

# IGBO LANGUAGE AMIDST GLOBALISATION: THE WAY FORWARD

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## **Abstract**

Globalisation, as a concept, idea or practice has come to stay. It refers to the process of increasing economic, political, social and cultural relations across international boundaries. It is a process that brings both positive and negative realisation on every aspect of human life. The forces of globalisation are fast pervading the entire globe. As the tempest of globalisation increasingly burrows into the fabric of human activities, it leaves minority languages more vulnerable and doomed, as people now prefer to conduct business and communicate in widely-used languages such as English and French. The paper finds out that the effects of globalisation have not been the same. There is obviously variation in the way globalisation is taking place around the world. Language is a living thing hence it needs to grow and develop in its environments. Every language is capable of growing, developing and dying. It is crystal clear that the wind of globalisation is not doing the Igbo language any good hence the paper calls on linguists, speakers of the language, enthusiasts and government to wake up to the challenge. The Igbo people can decide the extent to which globalisation will affect them. The paper advocates tangible measures to forestall the negative effects of globalisation on the Igbo language.

## **Introduction**

Globalisation suggests various things to different people. It has several definitions, but an undeniable fact is the certainty that it is a complex process that has wide and varying impacts on economies, both developed and developing. Globalisation refers to the process of increasing economic, political, social and cultural relations across international boundaries. It is unfortunate that while some nations take the initiative and set the pace, some other countries mostly third world, lag behind and only receive the crumbs that fall from the master's table.

Globalisation has fostered linguistic imperialism (that is, dominance of English and other major languages over Nigerian indigenous languages). It deals with increasing

breakdown of trade barrier and the increasing integration of world market. Globalisation is a driving force that propels world economies, redistributing world economy, enriching some countries and impoverishing some. It sets some countries as world standards and has been described by some as the peak of capitalism. Being an economic and political term, globalisation has gradually shifted into language and over the years, English has been tagged the language of globalisation. This has been acknowledged by Zuckerman (2003), Emenanjo (2005); Crystal (2006); Mondejar-Nicasio (2007); Witaliz (2011); Neha and Atanu (2013) among others.

Globalisation is an offshoot of European colonisation since 16th century and not a recent phenomenon as may be assumed. Due to neo-colonialism, economically powerful languages dominate the less commonly spoken language, accelerating the rate of disappearance for less commonly spoken languages. Globalisation today has now cleared the way for world-wide development, but the progress is not "even" as some nations are getting integrated into the global economy faster than others as shown by those countries' fast economic growth and reduced poverty levels (Lawal, 2006). This then means that globalisation does not hold the same benefits for all members of the global community. It holds more benefits for members of developed nations while developing nations can be said to be in a rather deprived position.

It is clear that globalisation is really affecting the African mindset; it poses a grave problem to the Igbo man on how to take the good things of globalisation and maintain the uniqueness of his cultural identity. Igbo people cannot reject their memberships of this global village but they can rebuild their own national image and insist on their own cultural advancements and terms of participation in the village. The paper started with an introduction in the first section. Review of literature on the concept of globalisation, language of globalisation, forces and effects of globalisation were done in section two. In the third section, the state of the Igbo language amidst globalisation and the way forward took the centre stage while the paper was concluded in the last section.

### **Concepts**

There are different concepts used in this work which may make understanding the work a little difficult. Based on this, we will explain them below. They are as follows: Globalisation as a concept, language and globalisation, forces of globalisation and effects of globalisation.

### **The Concept of Globalisation**

Ohaabunwa (1999) in Agwaraonye (2015), describes globalisation as an evolution which is systematically reconstructing integrative phases among nations by breaking down barriers in the areas of culture, commerce, communication and other fields of endeavour. In his own perspective, Nsibambi (2001) sees globalisation as a process of advancement and increase in interaction among the countries of the world and people facilitated by progressive technological changes in locomotion,

communication, political and military powers, knowledge and skills as well as interfacing of cultural values, systems and practices. Nsibami differs slightly in his definition adding that globalisation cuts across both political and military powers not mentioned in the first definition. Notwithstanding, both definitions perceive globalisation from a positive point of view.

Okura (2001) views globalisation from a negative perspective. He opines that globalisation is an ill wind that blows no culture any good. It is also a broad road that leads subtly but steadily to the destruction of local cultures and persuades many worldwide to follow it. In same vein, Adamu (2003:15) in his definition reports that:

Globalisation is like a wild fire, it has started, it is uncontrollable and nobody knows where it is taking us. What is evident is that no person, family, religion is immune to it. It is therefore, shaping our society's labour market and its pattern of inequality, its consumption, its health, its political stability and legitimacy, values and members' life style. We as humanity are shaping and affecting globalisation and globalisation is shaping and affecting us.

Adamu observes globalisation from both positive and negative point of view. In his consideration, globalisation is a process that nothing can escape from. It determines almost every aspect of human existence.

Gowdy et al (2004) as cited in Agwaraonye (2015) reasons in line with the foregoing that globalisation signifies increased flow of capital around the world; removal of barriers to trade; increased diffusion of technology and the internationalisation of the production process. Andrews (2006) captures the diversity in conception and application saying that there are economic globalisation, political globalisation, environmental globalisation, socio-economic globalisation and of course a linguistic globalisation or what Okwudishu (2003) refers to as a 'global common language'. Lawal (2006) adds that globalisation is widely accepted and referred to as the widening, deepening and speeding up of world-wide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual. This implies that globalisation affects all with or without their knowledge. Lending a voice to Lawal's view, Henshin (2007) regards globalisation as "the increased interconnectedness and under dependence of different societies around the world. He also sees it as the breaking down of national boundaries because of advance in communications, trade and travel.

Ezema (2010:1), commenting on globalisation states, "The present information revolution has gradually reduced the entire world into a global electronic village conquering the barriers of space and time." Adding to Ezema's view, Agbedo and Eze (2012) describe globalisation as an advanced stage of growth and predominance of Western civilisation in thought, world view, value and attitudes to life as well as the unprecedented increase in the empowerment of Western culture. This is very true

considering the rate at which indigenous cultures are being eroded unrestrained.

### Forces of Globalisation

A number of forces are responsible for the emergence and development of globalisation. Bertucci and Alberti (2001) identified four major factors as the driving forces pushing work-divide interdependence forward. They include: entrepreneurship, liberalisation of trade and investment, technological innovation and global social network. Nitish (2020) also lists the following as the forces of globalisation: advancement of technologies, reduction in cross-trade barriers, increase in consumers demand and high competition. In addition, Ukessays (2017) outlines these forces of globalisation: science and technology, trade and commerce and political changes.

The internet which is one of the technological innovations is a very powerful tool of globalisation. It contains the biggest, richest and wide ranging resources of information in the entire world, and it enables people to obtain an interactive avenue to instantly communicate with each other. It provides a transparent window through which global experiences and best practices are shared. It is cheap, and very easily available. It has a wide range of advantages, but most of its advantages also are its source of worry to the African society and indeed the world at large. It is one of the most effective and discreet way of changing a people's world view and entire moral code. The internet has globally unlocked unlimited prospects. It has come to be what is seen as globalisation of society providing technology that does not recognise national boundaries; that has no single owner, and that is not influenced by any single internal or external legal structure.

Youths are now becoming more and more slaves to the internet and its attendant social media including: Yahoo, Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, to mention but a few. They are exposed to these Western influences with little or no parental or adult control and guidance. Oni (2005) observes that Nigerian youths are rapidly losing touch with cultural values and that this could be seen in the alien culture which they portray; their bizarre dressing, dancing, language, and so on which invariably affect other aspects of social life. Bello and Adesemoye (2012:10) in their contribution have this to say,

... Teenagers and youths are generally vital segments of the society who could be instrumental in promoting African cultures. But unfortunately, the mentality and life style of the teenagers in African societies have been grossly affected by exposure to western films to some extent that rather than promoting African cultures, they have become hardened acolytes and promoters of western culture.

## **Language and Globalisation**

Globalisation allows languages and cultures to spread and dominate on a global scale; it also leads to the extinction of other languages and cultures. Language contributes to the formation of culture. It serves as important symbols of group belonging, enabling different groups of people to know what common heritage they belong to, and what common heritage they share. Without a language, people would lose their cultural identity. Languages are the essential medium in which the ability to communicate across culture develops. Knowledge of one or several languages enables one to perceive new horizons, to think globally, and to increase one's understanding of oneself and neighbours (Delhumeau 2011). Languages are then, the very lifeline of globalisation; without language there will be no globalisation and without globalisation there will be no world languages.

Further, Delhumeau reports that there are about 6,500 different natural languages. Eleven of them account for the speech of more than a half of the world's population. These eleven are Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, Hindi, French, Bengali, Portuguese, Russian, German, Japanese, Arabic and English. Language is used as an identity to be part of the "world system" now, and the thing about any system that integrates people is that it benefits its architects. There are arguments that globalisation is positive for language and people on the one hand and on the other hand some are arguing it will have negative effects on languages. Whichever way one looks at it, the fact remains that globalisation has both negative and positive effects on languages. As it stands in the global field, few languages are enjoying the dividends of globalisation while a handful of languages are facing serious threats.

Language is a vehicle for transferring information, trading, commerce, advancing technologies, that is, for capturing the advancements of technologies. Languages are hugely important in giving people an identity in a very rapidly changing world. The more there are people who speak a language, the more important that language is. Linguists estimate that, up to a half of the world's remaining 6,500 languages will no longer be in regular use by the end of this century (Turin, 2013). Most of the languages facing extinction lack the capacity to fulfil the needs of man in an age of breakthrough, science and technology, when every man and woman want to be part of the advances and prosperity.

## **Globalisation and Indigenous Languages**

In this era of globalisation, users of indigenous and national languages are continuing to decrease. Today, Nigerians use and read books written in foreign languages faster and fluently than those written in local languages. The number of movies produced in English are much more than those performed and produced in Igbo and other Nigerian languages. Emenanjo (1999:83) earlier declares that:

Language is the key to the heart of the people, if we lose the key, we lose the people. A lost language is a lost tribe; a lost tribe is a lost culture, a lost culture is invaluable

knowledge lost... The whole vast of archives of knowledge and expertise....will be consigned to oblivion.

The United Nations Organisation estimates that a half of the world's estimated 6,000 languages will disappear in less than a century. Roughly a third of those that are spoken in Africa and about 200 already have less than 500 speakers. Experts estimate that a half of the people in the world now uses the eight most widely spread languages in their daily lives. The languages are: Chinese, English, Hindi, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Portuguese and French. Experts say 234 African languages have already disappeared and that 32% of the endangered languages on earth are African (Leonard, 2005).

Akande (2002) blames globalisation for the extinction of 22,000 indigenous cultures in the last decade and projects that approximately 90% of the world's languages will disappear in the next century as a result of globalisation. Globalisation has resulted to the loss of cultural boundaries. In this way, it has caused the extinction of several languages in many developing nations. The way languages are going extinct is very rapid, and its continuation has been unless something is done to stop the complex process of globalisation (Cronin, 2003).

Leonard (2005) quoting Rafael Shambela (Mozambican Linguist) says that the pressures from globalisation are often too great to resist. To conserve native languages and cultures; he argues that societies must ascribe an inherent value to them. Many African languages have recently lost the competition to peers that have guaranteed a surer economic survival and not to languages of power. It is difficult to advance technology and democracy without a corresponding advancement of language. Indeed without language, there will be no social understanding and stable environment within which technological innovation and democratic process can take place. Technology must be acquired and domesticated through acceptable integration of Nigerian languages.

Romaine (2002) argues that legal provision is another way of ensuring the survival of languages. Many governments around the world have attempted to protect their cultures by imposing bans on what they declare to be foreign cultural intrusion. In a concurring opinion, Usman (2017) says:

Scientific or technological development cannot be attained by a people who have not developed linguistically. The failure of many African countries to enhance the robust development of their local languages to make them more effective tools for technological development and wealth-generation has led such countries to failure and stagnation in many areas.

France has attracted the notoriety for attempting to protect its language from the immigration of language words (McPartland, 2013). This is a premeditated act done primarily to preserve and protect French as a language from the ill wind of globalisation.

In the same vein, the Chinese government has also attempted to protect the purity of its language by removing the use of foreign words. Authorities in China recently scrutinized the brands and the names of 20,000 Western companies, forcing them to change to more Chinese-sounding names. It is difficult to advance technology without a corresponding advancement of language. Indeed without language, there will be no social understanding and therefore no stable environment within which technological innovation process can take place. Chinese scholars have also called for the removal of English words from a prominent Chinese dictionary which includes 239 such words ("language purity now" 2012). The above few steps taken by France and China towards their languages in this global era show their readiness to safeguard their respective languages against the ill wind of globalisation.

### **Igbo Language amidst Globalisation**

From the discussion of the relevant concepts, it is clear that globalisation in all its forms has come to stay. It is also clear that no nation, culture and especially language are immuned to it. Some countries and cultures are benefitting remarkably from the dividends of globalisation while others are being negatively affected. The nations that are benefitting are doing so with their languages. This shows that the internet which is one of the greatest inventions of science and technology and the most vital instrument for globalisation is a platform that is open to all and sundry irrespective of language or culture. From all indications, any language can be used on the net and a number of languages are showing their presence on the net. The task on ground is for the owners of the Igbo language to recognise the fact that it is their duty to protect and project their language to whatever level they want it to get to knowing that every language including Igbo can only get to the level the owners want it to reach or perform the functions it is expected to perform. Based on the above fact, the paper makes the following recommendations to further the course of the Igbo language in the global arena.

### **Acceptance of the Igbo Language**

It is not an accident that Igbo people have Igbo as their language, but the attitude of a greater percentage of the Igbo people shows that the language has no place in their hearts. No people that abandoned their language have prospered. Most of the countries that are making waves in the global market are doing so with their languages. Languages do not develop against the interest of the language owners. It is the owners of a language that determine how far their language can go. The Igbo language can be pushed beyond the present level but it will take love and acceptance from the Igbo people themselves. Love for the Igbo language will affect so many other things a people can do for their language. Not loving one's language simply

shows lack of love for oneself. One should love everything about oneself to amount to anything in life. The Igbo people need to take a leaf from other tribes to learn how to deal with their language. There is a limited time to whatever can be done positively to showcase the Igbo language. This is because as actions are delayed, globalisation forces are busy eating deep into the lives of the Igbo people, especially the youths thereby endangering the Igbo language more. In line with the foregoing, Adichie (2018) pleads that within their home, parents should insist on their children speaking Igbo because it will help them to keep their identity while trying to reach to the outside world. We can embrace Western technology but at the same time keep our cultural heritage.

### **Incentives for Studying Igbo**

Knowing the values of indigenous languages and the negative effects of losing a language, the government in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, National University Commission and institutions of higher learning should devise a way of enticing more students to study the language. Different methods can be applied to this effect. The end result is to increase the number of people studying the language. Some nations are already doing so with their various languages; for example: China, France, Germany etc. Scholarships and other kinds of funding can be used to make the Igbo language attractive for study at all levels. If the above mentioned nations are releasing funds in order to increase the number of speakers of their languages and as a result increasing the presence of their languages on the net, then the Igbo people should rise up to the same challenge. As the wind of globalisation is blowing and unfolding the importance of language on the global platform, the Igbo educationists should follow the trend especially where it calls for increasing the number of speakers and students enrolling for Igbo studies.

### **Resuscitation of the Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC)**

That the Igbo language got to the level it is today is the sole effort of SPILC led by Late Chief F.C. Ogbalu. Whether the organisation is still working is what this paper will not delve into. The fact is that since the death of F.C. Ogbalu, no definite improvements or achievements have been recorded by the organisation. Other organisations like Igbo Studies Association and Otu Sụwakwa Igbo should come up with tangible evidence showing what and what have been achieved so far. If these indigenous bodies led by the Igbo people cannot achieve much, then no foreign organisation can help the language to cross the present level. Everything boils down to the need for concerted efforts from academics especially linguists who are supposed to know better about language issues to go beyond politics and do something positive with regard to the Igbo language. There is an urgent need to chronicle and display the Igbo traditional education from time to time and all programmes in the mass media should reflect the Igbo geographical context.



Igbo linguists and academics should fight to reintroduce the study of Igbo language abroad as other Nigerian languages like Yoruba which is studied in more than sixteen universities in the United States (Adewole, 2007). The issue at hand demands a collaborated effort. No one can do all that is needed to push the language forward; so it is important that the already existing Igbo language organisations be revived or be sensitive about the enormous work to be done on the language to enable it to compete with other languages in the global market.

### **Interdisciplinary Network**

Igbo linguists should identify areas of greatest weakness of the language. This will help to know the areas of the language on which to focus attention first. By this, we mean giving immediate attention to where the language is lagging behind. Core questions like the following should help drive the matter home: What are the greatest challenges of the Igbo language? What could be done to shoulder the challenges? Identifying the challenges of the language will be the first step in helping the language to gain global recognition. Igbo as a language can be packaged and sold to other nations of the world. After all, people are spending time and money learning more difficult languages for many reasons.

As the problems of the language in relation to globalisation are identified, linguists should be broad-hearted enough to relate with other academics in other areas to find a lasting solution to the problems at hand. Various departments of linguistics can collaborate with computer science or mathematics department to figure out solutions to the problems of the Igbo language. Also, to aid understanding in all other subjects of learning, Igbo language teachers should come up with Igbo translation of terms in those subjects. This may take quite some time to articulate but the resultant effect will be enormous.

### **Frequent Usage of the Igbo Language**

As mentioned earlier, no language specifically meant for use in this era of globalisation, neither are there particular languages solely reserved for use in modern technologies. This is to say that any language can be used to communicate on social networks, the internet, the media etc. Text messages can be written using the Igbo language. PDF articles written in Igbo can be posted and retrieved online. Igbo textbooks from nursery to higher learning books could also be converted to PDF and posted online. This will help some researchers in the language to lay hand on some materials in the language. If other languages are going to the net, Igbo language should also follow suit while underground work is going on to improve on the standard of the language. Complaining about the deficiencies of the Igbo language is not the solution and will not help the situation. This paper opines that what is available so far should be used while genuine and spirited effort is being made towards raising the standard of the language.

## **Conclusion**

It has been made clear that globalisation has come to stay. Also understandable is the fact that there are positive and negative effects of globalisation. Some developed nations are benefiting tremendously from globalisation while a good number of other developing nations are experiencing the negative effects of globalisation. Igbo language is adversely encountering the negative effects of globalisation. The paper reveals that rather than shying away from the realities of globalisation; Igbo linguists and lovers should take up the task of pushing the Igbo language to the global arena since every language has equal access to the global platform. Lastly, procedures to fight the negative effects of globalisation on the Igbo language were proposed.

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