

# UNESCO PREDICTION ON THE EXTINCTION OF IGBO LANGUAGE IN 2025: ANALYZING SOCIETAL VIOLENCE AND NEW TRANSFORMATIVE STRATEGIES

\*Ani, Kelechi Johnmary

\* Department of History and Strategic Studies, Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, P.M.B. 1010 Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

## Abstract

The world is increasingly recording high cases of endangered languages. Endangered language is a language that is at risk of falling out of use as its speakers die out or shift to speaking another language. Igbo language is falling out of the communication choice of many Igbo people. The paper shows how the gradually society exhibits social violence against their language at home, school, church, as by the government and through their dialect as well as other multidimensional ways. It well calls for the factoring and promotion of Igbo language based NGOs, public service broadcasting and transformative government policy in other to attain sustainable Igbo language transformation.

## Introduction

The place of language in any human endeavour cannot be replaced by anything else. This is because of the central nature of language in human history. Language is a form of expression which is generally conceived as an arbitrary set of codes used for communication (Eze, 2011:1). Azikiwe (2007) presented language as a system of articulated sounds organized by human thoughts and used by a group of humans for purposes of communication. UNESCO as an “organisation appreciates what the expressive culture of any community means to its people, an embodiment of everything that matters to self-definition and group identity. Language, as the most dynamic component of that culture, is the repository of the worldview, values and mores as well as chief instrument for mass mobilisation in a community” (Prince-Education, 2009). Lyons (1981) has shown that “language is ubiquitous, hence present in all human activities; thoughts, dreams, prayers, meditations and relations”. “Nigeria is a country which is very rich – not only in terms of natural resources and human potential, but also in terms of languages and cultures. According to reference books like the Ethnologies and the Index of Nigerian Languages there are about 500 languages spoken in Nigeria today. There are some large languages like Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Fulfulde, or Kanuri, which are spoken by millions of first and second language speakers, but most Nigerian languages are minority languages with only a small number of speakers” (Seibert, 2000). The Igbo language is spoken by an estimated twenty million Nigerians (Echeruo, 2001:1).

The fact Igbo language instead of gaining communication height in the hierarchy of languages is currently moving in the downward trend in the comity of human languages is drawing increasing consign amongst individuals and scholars within the Igbo nation and beyond. “But following the prediction by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Advisory Committee on Language Pluralism and Multi-language Education that Igbo language and by implication, culture, may be heading for extinction, and subsumed by other stronger Nigerian languages by 2025, if nothing is done, by its speakers to ensure that it is not only taught in schools, colleges and universities, but also used as language of official communications within government and business circles in the five Igbo-speaking states-Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo-the prayers, this time around, seemed to have changed from that of (language) height gain to long life” (Abanobi, 2012:27). It should be noted that the extension of the link between Igbo language and Igbo culture is rooted on the fact that “language is the handmaid of culture, the two are inseparable” (Baldeh, 1991:3). Okoye, and Onwuegbuchunam (2011:547) have shown that “hardly can an Igbo man make a statement without code switching”. This ugly trend is growing because the language habits of a person predispose certain choices of interpretations (Sapir, 1956).

The appeal of language resides precisely in its capacity to meet the needs of man for self-expression and for communication of experience in his day-to-day engagements with the world around him. Man needs language for the dissection and analysis of material reality and spiritual experience as well as for formulation of hypothetical statements, theories, and belief as well as value systems. In other words, beyond facilitating the communication of experience, a language must enhance man’s cognitive abilities and functioning, if it is to be of permanent relevance or survive through the ages. Most of the languages facing extinction lack that capacity to fulfil the needs of man in an age of breathtaking science and technology, when every man and woman wants to be part of the advances and

prosperity (Prince-Education, 2009). Language loss occurs when the language has no more native speakers, and becomes a "dead language". If eventually no one speaks the language at all, it becomes an "extinct language". While languages have always gone extinct throughout human history, they are currently disappearing at an accelerated rate due to the processes of globalization and neo-colonialism, where the economically powerful languages dominate other languages (Austin, and Sallabank, 2011).

Professor Innocent Eleazu, a United States based Economist, who hails from Obibiezena in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State, has argued that the trouble with Igbo language was not the UNESCO prediction but the fact that some language scholars have come up with similar findings, which seems to confirm the position of UNESCO. The prediction of UNESCO calls for scholarly discuss not only on its face value but also, over the historical fact that many human languages and culture have disappeared over the ages. For instance in Nigeria, the following languages have become moribund with few elderly speakers; Bete, Bubbure, Camo, Fali of Baissa, Fam, Holma, Kiong, Kudu, Mbaru, Njerep, Odut, Shan, Shen, Undu Rishi, Yangkam and Ziriya (UNESCO.org). Again, Defaka, Fyam, Ilue, Jala, Ju, Kubu, Lere Cluster, Luri, Ngwaba, Okorogbana, Shiki and Somyewe have become seriously endangered language, which the young people that speaks them have reached or passed middle age (UNESCO.org). Ugwoke (1998:14-20) had earlier presented a comprehensive list of indigenous Nigerian languages that are endangered.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Igbo people are increasingly engaging in the progressive race towards cultural marginalization and geometric linguistic endangerment. This study is centred on cultural marginalization theory of language. "This frequently happens when indigenous populations, in order to achieve a higher social status, adopt the cultural and linguistic traits of a people who have come to dominate them through colonisation, conquest, or invasion. This is the most common cause of language endangerment" (Austin and Sallabank, 2011). When the people gradually neglect and refuse to promote official and unofficial communication dynamics in their language, consciously or unconsciously, they are culturally marginalizing their language. This is the situation found across the length and breadth of the Igbo nation. Unfortunately, some Igbo people have paid with their breath for neglecting their language. Anyaegbuna (2012:30) showed that "following the wanton repetitive killings of *Ndigbo* in Northern Nigeria, some aggrieved Igbo youths made reprisal attacks on Northerners at Nkpor junction and some other areas. They mounted roadblocks and screened vehicles for Northerners. The basis of screening was the ability to understand and speak Igbo. It was a disaster that a few Igbo youths were killed needlessly, because they either did not understand or could not speak Igbo fluently; they were mistaken for Northerners seeking camouflage". What a bad scenario that calls for Igbo revival. The Igbo language revival scholars must therefore arise in the "race against time" (Krauss, 2007) towards the revival of our language. Revising of Igbo "language and culture shift" (Fishman, 1991) needs patriotic attention and urgency. This could be attained through the cultural revival of the Igbo ethno linguistic vitality (Ehala, 2009), if all and sundry within the Igbo nation and beyond can gradually and progressively reduce their high level of social violence against the language.

### **Forms of Social Violence against Igbo language**

#### **a. Home-engineered Language Violence**

This is the form of domestic violence that hunts the language from its cultural root. Many parents from the earliest years of their children's infancy deny them the opportunity of learning how to speak Igbo language because they have sworn never to speak Igbo in the house, let alone training the new Igbo child with the language. It is no longer a taboo, to hear and see parents that shamelessly ban their children from speaking Igbo language at home, especially when they have grown to mix up with their peers and speedily picks the language. In the course of this paper, a parent who engages in this type of language violence told the researcher that the children have nothing to lose for not knowing how to speak and write Igbo language as it will not affect their academic future. This type of parents even go the extra mile to barn children of their neighbours who are not proficient in English communication or who carry the Igbo language communication orientation from coming to their houses to visit their children because they believe they would contaminate them with the Igbo language way of communication. Ndubuisi Chinonye, from Ihite, Uboma L. G. A. Of Imo State, who was born and brought-up in Lagos stated that "she cannot speak the language fluently except some 'beginner's sentences'. She attributed her inability to do so to the fact that 'I was not introduced to it early but I am proud of the language and I am willing to learn more if I can see somebody to put me through' (Adeworan and Agba, 2012:29).

Abanobi (2012:26B) documented the shocking experience of Chief Chike Okpara, *The New Masquerade* actor popularly called Chief Zebrudaya Okoroigwe Nwogbo, alias 4.30 in United States of America. The story had it that he ran into a an Igbo family on holiday in USA during a party. "And I just went to where they were sitting in a corner and started to speak Igbo language to them (the kids). I

said: *kedu?* (how are you?), *Kee mbosi unu biara?* (which day did you guys arrive the US?) *Kedu maka Mama unu?* (How about your mum?). At this juncture, their mother suddenly walked in and said, “hold it! We don’t speak Igbo to our children”. I said why? And she said “no, no, we don’t speak Igbo to our children. They only speak English. In fact, they don’t eat Igbo food. I said, but you are Igbo from Nigeria?. She said, “it doesn’t matter, that’s the way it is. You either take it or leave it. Can you imagine? I was shocked honestly. So, I said, “what a heck! Why should we throw away our culture, our language, our behaviour, just because we happened to find ourselves in white man’s land? Then, she finally said, “What is there in Igbo language? What do I have to gain from speaking it? Please don’t speak Igbo to them any more”. What an aberration going on under our collective cultural conscious that is haunting the universality of the Igbo personality and identity. Anyaegbuna (2012:30) has pointed out that “Igbo parents, even when they fumble with grammar and tenses, or even when an Igbo born recipient or listener cannot comprehend these are passed on to our children, our successors and future generations”. It should be noted that it is not only overseas that such things happen as an Igbo parent from Oji River in Enugu State has stated that “my children are fluent in Yoruba and English but little or no effort is being made to train them to speak Igbo because I spend little time with them and the language of communication at home is either pure English or Pidgin English... To be candid with you, I am not making any effort to teach them Igbo” (Adeworan and Agba, 2012:29).

This scenario is regrettable because “a child’s language serves the purposes of accessing to basic material and psychological needs (Halliday, 1975). Fafunwa had also argued that in order to enable a child to develop curiosity, manipulative ability, industry, mechanical comprehension etc. more easily, the mother tongue remains the most natural way to learn (Bamgbose, Banjo and Thomas 1995:61). Osewa (2005) the owner of Nairaland.com recently asked “Is it likely that with the way our country is going -parents teaching their kids less of their origin, roots and language, that most of our languages would become extinct with time?”

#### **b. School-engineered Language Violence**

The schools in the Eastern part of the county are equally contributing in the violent attack on Igbo language. One would quickly ask; how can the school, which are often centres for Igbo learning, especially in the primary and secondary schools become sources of violence to the language? The answer is simple. Many private primary and secondary schools, which have become the order of the day, for children and their peers as well as for many parents who have come to accept the reality that private schools are the place their children’s learning needs could relatively be better attended to, do not have teachers who teach Igbo language. Others that have teachers in the subject bans their students from speaking the language both within school hours and in the privacy of their hostels. One would not forget easily how some hostel masters and mistresses in the burden schools of the 1990s and 21<sup>st</sup> century use to make corrupt money from students in the hostels by commissioning the class prefects and hostel captains to collect 50 kobo, #1, #5 etc from those who speak Igbo because Igbo speaking is/was vernacular to them and vernacular is prohibited. Today, it is not only that the dormitory-based public schools have disappeared but that the private, especially the missionary or religious-oriented schools that have stepped into the shoes of the former government schools have taken the war against Igbo language to an unimaginable level in their bid to brand their school ‘modern’ and as ‘grammar schools’. This new wave of private grammar schools end up aborting the students consciousness of their ancestral and historic language and even punishes them more by not properly teaching them the ‘Oral English’ or ‘Queens English’ etc. which the students sometimes perceives as strange both in pronunciations and in construct.

However, without adequate knowledge of Igbo speech skills, “learners have difficulty in pronouncing, spelling and intonation” (Marjah, 2008). Unfortunately, the Ivory Towers in the East are not helping matters as one cannot boast of a vibrant Centre or Institute of Igbo Language Studies in any South Eastern University, both private and public. Many tertiary institutions in Igbo land do not have the Department of Igbo Language. Fox (1975:118) has argued that “it is no surprises on academic level that in most universities and colleges of education in the Third World, where school reform ought, as in other places, be closely linked to new language policies, and even in certain cases depend on this, acceptance of necessary minimal research is most often lacking. Minus the Colleges of Education where this Igbo department are largely found, many of the universities in Eastern Nigeria do not have the department, while others have the Igbo department closed-down because of lack of students’ patronage as well as their inability to repackage the course and make it more attractive. Nneka (2002) pointed out that “it is a matter of great regret that Igbo teachers and educational counsellors in both primary and post-primary do not encourage their students to study and make Igbo a career choice”.

Okoye and Onwuegbuchunam (2011:547) showed that “our attitude towards our language is the major factor to its under-utilization. It is almost anathema hearing one speaking Igbo in any of our tertiary institutions, the few students who opted for such course as linguistics Igbo are disregarded by colleagues, they regard the students of Igbo language as unintelligent and inferior to other students”. Fox (1975) has noted that school system of learning language is cumbersome and conservative as it tends to shy away from innovations. “The attitude of people towards the Igbo language affects teaching and learning of the Igbo language in all levels of education. Students shy away making their career choice on Igbo language because people, even their parents look down on them as lazy and un-brilliant students. Those who decide to make Igbo a career do not feel proud to claim whole heartedly to be Igbo students” (Okoye, and Onwuegbuchunam 2011:547). While Ezeani (2002: 3-9) has called for the learning of sciences in Igbo language, it should be noted that every subject under this planet earth can be learnt in Igbo language and that should be encouraged at both the home and school.

**c. Church-engineered Language Violence**

This is a form of violence against Igbo language that is growing in the places of worship in Igbo land. The rise of Pentecostalism and the desire for each church to package himself in an attractive way to the teaming millions of Igbo people, who are intrinsically religious have wrongly paved way for the rise of pastors, and preachers who speak English primarily on the stage. “The reality is that the hegemonic influence of English has relegated Igbo to the background, especially in the practice of Christian faith. In most churches in urban centres, the medium of transmitting messages is English where as the largest percentage of the congregation are speakers of Igbo” (Okoye and Onwuegbuchunam, 2011:547).

Ayoola (2007:120) did not exaggerate the situation when he wrote that “many Nigerian church goers believe that attending English-speaking churches can improve their English, hence they would rather worship in an English speaking church even when they would have been more blessed in a church where their native language is the medium of communication”. Anyaegbuna (2012:30) noted that “true as this may be, it often stuns me that in my childhood some decades ago, a typical old woman in my village could read the Igbo Bible very well, and it was not written in my own native Igbo dialect. Some notable Igbo dialects like Nsukka, Owerri, Mbaise, some in Ebonyi, Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States etc. may be difficult to other parts like Anambra and Abia, but the early missionaries started a good job with the Igbo Bible which the late guru F. C. Ogbalu distinctively nearly perfected. The Bible based Igbo is now often referred to as “Central Igbo” but even this is speedily vanishing”. Okoye and Onwuegbuchunam (2011:547) wrote that “for Christians in Igbo speaking communities, buying an Igbo bible for a personal study is a forgone issue”.

**d. Dialectical Violence against Igbo Language**

This is the form of violence against Igbo language that is rooted on dialectical differences and quest for superior dialectical status amongst the Igbo speaking people. Afigbo (1982) stated that “Igbo language consists of many dialects; as such every community has its dialect to preserve at the expense of a pan-Igbo language”. Okoye and Onwuegbuchunam (2011:547) wrote that “there are Onitsha dialect, Owerri dialect, Abakaliki, Nsukka and Udi dialect etc; each claims to be superior to the other dialects”. Anyaegbuna (2012:30) noted that “many have tried to argue that Igbo is a multi-dialectical language and that some of these dialects are rather difficult to comprehend”. Afigbo (1982) went to state that “this obsession of preservation of fragmented dialect at the expense of pan-Igbo language, has made it impossible for Igbo vocabulary enhancements”. “The more historically recent standardization and romanization of Igbo has provoked even more controversy due to its dialectical diversity, but the Central Igbo dialect has gained the widest acceptance as the standard-bearer; however many such as Chinua Achebe have dismissed standardization as colonial and conservative attempts to simplify a complex mosaic of languages. Such controversies typify inter- and intra-ethnic conflict endemic to post-colonial Nigeria. Also worthy of note is the Enu-ani language, a variation of the Igbo that is spoken among the Aniomas. The Aniomas are the Aniocha's, Ndokwa's, Ika's and Oshimilli's. An ethnic Ibo found in the Niger-Delta region” (Wikipedia.org, 2012).

**e. Government Negligence of Igbo Language**

Anyaegbuna (2012:31) noted that *Ndigbo* have remained largely dummy to politics and government. This has resulted in the emergence of crooks and mediocre as our leaders over the years. The concept of *Igbo enweze* (Igbo has no king) has been so misapplied that it has derogated our value system, such that nonentities, even criminals have hijacked the Igbo traditional stools, as custodians of Igbo culture. *Ndigbo* must begin to learn that their destiny cannot be left in the hands of a few selfish and ambitious individuals, who lack the credentials to lead such a great people. The government in Igbo States are

practically not doing enough to put the Igbo language in the scheme of first class languages of the country. The government of the Igbo States are still not proactively promoting Igbo language's place as "multi-million language".

The *Asusuigbo Teta* (Wake Up Igbo Language) Association International, which held its 2012 annual conference in Umuahia, which it started since July 2009 at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education met its shocker of life when "many prominent Igbo sons and daughters, government officials and traditional rulers who, ordinarily, ought to have graced the occasion were nowhere to be found... (Prof. Eleazu, the founder argued) that he tried to reach out to everybody that mattered in Igbo land and Abia State, including Governor, Theodore Orji and members of his State Executive Council, but cannot tell why they failed to turn up. 'I wrote letters to them: I still have my copies with me' (Abanobi, 2012A). This reveals the place of Igbo language to the ruling Igbo political elite.

Mbanze (1984) wrote that "to worsen this situation was the thirty years Orthography controversy, which left many, confused. The inability of the government to develop or evolve an Igbo language education policy has left the students and their teachers in a confused state". "Endangered languages, unfortunately, have very slim chances of survival, if all that governments are required to do is to carry out 'mapping and documentation' of languages so categorised and to have school children engage in creative writing competition. So far, those are about the only programmes outlined by UNESCO and Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Tourism and Culture. Such programmes will capture and preserve for posterity the sounds and symbols (as well as their meanings), grammar and writing conventions of language. They cannot guarantee the continued attachment of people to their mother tongue, especially where another language spoken by a dominant and more enterprising group coexists" (Prince-Education, 2009). "There is little surprise; therefore, that UNESCO's alert has not received appropriate attention among the ruling elite anywhere in the world. The agency possibly understands the politics behind it all, but persists in its demand that "Governments should introduce in their education systems measures to secure the harmonious and fruitful existence of languages" (Prince-education, 2009).

#### f. **Multidimensional Societal Language Violence**

Okoye and Onwuegbuchunam (2011:547) have shown that inferiority complex affects Igbo people in the use of their language. The Igbo people feel proud speaking other languages like English, Hausa, Yoruba and feel shy speaking their local languages or dialects. "The other face of a typical Igbo is that he will proudly communicate freely and fluently in Hausa, Yoruba, and other tongues in public, but rarely in Igbo. We often try to be more native than our native hosts, but hostile to our very own native identity. Are we ashamed of being Igbo" (Anyaegebuna, 2012:30). The greatest problem facing Igbo languages is the Igbo man's attitude to his language. An Igbo man prefers greeting in English than in Igbo language. Anyaegebuna (2012:30) wrote that "it is glaring that *Ndigbo* equally stand out as one group that would rarely communicate freely and proudly in Igbo publicly". There is the new wave of hybridized Igbo through the integration of English and Igbo language in what is popularly called *Engligbo*. This is the worst form of adulteration that is currently experienced in Igbo language. It is more damaging because children easily picks it and turn it into a popular slang amongst the populace. Uzoma Okpo, a popular radio presenter and Director of Radio Services, Broadcasting Corporation of Abia (BCA) urged "the Igbo speaking states to conduct their businesses in Igbo as their Northern counterparts are doing in Hausa" (*Daily Sun*, 2012:29).

### **Identifying New Transformative Strategies**

#### a. **The Role of Language-Based NGO and Associations**

There is need for increased number of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other Igbo language based associations. This language based NGOs and associations would work hard toward the revival of the consciousness of the language primary amongst the Igbo people and secondarily amongst the global citizenry. They would equally join Igbo Language Departments and Igbo study groups/scholars in enhancing the language study. It could be recalled that "in the days of F. C. Ogbalu, founder of the Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC), at the end of the day, the language gained some lexical heights with the introduction of some new Igbo vocabularies like *mahadum* (university), *okammuta* (professor), *tekinuzu* (technology), *ekwenti* (phone/mobile phone), *nari* (hundred), *puku* (thousand), *nde* (million), *ijeri* (billion)" (Abanabi, 2012:27). SPILC which started since 1948 has contributed immensely to the introduction of new Igbo words and concepts. Shoeman (1981:71) wrote that all natural languages are deemed capable of expressing and generating new sentences, new words, but the silent problem is the amenability of African languages to the problems of modernization. There is need for NGO and Igbo Linguistic Associations to agitate for

increased Igbo writing as a means of communication. “Writing is one of the most important activities of a literate society and it has incalculable influence on humanity because it is a common instrument for the dissemination of knowledge (Otagburuagu, 1997). That could have been the force that motivated Professor Eleazu, who founded the *Asusuigbo Teta* (Wake Up Igbo Language) Association International in 2009 for the revival, promotion and preservation of Igbo language especially in the Diaspora, with strong public language promotion in Igbo land. The body which is based in Massachusetts, United States of America has a Nigerian office at 14/16 Mere Street, Owerri, Imo State.

#### **b. Public Service Broadcasting**

This is a new and veritable way of transforming Igbo language. “For over three days in May/June 2011, UNESCO hosted a meeting at its Paris headquarters in which a group of experts reflected on and examined how best to save endangered languages through public service broadcasting. The theme of the meeting was “Towards UNESCO Guidelines on Language Policies: A Tool for Language Assessment and Planning”. More than 50 linguists, communication scholars and specialists in related disciplines attended the meeting” (Obijiofor, 2011).

There is the need to modernize the Igbo language through transformative media education. *Daily Sun* (2012:29) showed that “Dr. Chuks Osuji, former MAMSER Director in Imo State, called on Igbo sons and daughters to cherish and speak their language because it is our identity. Uzoma Okpo, a popular radio presenter and Director of Radio Services, Broadcasting Corporation of Abia (BCA) urged Igbos to love and speak their dialects”. “It is vital for each country to establish an official regulator of all forms of broadcasting. The key responsibility of this regulator is to ensure that broadcasting organisations meet certain mandates, such as an obligation to broadcast in minority languages for a specified number of hours per week during peak hours. Such broadcasts should not be limited to language programs but must also be reflected in news and current affairs programming, documentaries, educational broadcasts (especially educational programmes targeted at pre-school age children, as well as primary and secondary school children). Other programmes through which minority languages should be promoted include sports and other forms of entertainment (e.g. drama, soap operas, etc.)” (Obijiofor, 2011). To facilitate effective use of public service broadcasting for language development, one of the conditions for the issuance of broadcast licences must be that licence holders should be required to broadcast in minority languages for a specified number of hours per week during peak and off-peak hours (Obijiofor, 2011). For instance, 101.5 Unity FM, Abakaliki Igbo service transmission, would on a daily basis come up with an Igbo revival advert thus: *mama aguu na-agum* (*Mum I am hungry*). *Junio; stop speaking that thing. Mama Emeka O dighi mma* (*Emeka's mother! It is not good*); *I sokwa na-ememina asusu Igbo* (*you are one of those destroying Igbo language*). *Nkea bu nkwado Unity FM maka ikwalite asusu Igbo* (*This is Unity FM's contribution to the promotion of Igbo language*).

#### **c. Government-Promoted Language Policy**

Okoye, and Onwuegbuchunam (2011:546) wrote that in 1977, the Anambra State Government approved nine (9) language policies, which states that Igbo should be compulsory in the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC). Weekly newspapers also reported that Igbo language shall become one of the 9 compulsory First School Leaving Certificate subjects with effect from June, 1979. The same laws were also initiated by the Imo State government, but the 1976 policy, which Imo State government also adopted could not account for how the Igbo language could be furthered in the post primary institutions.

The governments of South Eastern States needs to start Igbo language research centres and institutes in their state capitals. The governors should come up with a strong Inter-Governmental Organization (IGO) that is centred on Igbo language promotion and transformation for sustainable societal development. The Igbo governors must begin to think of an Igbo language archive or language museum, which would record the day to day dialects amongst the Igbo people that are gradually eroding away. The Igbo Archival Dictionary Project (2010:1) was “geared towards the collection of as far as possible, all the lexical items, their collocates, and phrasal components from all the Igbo dialects by collecting and transcribing speeches from the different Igbo dialects with a view to preparing from the relevant linguistic data collected, a multi-volume Archival Dictionary of the Igbo, to be updated from time to time”. Again, the government in their bid to offer the citizenry dividends of democracy must promote indigenous languages. This is because Okwudishu (2006: 135-36) has shown that “development that has not given a pride of place to indigenous languages as vehicles of national development is likely to be a wasted effort”. Anyaegbuna (2012:31) has written that “the minimum required of any aspiring, elected or appointed Igbo leader is to restore the dignity of *Ndigbo*”. The

dignity of *Ndigbo* could be transformed through enhanced language, cultural and economic as well as technological development.

**d. Academic/ Lexical Development of Igbo language**

“Essentially, languages are dying because the communities that speak them have not been part of the advances, and so, they (languages) have not been enriched, lexically and otherwise, over time. Languages are facing extinction because generations of their speakers have failed to breathe life into them either through technological inventions, creative activities (including compositions for singing) or even social activism” (Prince-Education, 2009). “We have what we call *Odenigbo* Lecture that holds almost every year. We have what we call *Ahiajoku*. These are very laudable scholastic programmes” (Abanobi, 2012C: 28). Professor I. Eleazu has stated that “those of us who had been privileged to read the research of scholars on the endangered Igbo language and the UNESCO report, are in deep sorrow about the state of our language. For language to go into extinction it takes a cycle and then it goes into the ultimate extinction. Igbo language is getting close to that cycle but many Igbo sons and daughters don’t know that. But those of us who know are in tears. Come to think of it, I am not a language scholar; I’m an economist by profession. But it is an irony that those who are championing the cause of Igbo language today are people who don’t have anything academically to do with language. F. C. Ogbalu who tried to revive our interest in the language before he died was also not a language scholar. In fact he too was an economist” (Abanobi, 2012C:28). Scholars in Igbo studies generally needs to promote geometric and progressive Igbo language documentation. Linguistic documentation deals with various linguistic researches that aim at providing a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices and traditions of a speech community (Himmelman, 1998: 162).

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Emenanjo (1999:83) has shown that “language is the key to the heart of a 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”. This made Palmer (2012) to state that “the world is experiencing an unprecedented wave of language extinctions, resulting in loss of cultural identities, knowledge systems, and the variety of data needed to understand the structure of language in the mind. Documenting endangered languages preserves data and stimulates language maintenance and revitalisation”. Adichie (2012:26) wrote that it will be a great tragedy if we allow our language to die off. And, if that happens, that means we have no more identity”.

Once a language is determined to be endangered, there are three steps that can be taken in order to stabilize or rescue the language. The first is language documentation, the second is language revitalization and the third is language maintenance. Language documentation is the recording in writing and audio-visual recording of grammar, vocabulary, and oral traditions (e.g. stories, songs, religious texts) of endangered languages. It entails producing descriptive grammars, collections of texts and dictionaries of the languages, and it requires the establishment of a secure archive where the material can be stored once it is produced so that it can be accessed by future generations of speakers or scientists. Language revitalization is the process by which a language community through political, community, and educational means attempts to increase the number of active speakers of the endangered language. This process is also sometimes referred to as language revival or reversing language shift. Language maintenance refers to the support given to languages that need survival, to be protected from outsiders who can ultimately affect the number of speakers of a language (Austin and Sallabank, 2011).

Adegbite (2002) has observed that national development is linked to language development. There is the need to transform Igbo language into a language rooted on the people’s culture in the face of the violence it is facing. Adichie (2012:26) argued 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 out to the outside world. We are all responsible for the poor state of Igbo language today. Most times, when people go home for an occasion or something like that, you find them speaking English. That kind of thing should not be encouraged. Essien (2003) pointed out that languages rooted in the people’s culture and tradition, is a language in which the generality of the nation’s population that speak it, have unimpeded and unconscious facility in all forms of its communication. James Nwoye Adichie, Nigeria’s first Professor of Statistics and former Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Nigeria, Nsukka has pointed out that he “blame parents who don’t teach their children our language. And I want to appeal to parents who have their home outside Igbo land to try and make their children understand and speak our language. It is very important” (Adichie, 2012:26). Uzoma Okpo, a popular radio presenter and Director of Radio Services, Broadcasting Corporation of Abia (BCA) “called on pastors and preachers in rural Igbo (as well as those in the urban) areas to use Igbo in their ministrations, noting, tongue-in-check, that ‘there is no indication yet that Jesus does not understand prayer or sermon delivered in Igbo’” (*Daily Sun*, 2012:29). This article equally

calls for further studies on Igbo language extinction threat and new multi-dimensional approach to transform the language. One would recall that UNESCO in 2010 commissioned scholars to investigate public service broadcasting and language development in five countries. The five countries covered in the study were South Africa, Canada, India, Jamaica and Lebanon. The final report was submitted to UNESCO in January, 2011 (Obijiofor, 2011). The rich public and private actors in Igbo land should equally contribute towards such studies on Igbo language. Again, "I know there are some organizations that are doing everything possible to revive the Igbo language. I think they should be encouraged" (Adichie, 2012). Finally, Anyaegbuna (2012:31) stated that the "*Ohaneze Ndigbo* should resurrect and as a priority, secure the very foundations of *Ndigbo* through our language and culture or sustain definite workable succession plan based on integrity, before dabbling into secondary matters as politics of Igbo presidency. Otherwise, in no distant time, it will be difficult to really know who is Igbo in Nigeria, a position that will definitely weaken such chances in the future. There will be no greater threat of marginalization against *Ndigbo* as that self-imposed by our disappearing language and culture".

## References

- Abanobi, C. (2012) "The Battle for Igbo Language", *Daily Sun*, 28<sup>th</sup> August. (2012B) "War in America! Woman Attacks Zebrudaya for Speaking Igbo to Her Kids", *Daily Sun*, 28<sup>th</sup> August. (2012C) "I'm in tears for Igbo Language", *Daily Sun*, 28<sup>th</sup> August.
- Adeworan, O. and Agba, C. R. (2012) "Behold, Igbos in Lagos who are Proud of their Language", *Daily Sun*, 28<sup>th</sup> August.
- Adichie, J. N. (2012) "How I Trained Chimamanda and her Siblings to speak and Write Igbo", *Daily Sun*, 28<sup>th</sup> August.
- Adegbite, W. (2002) "Multilingualism and National Development" in L. Oyeleye and M. Olateju (Eds.) *Readings in Language and Literature*, Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.
- Afigbo, H. E. (1982) *Language and Cultural Nationalism: Problems and Prospects*, London: Macmillan
- Anyaegbuna, V. O. (2012) "Vanishing Igbo and Ndigbo: What Ndigbo should do to Reverse the Trend", *Daily Sun*, 28<sup>th</sup> August.
- Austin, P. K and Sallabank, J. (Eds.) (2011). "Introduction". *Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages*. Cambridge University Press.
- Awonusi, V. O. (1999) "Planning for a National (Nigerian) Languages" in Eruvbtine (Ed.) *Aesthetics and Utilitarianism in Languages and Literatures*, Lagos: LASU
- Ayoola, K. A. (2007) "The Triumph of Non-Standard English in Nigeria", *Papers in English and Linguistics*, Vol. 7 & 8, pp. 117-126.
- Azikiwe, U. (2007) *Language teaching and Learning*, Onitsha: Africana-First Publishers
- Baldeh, F. (1991) *Better English Language Learning and Teaching*, Nsukka: Fulladu Publishing Company
- Bamgbose, A. Banjo, A. & Thomas, A. (Eds.) (1995) *New Englishes: A West African Perspective*, Ibadan: Mosuro Publishers and Booksellers
- Daily Sun* (2012) "Setback for Bid to save Igbo Language", August 28<sup>th</sup>.
- Echeruo, M. J. C. (2001) *Igbo-English Dictionary*, Lagos: Longman Nigeria Plc.
- Ehala, M. (2009) An Evaluation Matrix for Ethnolinguistic Vitality. In Susanna Pertot, Tom Priestly & Colin Williams (eds.), *Rights, promotion and integration issues for minority languages in Europe*, Houndmills: PalgraveMacmillan. Pp 123-137.
- Emenanjo, E. N. (1999) "Language Endangerment, Native speakers and Language Empowerment in Nigeria", in N. Emenanjo, and P. Bleambo (Eds.) *Language Endangerment and Empowerment in Nigeria: Theory and Reality Vol. I*, Aba: National Institute for Nigerian Languages, 78-90.
- Essien, O. (2003) "National Development, Language and Language Policy in Nigeria" in O. Essien and M. Okon (Eds.) *Topical Issues in Sociolinguistics: The Nigerian Perspective*, Aba: National Institute for Nigerian Languages
- Eze, G. U. (2011) "Language and Gender in Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition". Paper Presented at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress of Curriculum Organization of Nigeria held at Benue State University, Makurdi from 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> September
- Ezeani, E. O. (2002) "Learning the Sciences in Igbo Language", *Journal of West African Languages*, XXIX, 2. Pp. 3-9
- Fishman, J. (1991) *Reversing Language Shift*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters
- Fox, M. J. (1975) *Language and Development: A Retrospective Survey*, New York: The Ford Foundation
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1975) *Learning How to Mean: Explorations in the Development of Language*, London: Edward Arnold
- Himmelman, P. (1998) "Documentary and Descriptive Linguistics", *Linguistics*, Vol. 38, pp. 161-195.



- Igbo Archival Dictionary Publication (2010) *A Composite Synchronic Alphabet of Igbo Dialects and Guidelines for Transcription*, Awka: Amaka dreams Ltd.
- Krauss, M. E. (2007) "Keynote - Mass Language Extinction and Documentation: The Race against Time". In Miyaoka, Osahito; Sakiyama, Osamu; Krauss, Michael E.. *The Vanishing Languages of the Pacific Rim* (illustrated Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 3–24
- Lyons, J. (1981) *Language and Linguistics: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Marjah, R. R. (2008) "Effect of Cooperative Learning Method on Student's Achievement in Reading Comprehension", Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Arts Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
- Mbanze, K. O. (1984) *Educational and Language Multiplicity in Nigeria*, Lagos: Longman
- Nneka, P. O. (2002) *Towards Effective Education Policy in Nigeria*, Enugu: Cecta Publishers
- Obijiofor, L. (2011) "Saving Endangered Languages through Public Service Broadcasting (2)" in <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/levi-obijiofor/saving-endangered-languages-through-public-service-broadcasting-2.html>. Retrieved on 3rd September, 2012.
- Okoye, C. and Onwuegbuchunam, M. (2011) "Under-Utilization of Indigenous Languages and Sustainable Development: The Igbo Language Case Study" in A. B. C. Chiegboka, T. C. Utoh-Ezeajugh & M. S. Ogene (Eds.) *The Humanities and Sustainable Development*, Nimo: Rex Charlse and Patrick ltd.
- Okwudishu, A. U. (2006) "Of the Tongue-Tied and Vanishing Voices: Implications for African Development" in E. N. Chia (Ed.) *African Linguistics and the Development of African Communities*, Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Pp. 129-139.
- Osewa, O (2005) "Nairaland Endangered Languages - Nairaland / General – Nairaland" in <http://www.nairaland.com/19933/endangered-languages>. Retrieved on 3rd September, 2012.
- Otagburuagu, E. J. (1997) *Teaching and Learning the Writing Skill in English Language: Theories, Issues and Practice*, Onitsha: Cape Publishers International ltd
- Palmer, B. (ed.) (2012) "Endangered Languages, Theory and Application", in <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/institute/humanities-research/programmes-of-research/endangered-languages-documentation-theory-and-application.html>. Retrieved on 4th September, 2012
- Prince Education (2009) "UNESCO'S ALERT ON THE WORLD'S LANGUAGES" in <http://www.nigerianbestforum.com/blog/?p=12923>. Retrieved on 3rd September, 2012.
- Sapir, E. (1956) *Culture, Language and Personality*, Berkley: University of California Press
- Seibert, U. (2000) "Welcome to the Nigerian Languages Page" in <http://www.uiowa.edu/intlinet/unijos/nigonnet/nlp/welcome.htm>. Retrieved on 3rd September, 2012.
- Unesco.org "Nigeria" in [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=11211&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=11211&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html). Retrieved on 3rd September, 2012.
- Wikipedia.org, (2012) "Languages of Nigeria" in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages\\_of\\_Nigeria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_Nigeria). Retrieved on 3rd September, 2012.

**Ani, Kelechi Johnmary** is a lecturer in the Department of History and Strategic Studies, Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, Nigeria. His areas of research interests include peace, conflict and African Political as well as social history. He is the authored Politics about Failed State in Nigeria: Dialectics on the Value of History to Nation Building Challenges, 1960-2010, Enugu: BookFirst, 2011.