangerment.

Igbo language, culture and Identity

The Igbo language is one of the major languages spoken in Nigeria, primarily in the southeastern part of the country. It is a tonal language with a rich oral tradition and a complex grammatical structure. The Igbo language has a multiplicity of dialects some of which are mutually unintelligible. It is the principal native language of the Igbo people, an ethnic group of southeastern Nigeria. The language has approximately 44 million speakers who live mostly in Nigeria (Attah, 1996). The Igbo people are primarily found in Abia, Anambra Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states with a size population in Delta and some part of Rivers States, in other parts of the country and outside the country such as Cameroon, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea (Mwakikalige, 2006). The Igbo language also has a significant impact on how the Igbo people live their social, economic, and political life. They may interact with individuals from various regions of Nigeria and abroad, completely engage in community issues, and have access to resources thanks to it.

According to Emenanjo (1988) cited in Toni-Duruaku and Chukwu (2012) "Language and culture are not only symbolic but rub off on each other in a mutual cause" The Igbo culture is rich and diverse, with a strong emphasis on community, family, and tradition. In Igbo culture, the importance of the family is strong, and large families frequently coexist in large compounds. Marriage is viewed as a means of fostering new relationships and tying the family unit together. Historically, the Igbo people practiced a wide range of spiritual practices, including ancestor worship and a pantheon of deities even though many Igbo people are Christians today, (Nwadike, 2008; Nwajiuba and Okereke, 2008). A vital component of the Igbo people's customs and beliefs is their use of the Igbo language, which has a rich cultural legacy. It is also a critical tool for passing down cultural norms, values, and traditions from one generation to the next. The language is employed in a variety of contexts, including official ceremonies, sacred rituals, and ordinary speech (Aja, 2008).

The Igbo language is also a crucial component of Igbo identity and culture and it is essential in defining the Igbo people as a whole. Language is an ethnic identity and it impacts how individuals think, experience the world, and interact with it. It is a crucial part of identity. As a medium of expression,

communication, and cultural preservation, the language of the Igbo people is an essential component of their identity.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is Domain of Language Use introduced by Fishman in 1960's. Domain of language use involves typical interaction between typical people in a typical setting about a typical topic. It is when speakers in bilingual or multilingual groups decide which language to use in certain social contexts. Examples of these domains are: family, friendship, employment, education and religion. The factors which influence concept of domain are: topic, role-relation and place. The choice of language by participants in a speech event is determined by the participants themselves, the topic of discussion and the setting. This choice of language can be influenced by the attitude of the speaker to the language which the language user could exhibit a sense of pride while communicating in a particular language or become less proud to use a language or even ashamed to use a particular language (Ayman, 2019).

Research Methodology

This study is designed to compare the language attitude of native Igbo speakers in diaspora and those in their homeland. Using the purposive sample technique, 300 native Igbo speakers were selected to constitute the sample population of this study. For convenience, 150 speakers were selected from Awka metropolis in Anambra State to represent Igbo people at home and being a metropolitan city with a Federal University has other Igbo people from other Igbo communities. The remaining 150 respondents were selected from Oshodi metropolitan city of Lagos to represent Igbo speakers in diaspora. Oshodi in Lagos State was chosen because there are a large population of Igbo people residing there. The instrument for data collection for this research is a language attitude questionnaire which was administered to the 300 sample population and a semi-structured oral interview. The data gathered will be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Questionnaire Data

For the quantitative analysis, simple percentage and frequency were used. In the tables below, the frequency represents actual number of respondents used in the research work, while the percentage was derived by the formular:

$$\text{Frequency} \quad \times \quad 100$$

_____ Total frequency

Research Question 1: What level of competence do Igbo speakers in the diaspora and homeland have on the Igbo language?

Table1

	Questions	150 Respondents from Awka			150 Respondents from Oshodi		
		Igbo Frequency/Percentage	English Frequency/Percentage	Not applicable	Igbo Frequency/Percentage	English Frequency/Percentage	Not applicable
1	What is your mothertongue?	68/45%	54/36%	28/19%	112/75%	25/17%	13/9%
2	What language do/did your parents use between themselves?	150/100%	-	-	150/100%	-	-
3	What language did your mother use with you in childhood?	122/81%	28/19%		142/95%	8/5.3%	
4	What language did your father use with you in childhood?	123/82%	21/14%	6/4%	142/95%		8/5%
5	What language did you/do you normally use with your siblings in your childhood?	105/70%	42/28%	3/2%	107/71%	36/24%	7/4%
6	What language do you normally use with your spouse/partner?	56/37%	28/19%	66/45%	78/52%	57/38%	15/10%
7	What language do you normally speak with your children now?	105/70%	26/17%	19/13%	85/57%	43/29%	22/15%

The background information in table 1 above about respondent competence in Igbo language use showed that a greater percentage of the respondents in Oshodi attested the Igbo language was their mother tongue more than respondents in Awka metropolis. It also shows that the parents of Oshodi Igbo speakers use the Igbo language when communicating with the respondents when they were children more than Igbo parents at home. The implication of this is that the use of English language at home is common among parents in the homeland as the parents in diaspora try to teach their children Igbo language knowing fully well that the language of their environment is English or the language of the environment which is Yoruba. The data also reviewed that the respondents in Oshodi who are married employ the use of Igbo language with their spouses more than respondents in Awka.

Research question 2: What are the domains of language used by these Igbo speakers?

Table2:

	Questions	150 Respondents from Awka			150 Respondents from Oshodi		
		Igbo Frequency/Percentage	English Frequency/Percentage	Not applicable	Igbo Frequency/Percentage	English Frequency/Percentage	Not applicable
8	Parents	106/71%	37/25%	7/5%	134/89%	6/4%	10/7%
9	Siblings and relatives	50/33%	100/67	-	114/76%	36/24%	-
10	Close friends	22/15%	128/85%	-	43/29%	108/71%	-
11	Colleagues/classmates	17/11%	133/89%	-	36/24%	114/76%	-
12	Strangers	17/11%	133/89%	-	28/19%	112/81%	-

Discussions of the findings

Table 2 shows that greater population of respondents' in Oshodi employ the use of Igbo language with their parents, siblings and relatives, and close friends than respondents in Awka. This implies that respondents in Awka are more affected by the decline in the use of Igbo language than respondents in Oshodi. It also implies that respondents in Awka embrace English language more notwithstanding the fact that Igbo language is the primary language of the Eastern part of Nigeria, while respondents in Oshodi puts in conscious effort to use the Igbo language because they are faced with so many other languages in diaspora.

Research question 3: What are the opinion of Igbo speakers in the diaspora towards the Igbo language compared to those living in their homeland?

Table 3

	STATEMENT	Awka Frequency and Percentage					Oshodi Frequency and Percentage				
		SA	A	NAND	D	SD	SA	A	NAND	D	SD
13	I do not want people to know my identity by the language I speak	10/7%	23/15%	4/3%	68/45%	45/30%			22/13%	92/61%	36/24%
14	Igbo language is easy to learn	15/10%	75/50%	31/21%	19/13%	10/7%	14/9%	78/52%	8/5%	36/24%	14/9%
15	It is easy to make friends with a speaker of my language	10/7%	110/73%	10/7%	20/13%	0	22/15%	99/66%	14/9%	7/5%	8/5%
16	The friends I hang out with has a negative impact on my use of Igbo	10/7%	20/13%	36/24%	44/29%	40/27%	7/5%	50/33%	22/13%	64/43%	7/5%
17	If am to teach my child one language, it will be Igbo Language	15/10%	70/46%	33/23%	15/9%	15/10%	28/19%	78/52%	22/13%	22/15%	0
18	Speaking Igbo anywhere makes me feel uncomfortable	5/3%	17/11%	14/9%	72/48%	42/28%	15/10%	0	0	92/61%	43/29%
19	My parents encourage me to speak Igbo	52/35%	83/55%	4/3%	6/4%	5/3%	58/39%	85/57%	0	0	7/5%
20	When I hear someone who speaks Igbo language well, I wish I could speak like him	29/19%	76/51%	25/17%	5/3%	15/10%	36/24%	78/52%	0	36/24%	0

Discussions of the findings

Table 3 above shows that the majority of Igbo speakers in diaspora share similar positive language attitude with Igbo speakers in their homeland towards their language and culture, although they face challenges in maintaining it due to the influence of the dominant English language and culture. In other words, the attitude of the Igbo speakers towards the Igbo language is generally positive as Igbo speakers are comfortable using their language and are proud to be identified as an Igbo speaker.

Interview Data

For the interview data, ten Igbo speakers in Oshodi and ten Igbo speakers in Awka were randomly picked from the sample population of this study. A telephone interview was conducted with the Igbo speakers in Oshodi cause at the time of the interview session, the researchers were at the homeland of the Igbo language. On the other hand, the interview with the Igbo speakers in homeland was conducted with each one of the Igbo speakers and each having different durations with the longest duration to be six minutes. Recordings were done with the use of a smart phone for the purpose of finding out the challenges Igbo speakers in diaspora and Igbo speakers in their homeland have that result in the decline in the use of Igbo language and also to proffer solutions to the challenges experienced. Some of the

recordings were in Igbo language for speakers who preferred to be recorded in Igbo language, while some were done using the English language.

Research question 4: What are the challenges faced by Igbo speakers in the diaspora and homeland in maintaining and promoting the Igbo language?

Challenges of Igbo speakers in Awka metropolis

Limited vocabulary of the Igbo language: Igbo language with its rich history and culture, has not been given the same level of recognition and promotion as English language which has resulted in limited efforts to develop and expand the vocabulary of Igbo language. English language is often used as the language of technology, science, and business. This has resulted in the development of technical vocabulary that is not present in Igbo language.

Parents preference to English language: There is a perception among some Igbo people that speaking English language is more prestigious and can lead to greater social and economic opportunities. Some Igbo parents in homeland especially in rural communities try to impose the use of English language on their children as a means to show off that their children attend good schools compared to other children in their community even when the child is more comfortable using his/her mother tone or home language

The audience: Since not everyone on the street understands the Igbo language, some Igbo speakers switch to English language at regular intervals especially when addressing the public. They do so because they do not want anyone to be left out on the information that will be shared to the general public.

Teacher training: There is a lack of properly trained teachers to teach Igbo language effectively in the homeland. Some Igbo language teachers are not familiar with the most effective teaching methodologies or may not have the necessary language proficiency to teach the language to their students but still find their way in schools teaching.

Limited knowledge of some Igbo items: Globalization and technology have caused some Igbo items or words to be loss or less used by Igbo speakers and have also introduced new items that are not available in the Igbo culture. Some items like fruits e.g. pawpaw, mango, sour sop etc. are not known to many Igbo speakers which make them opt for their English alternatives and some new technological items such as microwave, vase, internet etc. are not part of Igbo language and culture.

Dialectal differences: There are several dialects of Igbo which vary significantly in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. This creates challenges for communication between speakers of different dialects who are not mutually intelligible and result in a preference for using English or other dominant languages for ease of communication. Dialectal differences can also be seen when an Igbo speaker whose dialect is very far from the Standard Igbo dialect finds it difficult to learn or use the standard variety employed in school and he/she may feel other Igbo speakers will not understand his/her dialect, he/she will prefer to use the English language in communication.

Challenges of Igbo speakers in Oshodi

Parental upbringing: Some participants complained they weren't thought the Igbo language by their parents or guardians when they were children, which was why they were unable to use the Igbo language well as adult speakers.

Influence of other languages: Igbo language has been influenced by other languages, including English and Pidgin English, which are widely spoken in Nigeria. This has led to the incorporation of loanwords and the adoption of certain grammatical structures that are not native to Igbo.

Environmental background: The environmental background poses significant challenge to maintaining Igbo language, especially in the modern world. With increasing urbanization, many Igbo people are moving from rural areas to urban areas. In the cities, the influence of English language is much stronger, and the Igbo language may not be used as frequently. This can result in the language not being passed down to the next generation, as children are more likely to learn and use English language.

Loss of traditional knowledge: Igbo language is closely tied to the culture and traditions of the Igbo people. As traditional ways of life are replaced by modern lifestyles, there seem to be a loss of the

knowledge and practices that are associated with the language which makes diaspora Igbo speakers to choose the English language in order to express themselves better when trying to make a discussion about tradition or culture.

Curriculum: The Nigerian educational system is primarily based on the use of English language as the medium of instruction. As a result, the teaching of Igbo language is not given enough attention in schools in Oshodi, Lagos State and is not included in the curriculum in some areas. This poses a challenge to Igbo speakers especially the children who spend all their day in schools, thus leads to a decline in the use of the language.

Limited resources: There are relatively few resources available for learning Igbo language, including textbooks, dictionaries, and language learning software. This can make it difficult for people who want to learn the language, especially those who are living in diaspora to maintain the Igbo language.

Non Igbo Friends: The friends and company diaspora Igbo speakers keep cause huge challenge to maintaining the Igbo language as most of their friends are from other language group who do not understand the Igbo language. Spending more time with friends either on the street, the office or at business places or on phone causes a decline in the use of Igbo language.

Research question 5: What strategy can be used by Igbo speakers in diaspora and homeland to preserve and promote the Igbo language?

Preserving and maintaining the Igbo language is an important task that requires the collective effort of individuals, communities, and organizations. Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommend the following for preserving and promoting the Igbo language:

This study encourages parents to speak Igbo language to their children at home. Parents have a huge role to play by making sure their children learn the Igbo language at a very tender age by exposing them to Igbo language, culture and history of the language.

More books, audio and video materials, and online resources to teach and learn Igbo language should be developed. These resources should be available and accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds. The Eastern state governments should partner with local and international organizations that are committed to the preservation and promotion of language and culture to grant awards or sponsorships to winners of quiz competitions organized in Igbo language. This can help encourage the use of Igbo language by the Igbo people especially the youths.

Salaries of qualified Igbo teachers at all levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary) should be made attractive with other incentives attached to it.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of this research:

Firstly, it is evident that conducting research on speakers' attitude towards their language can be quite beneficial though a great deal remains to be done. Therefore, topics for further research on the basis of the present study are highly recommended.

Secondly, the sample size has made it impossible to make firm conclusions about Igbo speakers' attitudes towards the Igbo language. In light of this, it would be interesting to conduct studies where the sample includes a high number of participants.

Finally, the researchers also recommend a more thorough study with more sophisticated design and analytical technique to be done on language attitudes of Igbo speakers towards their language.

Conclusion

The study revealed that the use of the Igbo language by its speakers is not bound by space. In other words, if an Igbo man finds himself in an environment that accommodates other languages or a multilingual environment, he makes an adjustment by learning the language of his environment to enable him or her have a pleasant dealing with his neighbor(s). This adjustment does not mean his attitude to his language is negative. In other words, Igbo speakers adore their original tongue and they take great pride in being called native Igbo speakers. Some Igbo speakers take pride in their ability to speak the Igbo language and believe that it is essential for every Igbo person to know how to speak it. They also view it as a way to differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups. Some Igbo speakers on the other hand, combine aspects of positive and negative attitudes to the Igbo language; they value the

Igbo language and culture but also recognize the practicality of English in modern-day communication. While there is a strong attachment to the Igbo language among many of its speakers, there are also concerns about its future survival and the need for continued efforts to promote its use and preservation.

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Online materials

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<https://en.wal.unesco.org/>

<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/diaspora>

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/homeland>

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/businessday.ng/amp/news/article/ngo-moves-to-preserve-igbo-language-culture-2/>

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