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Austine Uchechukwu Igwe
Ph.D, Department of History &
International Studies, Nnamdi
Azikiwe University, Awka,
Nigeria.

Nwachukwu Obiakor
Ph.D, Department of History &
International Studies, Nnamdi
Azikiwe University, Awka,
Nigeria.

The historical emergence of 'Union Igbo Bible' and its impact on Igbo language development in the twentieth century

Austine Uchechukwu Igwe, Nwachukwu Obiakor

Abstract

Language is generally seen as the quintessence of humanity. Thus, with particular emphasis on the Igbo language, credit for its development should be given to the Anglican Church in Nigeria. Recall that the Anglican Mission in Igbo land undertook the first bold attempt to standardize Igbo language with the publication of Union Igbo Bible in 1913 (which centenary was marked by the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion in different parts of south-eastern Nigeria in 2013). This breakthrough by Archdeacon T.J. Dennis and his assistants led to a great standardization/ orthography debate that raged for the greater part of the twentieth century. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the historical emergence of the Union Igbo Bible and the consequent standardization debate. Diverse secondary source were put into use, while in the main the eclectic method of analysis will be adopted. The paper also adopts the cultural accommodation theory as a framework of analysis, and argues that an understanding of the people (Igbo) and their history is vital in appreciating the myth and realities of Igbo language standardization debate of the last century. The paper concludes by stressing that although opponents of standardization may have some points; but standardization of the Igbo language is very vital as it would enhance the general development of not only the language, but, the Igbo nation as a whole.

Keywords: Union Igbo, Language, Standardization, Development, Twentieth Century.

1. Introduction

The first attempt made by the European Christian Evangelical missions to introduce Christianity in the area that later became Nigeria was in the 16th century, and later towards the end of the first half of the 18th century ^[1]. This first effort failed and towards the last quarter of the 18th century. General interest in the Christian evangelization of Africa was re-awakened through the efforts of John Wesley's evangelical movement of the late 18th century. Thus activities of the Christian missions, especially the Methodists and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) of the Anglican Communion penetrated the area that later became Nigeria before the end of the first half of the 19th century. The first port of call of the Christian missions was Badagry (a renowned port for shipment of slaves), where the CMS and the Methodists established their stations, and later at Abeokuta between 1842 and 1845 ^[2]. The Church Missionary Society of the Anglican Communion was unrelenting in its zeal to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout Southern Nigeria. Less than two decades of establishing their stations in Yoruba land, the Anglican Communion, through the CMS succeeded in establishing a station at Onitsha, South-eastern Nigeria. The first Church in Igbo land, established at Onitsha in 1857 was made possible by the Sierra-Leone based Church Missionary Society (CMS) led by Samuel Ajayi Crowther (later consecrated Bishop of the Niger Mission). It was about twenty eight years later, in 1885, that the Holy Ghost Mission (Spiritans) of the Roman Catholic Church brought Catholicism into Igbo land ^[3]. Recall that from the outset, the principal aims of the diverse Christian evangelical missions in Nigeria in particular, and Africa in general were the spread of the three Cs: Christianity, Commerce and Civilization (western); through all possible means ^[4]. However, with regards to spread of Christianity, and due to the rivalries and competition among the major Christian missions in Africa, the parent bodies of the missions in Europe encouraged the missionaries in Africa to study the indigenous languages of the people. The home offices of the missions felt that a good grasp of the indigenous language was a practical means of communicating Christianity to the people, not only by means of spoken language, but also through producing vernacular Bible translations and catechisms.

Correspondence:

Austine Uchechukwu Igwe
PhD, Department of History &
International Studies, Nnamdi
Azikiwe University, Awka,
Nigeria.

Thus, there was the need to evangelize in the indigenous language; and with regards to the missions in Igbo land, the need arose for the translation of the central focus of Christianity—the Holy Bible into the Igbo language. The Anglican Communion in Igbo land, through the CMS made concerted efforts from its arrival in 1857; and it finally succeeded, after several efforts in translating the Holy Bible into the Igbo language through the integration of many dialects of Igbo language, which gave birth to the Union Igbo Bible in 1913. The successful production of the Union Igbo Bible and its consequences is the major problem of this study.

Against this backdrop, this paper is divided into three sections and a conclusion. The first section briefly examines the Igbo people, culture; and language development before 1900. The theoretical framework, which underpins the paper, completes this section. The second section highlights the role of the CMS in the development and publication of the Union Igbo Bible and its consequences. The third section analyses the great orthography and Igbo language standardization debates, which spanned during the greater part of the last century. The conclusion examines the myth and realities of Igbo language standardization debate; and makes necessary recommendations.

2. Brief Overview of the Igbo People, Culture and Language Development Before 1900

The Igbo occupy the eastern and parts of both western and eastern Niger Delta area of Nigeria. Igbo land is bounded on the north by the Idoma, on the east by the Ibibio speaking people and on the south-west by the Ijo (Izon) and the Benin people respectively ^[5]. In modern Nigeria, the Igbo people occupy the five south-eastern states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo; and Igbo speaking people are also found in some parts of Delta and Rivers states. It is vital to stress that Igbo, as used in this paper denotes all sub-groups that speak different dialects of the Igbo language; and most words in these dialects have similar meanings. The Igbo people also share a lot of things in common, especially their cultural outlook and ways of life.

However, before the second half of the nineteenth century, it was difficult to define who was Igbo because the boundaries of the Igbo area had not yet been defined and many people living in the area did not yet regard themselves as Igbo. Thus, the idea that all the group in the area spoke the same language and shared elements of same culture among themselves, had not yet taken root. Insight into the genesis of the Igbo came to the fore with the writings of scholars, such as A.E. Afigbo, who argues that the Igbo have settled in the Niger-Benue area many millennia ago; and that their cultural history spans at least 6,000 years ^[6]. With regards to the origin of the Igbo, two assumptions have been generally espoused by scholars and commentators: the external influence, origin from the east, principally through Jewish influence or Egypt. The second is that the Igbo have lived in their present area from time immemorial, what has been described as ‘the Igbo core’, from where they migrated to other parts of Igbo land.

Most scholars are agreed that the second assumption of origin from the ‘Igbo core area’ seems more authentic. Specifically, A.E. Afigbo ^[7], T. Falola *et al* ^[8] and E. Isichei ^[9] agree that the Igbo have no tradition of migration from other parts of the world. They concluded that the earliest centre of Igbo settlement in Southern Nigeria was the Nri-

Awka-Isuama (Orlu) area, known as ‘the Igbo core’, from where various Igbo sub-groups migrated to other parts of Igbo land. Although, Igbo societies existed many centuries ago, but it was during the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, when Igbo land acted as a major source of slaves to the New World, as from the 17th century that Igbo land came into greater focus.

Traditional pre-colonial Igbo society was heterogeneous; and virtually each group had its independence without allegiance to others, unlike the case in most parts of Hausa land and Yoruba land during the same period. Although, there were few centralized entities during the period, but in the de-centralized areas, political leadership commenced from the family unit to other levels, to the community/town. The role of male elders and adult males at various levels in the decision making process was unique in traditional Igbo society. Thus, by the nature of the political administrative system in most pre-colonial Igbo societies, consensus was reached before decisions were taken; a sort of ‘republicanism’ and what has been described as ‘surplus democracy’, due to the extensive consultations before decisions were taken.

With regards to culture, there were similarities in cultural beliefs and practices of pre-colonial Igbo societies. For instance, virtually all Igbo groups believed that life and material success and prosperity come from the creator. Specifically, all Igbo group shared the view that the prosperity (material success) of their society in the form of good harvest, victory at war, with its resultant ‘spoils’ emanated from *Chukwu* (heavenly God) ^[10]. Similarly, throughout Igbo pre-colonial society, land, (*Ani*), was highly revered as the earth spirit, the guardian of morality, law and customs; as well as the custodian of public morality. Serious crimes/offences such as incest, patricide, wilful stealing of yams, among others, are generally seen as *alu* or *nso ani*. These crimes called for cleansing of the land-*ikpu ani*, and the traditional priests and the society concerned ensured that the necessary appeasement of the gods was performed to avoid reprisals from the gods. *Ikpu ani* (traditional cleansing of land) must be performed by culprits in order to bring back order to the society; and as well avoid the spread of punishment within the lineage or society ^[11].

With regards to the language of the people-Igbo, it falls among the ‘Kwa’, a sub-group of the Niger-Congo group of languages. According to Linguists, some other members of the Kwa sub- group of languages in Nigeria include Yoruba, Edo and Idoma. Accordingly, citing A.G. Armstrong, A.E. Afigbo opines that just like other languages in the Kwa sub-group, the Igbo language must have begun to evolve from about 6,000 years ago ^[12]. Against this backdrop, since the Igbo language is the most vital language distinguishing the Igbo people from other people within the Nigerian area in the period before 1900, it can then be suggested that the Igbo began to emerge as a distinct people from about 6,000 years ago.

Generally, being Igbo denotes the ability to speak one of the dialects spoken in the Igbo area (already specified earlier), and at least being familiar with some aspects of the traditional cultural norms from that part of Igbo land. Thus, this was the case by the dawn of the 20th century, by which period the boundaries of Igbo land was defined, especially by European missionaries and the colonial government. It was from then that greater emphasis began to be laid on the study of Igbo language and culture. However, pre-colonial Igbo did

not speak a unified form of Igbo, rather a number of related dialects of the Igbo language. Generally, the first word list in Igbo language was believed to have appeared in Sierra-Leone in 1828, and was further brought to Igbo land in 1857, when the Church Missionary Society [CMS] brought the Anglican Church into Onitsha^[13]. This effort of the CMS of the Anglican Church in Nigeria continued into the 20th century.

It was also during the beginning of colonial rule that European Anthropologists, using their own criteria divided the Igbo into five sub-cultural groups: northern, southern, western, eastern and north-eastern Igbo; each of which has its sub-divisions. Other than all the above, there are general geographical similarities among all sections of Igbo land. The entire area is ethnically contiguous, as no other ethnic group separates any part of Igbo land from the others. The area is also geographically landlocked, as it is not contiguous to any ocean; and as well, Igbo land is also politically landlocked, as it has no common border with neighbouring countries to Nigeria. Most parts of Igbo land are patriarchal, as inheritance is through male off-springs. Thus, the fore-goings are vital because language and culture of a people cannot be understood outside their historical context.

3. Theoretical Framework

For a proper understanding of the issues raised in this paper, the cultural accommodation theory will be used as the basis of analysis. This is to buttress the fact that the emergence of the Union Igbo Bible in 1913 and the consequent Igbo language orthography and standardization debate of the last century could be described as a myth, rather, standardization was necessary and remains vital till date. The cultural accommodation theory, which was first brought into limelight by Peter Whorf in 1956, is based on the notion that language and culture are closely related. The theory argues that language influences the ways in which individuals think and perceive the world. It points to the fact that individuals adjust their responses (or behaviours) in ways that corresponds to the culture with which they have an encounter. Furthermore, the theory suggests that individuals think and act differently depending on the language they are using^[14].

Further insight into the theory shows that it emphasizes that a relationship exist among language, culture and the individual's thought process. Culture, which implies the totality of man's ways of life, no doubt influences thought, either directly, through the socialization process of individuals within the culture area, or indirectly, as the individual learns the language of a culture area; language, being an evolved cultural trait. Consequently, when learning a language, an individual's thought process may be unconsciously influenced by the culture within that language area. Thus, this theory is vital to this study, because a standardized Igbo (which the Union Igbo Bible represents), that involved a fusion of different Igbo dialects can easily be understood by the Igbo from different areas due to cultural similarity that exist among the Igbo people. Since the dawn of colonial rule, the diverse Igbo groups have been able to accommodate their cultures, and such accommodating continues till date.

4. Role of the CMS in the Translation and Publication of the Union Igbo Bible and its Consequences

When the CMS of the Anglican Church from Sierra-Leone

decided to start a mission to the Niger, Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther (leader of the mission) prepared the first book ever published in the Igbo language, *The Ibo Primer* in 1857^[15]. The book was to be used by the Missionaries; and Reverend Crowther made use of the Isuama dialect, which he called Ibo, as basis of his translation. This was a version of the Igbo language, which was then common among ex-slaves of Igbo origin in Sierra-Leone. This Isuama dialect was used in the evangelical works of the CMS in Igbo land up till the beginning of the 20th century. However, the Roman Catholic Mission, which arrived Onitsha in 1885 published a book on Igbo Grammar in 1899, and an Igbo Dictionary in 1904; both in Onitsha dialect of the Igbo language^[16].

However, the CMS in Igbo land expedited action on the translation of the Igbo dialects into a unified Igbo language as from 1891, when Archdeacon T.J Dennis joined the Niger Mission after the death of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther in the same year. With his arrival, Reverend Dennis, a trained Linguist set up the Igbo Language Translation Committee, which included Igbo indigenes from diverse backgrounds. Thus, very early in the first decade of the 20th century, the Committee succeeded in producing some sections of the Bible in both Onitsha and Bonny dialects of the Igbo language. Similarly, within the same period, specific Bible translations, catechisms and vocabularies were produced in Bonny Igbo, independent of the translations in the Onitsha dialect.

The CMS were generally unrelenting in preaching the gospel in the language of the people; thereby encouraged full participation of the people in all aspects of evangelization. This 'indigenous-focused' policy yielded fruit with the ordination of Reverend George Nicholas Anyaegbunam, as the first Igbo Anglican clergy in 1903^[17]. Other than this, the years, 1900-1929 is often referred to as the Union Igbo Studies period. This was because the Committee led by Archdeacon Dennis set to work as from 1904, when the first conference that led to the production of the Union Igbo Bible was held at Onitsha. The participants at that meeting, which included T.J. Dennis, T. Anyaegbulam, among others; rejected the Isuama dialect and the existing translations in the Onitsha dialect^[18]. In their place, the Committee recommended a fresh translation that will involve diverse Igbo dialects.

Official permission was granted to Archdeacon Dennis and his team in 1905, and the group chose Egbu, near Owerri as the venue for the committee's arduous, but vital task of translating the Holy Bible into the Igbo language. It was observed that the choice of Egbu, near Owerri was earlier made possible in 1904, when the Acting High Commissioner in Calabar, Mr. Probyn invited the CMS to open a station near Owerri, a place he felt that the 'purest form of Igbo was spoken'^[18]. Translation work began on the production of the Union Igbo Bible in 1906. In their work, the translation committee used terms which were common and understood in Onitsha, Owerri, Unwana, Arochukwu and Bonny dialects, utilising idioms and proverbs that were common in these dialects.

Generally, the Union Igbo was intended to be a sort of central or 'compromise Igbo, and aimed to serve as a literary medium for the whole Igbo. Translation ended in 1912, while the Union Igbo Bible was presented to the public in 1913. It created an Igbo language variety, which was hoped could command wide acceptance. Similarly, it tried to build a synthesis, and by 1915, it stood as a sort of Esperanto, which

encouraged the de-centralized Igbo society to look beyond their immediate internal confines to a wider Igbo community. D.C. Okeke opines, while highlighting the relevance of the Union Igbo Bible that it acted as a new cohesive agent badly needed in Igbo land during the first two decades of colonial rule. He concluded by observing that for any section of Igbo land to reject the means through which the new religion drew the Igbo together was to encourage the fragmentation of the Igbo people ^[19].

Archdeacon T.J. Dennis and his Committee also translated *Pilgrim's Progress*, some catechisms, *the Union Reader and the Union Hymnal* into the Igbo language; without bias to any particular dialect. The hallmark of the translations was the Holy Bible-*Bible nso*. The Union Igbo period also witnessed translation works based on aspects of Igbo culture, proverbs, riddles, folk-tales and some aspects of the peoples' songs, customs and traditions. Again, while appreciating the work of T.J. Dennis and his team, D.C Okeke concluded that:

The missionaries through their translation of different sections of the Bible into the Igbo language removed what they considered the fulcrum of Igbo religious past. For instance, they changed Dinwennuanyi (Onitsha dialect) which implies lord to Onyenweanyi, which denotes our owner ^[20].

The above (as translated) shows that adherents of Christ should be submissive to Him, not to the other gods prevalent in many Igbo societies of the period.

The public presentation of the Union Igbo Bible in 1913 generated a lot of debates, even within the Anglican Church in Igbo land, especially from most members of the Church from Onitsha sub-group. The critics described the Union Igbo as an artificial creation and insisted on the continued use of the Onitsha-Igbo version of the Bible. Other Christian denominations in Igbo land also rejected the Union Igbo language, and continued to use the Onitsha dialect in their evangelization. Nonetheless, the Union Igbo language should be credited for having succeeded in creating the first written standard Igbo language. The Union Igbo created several written versions of the language; and proved the existence of a unified Igbo language for the first time, thereby stimulated interest in the existence of the language by many people in the Igbo nation.

5. The Great Orthography and Igbo Language Standardization Debate

Despite the criticisms, the Union Igbo generally remained in use within most sections of the Anglican Communion in Igbo land. The major issue critics of the language raised was in the area of some aspects of its orthography. While this issue raged, far away in England, the International Institute of African Languages and Culture (IALC) was inaugurated in London in 1926. The IALC later published a pamphlet, *Practical Orthography of African Languages* in 1927, which was quite different from the Lepsius Orthography used by the CMS in the Union Igbo language.

The publication of the IALC's pamphlet led to the commencement of what later became known as 'the great orthography debate' in Igbo land as from 1929. The debate was between the colonial government (which invited an official of IALC in 1929, who recommended the use of IALC's orthography) and the Catholics on one side; and the

Protestants (excluding the Methodists) on the other side. While the former and the Methodist Mission in Igbo land insisted on the use of IALC's orthography, the latter vehemently rejected it and continued to use the Lepsius orthography. This gave rise to the 'Roman Catholic Orthography' and the 'CMS Orthography', which existed side by side while the orthography debate lasted up till the early 1960s ^[21].

While the debate lasted, Mr. Pita Nwana published *OMENUKO*, the first Igbo novel written in the IALC's orthography in 1933, and thus won an award from the Institute. While the orthography debated was on, in 1939, Dr. Ward (a Linguist, sponsored by the colonial government), in her series of research works on Igbo language standardization produced what later became known as a standardized central Igbo language. The central Igbo was based on the Owerri and Umuahia dialects, with particular inclination to Ohuhu ^[22]. While commending the production of a standardized central Igbo, E.N. Emenanjo, a renowned Igbo Language scholar opines that:

Unlike the Union Igbo, central Igbo (as compiled) could be identified with the dialect of the Igbo heart land area (old Owerri Province). It was convenient even to the people of Nsukka and other areas in Northern Igbo land than the Onitsha dialect ^[23].

However, while the colonial government, Catholics and the Methodists accepted the central Igbo, the Anglican Communion in Igbo land held on to the Union Igbo. It was in this state of affairs that the colonial government resolved in 1944 that the central Igbo should be used for literature, especially, those connected to the government. Meanwhile, while the standardization debate raged, Mr. Fredrick Chidozie Ogbalu formed the Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) in 1949. The Society was officially launched in 1950; while after many attempts to reach a compromise on the version of the Igbo language to use failed, Mr. F.C. Ogbalu, the founder of SPILC issued his own personal 'compromise' orthography in 1955.

Despite the above, the standardization debate continued, and in 1961, the Eastern Region government set up an Orthography Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. Onwu. The committee did a thorough work; a compromise was reached, as all parties including the SPILC accepted the Onwu Committee's recommendations. The Committee used diacritical marks to distinguish 'light' and 'heavy' vowels. Consequently, in June 1962, the government issued an order that the Onwu Orthography must be put to use in the teaching and studying of Igbo language ^[24]. However, few years into the implementation of the new orthography, the Nigerian civil crises and the consequent Nigeria-Biafra civil war began.

The lull witnessed in the standardization debate brought about by the outbreak of the civil war was rekindled when the war ended in 1970. The SPILC reactivated its role of promoting Igbo language, and in 1972, the SPILC set up an Igbo Language standardization committee and charged it with the responsibility to adopt words from different dialects of Igbo for purposes of enriching the Igbo language. The SPILC accepted the recommendations of its committee in 1973, which thus gave birth to the standard Igbo currently being used till date. Credit must be given to Mr. F.C. Ogbalu,

who continued the wide promotion of Igbo language in all its ramifications during his life time. Specifically, he established a press devoted to the production and publication of educational materials in the Igbo language. F.C. Ogbalu's legacy lives on after his death.

Nonetheless, despite the general acceptance of the standard Igbo language as approved by the SPILC, many people continued their opposition against any form of standardization of the Igbo language. One of such critics of the Igbo language standardization was the renowned international literal scholar of Igbo extraction, Professor Chinua Achebe. In his Odenigbo Lecture in September 1999 at Owerri, on the theme: "Tomorrow harbours the unknown, but today is certain" :-(*Echi di ime, taa bu gboo*). In that lecture, Achebe decried the collapsing fortunes of the Igbo language and heaped the blame on all forms of standardization of the language, with more emphasis on the Union Igbo^[25]. These comments that emanated from the erudite and highly respected Professor Chinua Achebe generated a new wave of debate among scholars of Igbo language. While many scholars, especially members of SPILC criticised the remarks made by Prof Achebe, others such E.N. Emenyonu (a renowned scholar of Igbo language) were cautious in their reactions to Achebe's criticism of standardization^[26]. Thus, the standardization debate which was at a lull continued after Prof. Achebe's Odenigbo Lecture in 1999.

6. Conclusion: the Myth /Realities of Igbo Language Standardization

Holistically, standardization denotes the imposition of uniformity upon a class of objects. Thus, the process of language standardization works by promoting uniformity in language structure. Language standardization involves conscious human intervention in language change and maintenance; and the drive towards language uniformity has social and economic goals^[27]. It is therefore right to assert that the translation of Union Igbo had both social and economic relevance to the missionaries during that period. That effort, which sparked off series of standardization of the Igbo language, had both economic and social implications to the Igbo, as a people. Economically, standardized Igbo made commercial activities in most Igbo areas to be easier than it used to be. Socially, standardized Igbo language has boosted interactions and integration among different Igbo sub-groups.

In the course of our analyses in this paper, it is evident that the successful production of the Union Igbo Bible and its presentation to the public in 1913 generated the consequent standardization debate. Critics of the Union Igbo language, which was the medium for the first translation of the Holy Bible into the Igbo language failed to realise the relevance of the feat achieved by Archdeacon T.J. Dennis and his translation team. There were even critics of Union Igbo from within the Anglican Communion in Igbo land. Specifically, adherents of the denomination from Onitsha and its environs rejected the language on the ground that their own dialect 'must' be used, probably because the headquarters of the CMS in Igbo land is located at Onitsha. Another reason for their rejection of Union Igbo could be because majority of the indigenous clergy in the first sixty years of Anglican presence in Igbo land were indigenes of Onitsha and its environs.

Other critics of the Union Igbo based their argument on the fact that unlike the Yoruba language, which adopted one

dialect (Oyo dialect, although principally for political reasons), with minor adjustments, the Union Igbo language pleased no one. The critics concluded that Union Igbo failed to become a lingua franca, and unfortunately, the English language fulfilled that role as soon as Igbo people began to learn it. However, the critics failed to understand the fact that Union Igbo adopted words from different Igbo dialects for the purpose of enriching the Igbo language. It is also vital to stress that other languages in Africa have also passed various phases of standardization. For instance, the Hausa language, widely spoken in Northern Nigeria and few other countries in Africa has no natural dialect, which can be equated with standard Hausa. Thus the current standard Hausa language is an artificial creation, which was devised for the creation of written materials of the language^[28].

The Union Igbo was vital and its introduction was very timely. Since, in recent times, writing and reading Igbo language has become a challenge facing speakers of the language; if a standardized Union Igbo was not introduced, which ignited standardization debate; the Igbo language would have been the worse for such negligence. This is because people from different sub-groups would often use their dialects, both informally and formally without any form of uniformity. Thus, the uniformity attained today in the Igbo language originated from the translation of the Union Igbo; and as such T.J Dennis and his team should be commended, not denigrated, for being pioneers of the standardization of Igbo language.

There are many benefits derived from a standardized language; which the Igbo language has attained despite criticisms. A standardized language facilitates communication among its speakers, it enhances unity among speakers, and it simplifies teaching and learning in the language; and as well serves political purposes. Standardization of language is also very vital as it develops the language and makes it act as modern means of education, administration and literary expansion. Some other features of a standardized language, which standardized Igbo language has, include codified normative system of reference supported by a standard orthography, standard reference grammar and standard dictionaries.

In the course of our analysis in this paper, we made use of the cultural accommodation theory to justify standardized Igbo language. That theory is relevant to this study because, the Igbo, though, heterogeneous, share similar cultures. Although, there exists different Igbo dialects, but due to the observed similarities in the general ways of life of the Igbo as a people, all can easily integrate and adapt in speaking and using a standardized Igbo language. This is better than a situation where all will be allowed to write in their respective dialects; which could undermine the development of the language, as no particular dialect would want to be neglected. Opponents of standardization should share this view; as an un-standardized Igbo language will do more harm than good to the Igbo language in its present form.

Generally, the failure of opponents of standardization to realise the importance of a standardized Igbo language could be attributed to the nature of the Igbo people; especially their pre-colonial background (highlighted earlier), which was virtually republican in character. One should therefore not wonder the reasons for the non-acceptance of the Union Igbo language, and the rejection of various standardized versions of the language by many persons from different dialects of the Igbo language. Their non-acceptance of standardization

can be premised on the ‘independence of thought’ of the average Igbo person; and this constitutes the myth of the debate. On the other hand, the benefits of standardization (highlighted above) form the realities of Igbo language standardization debate.

The myth of standardization has continued to undermine the Igbo language; as the non-acceptance of a standardized version of the language has made many Igbo people to continue to speak “*Engli-Igbo*” (mixture of English and Igbo languages), in place of the Igbo language. This has done more harm than good to the development of the language. Those opposed to a standardized Igbo language should realise that standardization is the norm, as many languages in Africa have been standardized in their present form. These include Kiswahili, Hausa, Somali, Shona and Afrikaans. Specifically, Kiswahili originated through a fusion of indigenous African Bantu language and an aspect of the language of itinerant Arab traders along the East Coast of Africa many centuries ago. In its present form, Kiswahili has attained more than sixty years as a standardized language. Thus, with respect to the Igbo language, acceptance of its standardized version by all will boost its total revival.

Against this backdrop, this paper makes a clarion call for all Igbo to accept the standard Igbo language in its present form (as approved by the SPILCC after passing through diverse phases). This is because, with modernization and globalization, which the Igbo embraced; in recent times, reading and writing Igbo language has become a challenge facing speakers of the language. It is not just enough to use Igbo language to explain things, Igbo speakers must also be able to read and write the language. A mass enlightenment and sensitization of the relevance of the language must commence without delay, for the language to compete favourably as one of the three major indigenous languages in Nigeria.

Finally, this paper recommends that Igbo language should be made compulsory at the primary and secondary levels of education in the Igbo-speaking states, especially, the south-east zone-the Igbo heartland of Nigeria. Similarly, the language should be introduced as a compulsory General Studies Course, for one and two hundred level students in all tertiary institutions in Igbo land. The language could also be adopted as the second language of government business and administration (after the official English language) by the states in the south-east zone of Nigeria. This is because “tomorrow harbours the unknown, but, today is certain”; and a popular Igbo adage made us to understand that: “it is better to look for the black goat during the day than at night”.

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