

## The Prelacy and The Igbo Language: A Case for Prospect and Posterity

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### Abstract

It is a fact that the speakers of Igbo language in most cases are shy to speak their language given the effects of the prestigious language exposure. Consequently, a lot of families no longer expose their children to their mother tongue and the result is a drastic reduction in the number of the new generation taking pride in the growth and future of the Igbo language. On this backdrop, this paper seeks to examine the position of the prelacy as agents of social change; to investigate their roles in the battle for the survival of the Igbo language. The paper specifically looks at how the prelacy, given their revered position can bring to the consciousness of their hearers the beauty and the advantages of projecting the Igbo language against the tide of indigenous language holocaust. Through the methodology of unstructured interviews and logical interpretations, the study found out that the prelacy holds an important position in the lives of their hearers and can move their hearers to change their thinking towards their language. The paper concludes that the prelacy holds the key to the prospects and posterity of the Igbo language.

**Key words:** prelacy, language, indigenous languages, prospects, posterity

### 1.0 Introduction

It is a major challenge to contend with the rate of invisible war facing indigenous languages. The war is very intense and gradual, though it seems as if nothing is happening to a layman; but to a linguist, a lot of harm has already been done to the neglected indigenous languages. It is now a norm for owners of indigenous languages to abandon them to embrace more prestigious languages. Going by the number of enrolments in different language courses in the Nigerian higher institutions especially in the South-East zone, foreign language enrolment in languages like English, French and Chinese is always on the rise while enrolment in Igbo language is dwindling. Most times, the few students that find themselves in the indigenous language department like Igbo accepted the offer of admission because they have no other alternatives. It is now very rare to see people taking pride in speaking the indigenous languages. The parents who should understand better are the worst enemies of the indigenous languages; hence they take pride in bringing up their children with foreign languages without rethink on the devastating effect of such attitude. The rate at which the new generation look down on the indigenous language calls for an urgent intervention from well-meaning members of the society. It is a lay knowledge that no language develops without the concerted efforts of the owners of the language. The issue at hand is that many indigenous people do not understand the intricacies and dynamics of language. Many are not aware of the war against indigenous languages and the fact that as foreign languages gain more grounds through increased number of speakers that the indigenous languages are indirectly being subdued and going into oblivion.

The first part of this paper handles the introduction, the literature review in the second part, looks at the prelacy and dignity; prospects and posterity of indigenous languages. In part three, the paper throws light on the Igbo people and their language. Part four reveals the reasons why the prelacy should champion the course of Igbo language development and how the Prelacy can use their revered positions to showcase, promote and project the Igbo language. The paper concludes in the last part with highlighting the prospects of the Igbo language which we believe the prelacy should help to project and strengthen for effective preservation of the language for posterity

### 2.0 Literature Review

In this section, the keywords in the title of this work will be revisited and the views of scholars on related works will be examined.

#### 2.1 The Prelacy and Dignity

In different religious settings there are leaders who are charged with the responsibilities of overseeing the activities of a particular setting. Prelacy is a collective term for the high-ranking members of the Christian clergy. It also refers to church government administrated by prelates. Pointedly, prelacy refers to eminent leaders within religious groups.

The prelacy, as Rozario (2021) observes, are formal leaders within established religions, whose roles and functions vary in different religious traditions, but usually involves presiding over specific rituals and teaching their religious doctrines and practices. In continuation, he maintains that,

Each religion has religious leaders who deals with the religious affairs, rituals, philosophy, theology, clarification of any issue raised in connection to the religion. Thus, these people got ample influence, respect and command in society. Religious leaders have the power to raise awareness and influence attitudes, behaviours and practices. They can shape social values in line with faith -based teachings. They are

often the most respected figures in their communities. They play powerful role in shaping attitudes, opinions and behaviours because their members trust them. Community members and political leaders listen to religious leaders. They are well placed to add their moral and spiritual leadership to the local and global effect. The prelacy, through the use of language can impel people to change their views and mind-set towards any issues of concern in their sermons and other speeches. They can also contact political, social and civil society leaders, youth leaders, intellectuals, etc. to act on these issues.

Razorio in the above statements summarises the roles of the prelacy, presenting them as viable instrument to reorient a group of people on the need to uphold their language. Language is a useful instrument in the hands of the prelacy to instruct, motivate and convince. With language, the prelacy can influence the members of the congregations in so many ways. Evbuomwan (2012) in the following statements sees the church as an institution where language is utilized to different effects.

As we may have observed, language in these institutions is used, as a very viable tool in the hands of the religious leaders, to perform a number of functions. These functions may include, among others, to convince, to deceive, to entertain, to motivate, persuade, brainwash, and to extort. The extent to which any of these is done will depend on the intention of the user of the language. As our research has so far revealed, language use in religious institutions covers the instrumental function of language, in which language is used to make demands and satisfy several material needs, the regulatory function of language, which involves the use of language in regulating the behaviour of others in the society, the interactional function, which involves the use of language to interact and relate with others around, and the imaginative function of language, which involves the use of language to create worlds out of one's imagination, tell lies, pretend, deceive others, etc. This makes it possible for the religious leaders to control the minds of their follower and become very influential in their domains.

The foregoing reveals that the prelacy through the use of language can achieve both positive and negative results. It shows that leadership plays an important role in refocusing the masses on the need to uphold their language irrespective of the pressures from the ill-winds from global languages.

## **2.2 Prospects and posterity of indigenous languages**

It is no longer a news that language is an intangible natural resource given to man by the creator and can be harnessed like other natural resources to benefit the language owners (Ugochukwu, 2019). As a language grows and gains more grounds, the economy of the language owners is positively affected. The issue about language growth is well understood by the colonial masters and that informed the consistent strategies they apply to increase the number of speakers of their languages. They used their prestigious position accorded them by the vulnerable and covetous leaders of the black nations to enforce literacy in their language with the attached enticing benefits at the expense of our indigenous languages. In fact, all languages are capable of being developed and taken to any enviable height.

In some developed nations, the issue of promoting indigenous languages is a major concern. The purpose of the Indigenous Language Act (ILA) in Canada for example, is to enable the exercise of indigenous language rights by creating legal assurance for adequate funding and support for indigenous-led initiative to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen indigenous languages. The office of the Indigenous Language Commission in Canada has the vision to ensure that all indigenous languages in Canada are safe, vibrant and thriving (OCIL 2021-2022 Annual Report).

## **3.0 Igbo people and the Igbo language**

Among the tribes in Nigeria, the Igbo tribe is having the greatest challenge of abandoning their language for other foreign languages. They are very quick and eager to learn and speak other languages to the detriment of their own language.

Maduka (2007) comments on the threat of modern European languages powered by colonialism and globalisation to the continuity of Igbo and other Nigerian indigenous languages as follows,

Even though colonialism and globalisation have imposed western cultural values on Nigerians especially through the use of English and French as national languages, the Igbos should not fall victim to the glamorous economic and political benefits accruing from the knowledge of these languages by dispensing with the use of their mother tongue in various situations in society. They have to imitate the various people of the world for their languages' survival and rescue.

One of the greatest challenges facing the Igbo language is that the Igbo people do not cherish their language (Ikoro, 2019). This informs why many Igbo people prefer to speak English language in particular in order to appear literate. The same is also the reason Igbo parents do not see it as their God given duty to transmit their mother tongue to their young ones. It is wickedness to deny a child the possession of the natural gift (language) God gave to man freely. The Igbo people are pretty good at learning and speaking foreign languages other than their own language; hence, the need for sensitization of the Igbo people to the crystal truth that charity begins at home. The Igbo language need to leave the level of being the first language scarcely spoken by people of Igbo origin to becoming a second language learnt and spoken by people of non-Igbo origin. The future of the Igbo language lies with the Igbo people themselves as no other person can facilitate the growth of a language more than the owners of that language. The Igbo people need to be aware that a language can die not only when the speakers are all dead but also while the owners of that language are still in existence. The process of handing Igbo language to the next generation is a fire that must be ignited and sustained before it is too late.

Ezeokeke (2018) captures the state of the Igbo people and their language in the following statements,

When there are very important people around especially in our Cathedrals, the homily is delivered in English. The Igbo language is not deemed fit and dignified enough for such occasions. All these ought to be discouraged and discontinued. It is high time the Igbos cherished and used their indigenous language in their liturgical celebrations. Every liturgy is a public worship of God by the people. Therefore, active participation of the people is required and needed. For the people of God to participate actively, they must understand the language of the liturgy. A convinced Christianity can never arise out of liturgical parrotry. Such languages do not encourage the growth of faith and fulfilment among the members of the worshipping community. Though Vatican II and post-conciliar directives retain Latin as the language of the Church, ample allowance has been made for the use of the vernacular in each local Church. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 4 December 1963) calls for adaptations and inculturation of the sacraments and 212 liturgical languages. The Church in Igboland should be proud to use Igbo language in her liturgical celebrations and public worships. The use of indigenous languages has meant that translations become an important and ongoing work in the life of the Church. Today, Latin language is still a compulsory subject taught in our seminaries in Igboland, and one can be sent out of the seminary simply because he fails Latin subject...

#### **4.0 The Prelacy, Prospects and Posterity of the Igbo language**

The prelacy, given their dignified position should rise to the challenge of taking Igbo to the next level for the following reasons:

**(i) Language is divine and sacred**

There are almost uncountable natural languages in the world and of course, the origin of natural languages is still a puzzle to man. The most acceptable theory of language origin is the theory of divine origin. Natural languages are gifts from God to man and no man is born without the capacity to acquire a language. If natural languages are gifts from God and the prelacy represent God, then, the responsibility of protecting and preserving the natural language (Igbo language) should be a major concern to them. It is the duty of the prelacy to constantly call the attention of their members to this effect.

**(ii) Language is an intangible natural resource**

Researches has shown that languages are intangible natural resources given to man to explore and utilize (Ugochukwu, 2019). Languages are not ordinary; otherwise, why are developed countries pushing their languages forward and forcing colonies to learn their languages. In so many cases, those that embrace formal education are prohibited from speaking their indigenous languages. This deceitful strategy worked and it is still working to the detriment of the development of indigenous languages. Most developed countries are utilising the gains from both tangible and intangible resources of their nation for the development of their nations while developing nations are depending only on their tangible resources for development. If there are no gains in developing and increasing the number of speakers of a language, why are languages like Chinese and French being introduced in higher institution and other lower levels of education in developing countries?

**(iii) Developed nations give maximum attention to their language growth**

In most nations of the world, the development of indigenous languages is budgeted for and given maximum attention. There are bodies that are charged with the responsibility of working on the language to strengthen it against adverse effects of global languages. For example, the office of the

Commissioner of Indigenous Languages in Canada has the vision to ensure that all indigenous languages in Canada are safe, vibrant and thriving in accordance with the UNESCO mandate (<https://commissionerforindigenoulanguages.ca>)

(iv) **The death of indigenous language means the death of the owners of the language**

Language is life and a people without a language is as good as dead. The language of a people encapsulates everything about the people. A group of people is as vibrant as their language. A thriving language signifies the voice of the owners of the language while the death of an indigenous language indicates the exit of the owners of that language.

(v) **The more the speakers of a language, the more the economic growth of the owners of the language**

Most developed and developing nation have embraced the business of growing the number of speakers of their languages. Increase in the number of speakers of a language indirectly affects the economic growth of the nation involved. This is an advance secret known to most nations that informed the active involvement of their government in expanding the scope of their linguistic coverage. In the recent times, China and France are relentlessly invading different levels of institutions of learning in Nigeria with their languages and of course with attractive and enticing baits. Germany is also coming up with their own strategies geared towards increasing the number of German language speakers. Learning a language involves serious financial commitments which go into the coffers of the investor.

The prelacy as God's representatives should spearhead the advancement of the Igbo language course. If language comes from God and Igbo as a language is a gift from God to the Igbo people, then the onus is on the prelacy to sensitise and reorient their members on the need to embrace their language as a precious gift from God. It is believed that if the prelacy champion the course of promoting the Igbo language, the people will give them a listening ear knowing that they are God's representatives and they speak the mind of God.

This paper strongly contends that the Igbo language has the capacity to grow beyond its present level; the number of speakers of Igbo language will be continuously increasing on daily basis if the prelacy will consider and take the following actions:

- a. Make the Igbo parents realise that it is sin and wickedness to deny their children the joy of having and acquiring their mother tongue.
- b. Expose members to the global linguistic warfare against indigenous languages such as Igbo language.
- c. Increase the number of services conducted entirely with the Igbo language. The congregation has no right to decide the language used to communicate the mind of God to the people; rather it is the prerogative of the prelacy to feed the sheep with the appropriate native Igbo language. The message of the Bible will be best communicated and understood through the use of the Igbo language.
- d. Ensure that all foundational teachings of the church are given in the dialect of the community hosting the church. This will force the non-indigens who are members of the church to learn the dialect thereby enlarging the scope of the language.
- e. Starting Igbo class for non-Igbo speaking members of their congregation. If Igbo people are learning other languages wherever they find themselves, then the Igbo people living in Igbo land should as a matter of urgency force visitors to cherish, respect and learn the Igbo language to fit into whatever area of their interest.
- f. Encouraging excellent results in the Igbo language at different levels of education.
- g. Appealing to the Governors of Igbo states to give instant job offer to best graduating Igbo students in the departments of Igbo in higher institutions of learning.
- h. Push for the enforcement of a CREDIT PASS in Igbo language both for admission into tertiary institutions and also for qualification for all state employments.

## 5.0 Conclusion

This work sets out to draw the attention of the prelacy to a neglected challenge of championing the promotion of indigenous languages. The paper examined the dignified position of the prelacy highlighting the reason why they should champion the course of Igbo language advancement. Every generation has the responsibility to leave a legacy for the upcoming generation with regards to linguistic values. The prelacy of Igbo origin should use their revered positions to motivate the Igbo people to change their minds toward the Igbo language. This paper is a wake-up call to the prelacy to rise to the challenge of motivating the Igbo people to love, use and engage in transmitting the Igbo language for posterity.

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