

# EXTINCT AND ENDANGERED LANGUAGES: THE IGBO LANGUAGE EXAMPLE IN NIGERIA.

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## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to make a case for Endangerment of languages with focus on Igbo language being one of the major languages spoken in Nigeria that is endangered. Although all through human history language endangerment is sometimes described as natural phenomena, many languages are currently on their death toll due to globalization, mass migration, cultural replacement, imperialism, neocolonialism and linguicide. Recent studies indicate that Language loss crises currently exceeds the rate of loss of biodiversity. This makes for increasing urgency in understanding the diverse reasons for language change, loss and implications in order to stem the catastrophic rate of language loss globally and work out modalities to check and improve language vitality. The descriptive method was applied. This study revealed that many languages are on extinction que while others are already extinct. The Igbo language specifically is already endangered as it is in a dying state and urgently needs revitalization for survival. It further revealed that many of the younger generation, the children, youths, young adults and middle-aged people no longer use the language. Also, Igbo language is now hardly learnt and thought as mother tongue both formerly and informally in schools and at homes. Only old people and rural dwellers are left to speak Igbo as the language is generally looked down on. Factors leading to Igbo language endangerment include undesirable language attitude and disloyalty to the Igbo language and marginalization of the Igbo language along political horizons. A long-term negative consequence of Igbo language endangerment discovered in this study is that the Igbo language stands the risk going completely into extinction in about forty to fifty years from now if nothing drastic is done to curb this ugly trend. Of course, the major drastic consequence of this will be the death of the entire Igbo culture, tradition and in fact Ndi Igbo as a people. Recommendation proffered include; Positive sensitization and projection of desirable attitude towards the Igbo language. Advancement and development of Igbo language into a language of science and technology through thorough work on its metalanguage and development of orthography. The speedy and effective implementation of these recommendations will hopefully avert the impending doom for the Igbo language and the Igbo nation at large.

**Keywords:** Extinct, endangered languages, igbo language, Nigeria

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## INTRODUCTION:

For explicit clarity on the subject language endangerment and extinction it is pertinent to succinctly explain the meaning of language for the purpose of this study. According to the Merriam Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary cited in Anukam {1999} Language is defined as: A systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by use of conventionalised signs, sounds, gestures, or marks with meanings clearly understood. It is also referred to as an audible, articulate meaningful sounds, as produced by vocal organs. Words and their pronunciations with the methods of combining them, used by a considerable community.

The definitions above elucidate language as a medium of communication. Language has been described as the oldest discipline on earth and can only be used by humans, it is a natural trait that distinguishes man from other creatures living and non-living on earth. Language is the most basic and valuable possession of man; it differentiates groups of people from one another in different communities and societies. All over the world people are identified by their various languages. Language defines man's humanity, without language it will be impossible for man to deal with challenges of life, organize his environment and take care of emergencies and exigencies. In essence it is impossible for man to survive without language. Anukam [1999] opines that language grows in use and dies in disuse if the users

go into extinction. This calls to mind the issue of language endangerment and possible extinction. One may ask what actually is language endangerment and or extinction? Simply put language endangerment and or extinction can be described as language that is at the risk of falling out of use as its users die out or shift to speaking another language to the point that no one or group of people use the language any longer in which case the language is described as extinct. Language endangerment is not exactly same thing as language extinction though language endangerment leads ultimately to language extinction if nothing is done about it. When a language begins to lose its native speakers either as a result of death or lack of interest in the language, the language gets endangered and subsequently goes into extinction if nothing is done to check it.

Additionally, the UNESCO Ad HOC Expert group definition of language endangerment aptly explains that language is endangered when its speaker's loss interest in its use or cease using it entirely for whatever reason and stop passing it on from generation down to generations down the line. This means that there will be no more new speakers both adult and children. Essentially language endangerment could be seen as a situation whereby the language may no longer exist or cease from being used by its native speakers which eventually leads to outright language death and extinction. Indeed, some languages are dying by instalment at accelerated rate due to many reasons including the issue of globalization, neocolonialism, negative mental language revolution, linguicide among others.

An endangered language can also be described as a moribund language. A Language that is at the risk of going into extinction because most of the speakers are either dying or abandoning the language for a more preferred one (Linguistic Society of America, 2023). Generally, the tendency to loss language increases as original or native speakers die, begin to loss interest in them, economic and political tendencies disadvantage them, are not passed on to the next generation to continue to speak the language.

### Levels of Language Endangerment

Michael Hornsby Ed {2014} unmasked what he described as indicators of language endangerment. These indicators basically are used as criteria for identifying endangered languages, they include;

1. Population of current living speakers.
2. Arithmetic mean age of native and fluent speakers.
3. Percentage of the younger generation acquiring fluency in the language in question.

UNESCO also identified four levels of language endangerment ranging between 'safe', (not endangered), and 'extinct' (no living speakers). The four levels include;

1. Vulnerable.
2. Definitely endangered.
3. Severely endangered.
4. Critically endangered.

Shading light on the factors above UNESCO explained that when a language is described as;

Vulnerable – It means that children do not speak the language outside their homes.

Definitely endangered - It means that children do not speak the language both at home and outside home.

Severely vulnerable- At this level only old people speak the language and younger generation do not know how to express themselves in the language.

Critically endangered – At this stage the language is spoken by only a few members of the oldest generation and they are mostly semi speakers.

An endangered language can easily be described as that language that is at the risk of falling out of use as a result few speaker survivors, loss of native speaker survivors and general loss of interest in the majority of its speaker population. In like manner Michael E krauss an American Linguist and professor emeritus elucidated that language is safe if children are guaranteed to speak the language in the next hundred years. He bemoaned that approximately sixty to eighty percent of the languages of the world fall into this category. Finally, he affirmed that any language that is no longer spoken by children is categorically moribund.

Given the above it is evident that many Nigerian languages are already on the endangered language list and more are on extinct language list. Researchers have also concluded that in less than one hundred years from now as much as half of the total languages known and spoken today will be lost forever if nothing is done urgently to change the situation. According to UNESCO, linguistic diversity and multilingualism are essentially vital for sustainable development in any nation and we are gradually losing many of our languages.

The foregoing actually collaborates the discoveries of Suileman Sarvi {2012}. He came up with detailed analysis of the number of languages and their status in accordance with the different levels of endangerment. According to Suleiman {2012} presently, the languages listed in Nigeria are five hundred and twenty-seven in number of these nine are already extinct. They include Ajawa spoken in present day Bauchi, Basa-Guma spoken in Niger state, Auyokawa used by Jigawa state people, Gamo-Ningi one of the Kainji dialects in Bauchi state, Homa a language in Adamawa

state, Kubi another language spoken by Adamawa state indigenes, Kpati previously spoken in Taraba state, Odut spoken in Odukpani area of Cross River State and Teshenawa formerly spoken in Jigawa state. This is as listed by the national council for Arts. He further sustained that ten out of the remnants are non-indigenous, twenty are institutionalized, seventy-eight are still at their developmental stage, three hundred and forty-one are rather vigorous while twenty-seven are threatened forty-four are tilting to extinction. {Lewis, Simons and Fennings,2016.

The question of language endangerment has become such a challenge that interest groups and organizations have been on the increase for years now. The issue has become so vital that the attention of a United States based research group worldwide after a project on the issue cited in The Punch [2006] reported that one language is lost every month around the globe. On the authority of this report, the extinction of a language is often caused by wars, migration and cultural assimilation, politics and economy, abhorrence of native language, (imagine referring to your language as vernacular, what a shame!) In accordance with this report, it has become obvious that many Nigerian languages will go into extinction by the turn of this century. This simply means that many speakers have already abandoned their languages for other ones and many more people will soon follow suit.

Some of the states that have endangered languages as recoded by Suleiman [2012] are as listed below; Adamawa, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Borno, Cross River, Edo, Gombe, Gigawa and Kaduna others include Kebbi, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Rivers, Taraba, Yobe and Abuja FCT.

In a similar circumstance, Ohiri-Aniche [2006] reports that the marginalization of Nigerian languages in schools, thanks to the prevailing language policy on education, especially in nursery, primary and secondary schools which is as confusing as it is unimplementable is a broad path to language endangerment, loss and subsequent extinction of many indigenous languages in Nigeria. In her paper, she investigated a sample of thirty-six schools in Lagos state. According to her, three schools are using indigenous language i.e., Yoruba as their language of education from nursery one to three while English is taught as a subject in all the classes and is used as the language of instruction from primary one. Her investigation revealed that out of the entire thirty-six sample schools only four had their indigenous language Yoruba as the language of education. This is a clear indication that even when the native language is acquired at home by some children which is even rarely true children are forced to abandon it as they attain school age since it's not the language of education and knowledge acquisition. It is often looked down on by teachers and students. It is apparent from this report that Nigeria Policy on education is consistent with what makes for language extinction.

Many schools are not implementing the National policy on Education to the letter this is partly because looking at the form of the policy it is easy to confirm that the policy is unimplementable as it is laden with lots of inconsistencies. Again, blames have been heaped on the Government for their inability to engage in training and retraining of the needed manpower and other exigencies necessary for Language policy execution in schools around the country. If government wakes up to her responsibility regarding general language policy on education in Nigeria by training and retraining the needed manpower to cover schools in the entire nation it will help to sustain our local languages and radically prevent language extinction in the nation. In part the Language policy on education reads;

“The Language of the environment shall be taught as L1 where it has orthography and literature. Where it does not have it shall be taught with emphasis on oralcy as L2. [NPE:P.19] A close look at our schools show that the reverse is the case. This is largely due to the nonchalant attitude of our government towards the development of the orthography of our indigenous languages. Basically, our cultures and values as a society are already comatose. These situations are seriously impacting on the development and preservation of Nigeria indigenous languages and must be arrested to forestall further endangerment and extinction of more languages bearing in mind that Language preserves culture and culture is our way of life. This simply means that the death or extinction of a language signifies the death of culture and tradition that are tied to the language, example songs, myths and poetry. This is because traditional values and culture are not easily transferred to other languages.

Additionally, the dwindling rate of our collective interest in the use of our local languages in the various communicative domains have also contributed immensely to the endangerment and even possible extinction of our native languages in Nigeria. Nigerian elites look down on our native languages and that explains why they hardly use it even in their homes and offices not to mention schools. They discourage their children and wards from communicating in their native languages. The general attitude towards indigenous Nigerian Languages has often been that of disdain and negligence, especially in academic circles. Language attitude research carried out in this regard revealed that one of the three major languages in Nigeria Igbo seems to be the worst hit. We seem to be in need of a mental revolution to end this ugly narrative. In a situation where a French man cannot speak English, it does not affect his respect or tarnish his image as a person. Same goes for a Spanish national, a Chinese

, a Russian or a Portuguese and the list goes on but when an African man cannot speak English even his fellow African men consider him a joke, illiterate, dumb, and rather stupid and good for nothing. This simply typifies the level of psychological damage we have suffered as a people. Imagine the dumbness of using English as a yard stick for measuring the intelligence of our people including children. In our schools' children are brain washed into believing

that simply because they cannot speak English, they are unintelligent and never do wells, a language that is alien to their ancestral routes.

Imagine referring to your own language as vernacular- what a shame! Africans and most importantly Nigerians must intentionally learn to love, value and respect their indigenous languages if this mental slavery must be brought to end. We must begin to take pride in teaching our children our mother tongue and allow ourselves to communicate in our different native languages without any form of stigma and or prejudice to forestall the death of our already endangered languages. We must put up conscious efforts to stop helping our oppressors extend their operations to damaging heights by slowing down our growth and development as a people through mother tongue extinction. This attitude and practices both in public and private places especially in schools and academic environments negates the provisions of many educational ordinances, policies and reforms as promulgated by successive governments in Nigeria putting many native languages in Nigeria on endangered and extinction list.

According to Phelps Stokes commission to Africa {1920-21} as cited in Crystal {2000;83} the practice of making European languages the medium of instruction in Africa is pedagogically and psychologically damaging to the children as it affects their mental health. It opined that native tongues are immensely more vital in education. It is the chief means of preserving the societies customs, traditions, ideas and ideals. Native languages constitute mother tongue for many, it is the language that a person grow up with from early childhood. It is the medium of communication that they are most familiar with. This familiarity should be taken advantage of by providing education using it as a medium of instruction instead of looking down on it. Instead of this what really happens is that most African countries prefer the use of major commercial languages or the language of their colonial masters as medium of instruction in their educational system. This is the situation in Nigeria and all over most countries in Africa.

### **Brief Overview of Causes of Language Endangerment and Extinction**

**War and genocide:** This is one of the major causes of abrupt language endangerment and extinction. If a particular race or ethnic group is wiped out during war or ethnic cleansing, the tendency is that their language will also go moribund. For instance, the Mayan language of Guatemala was severely affected by the civil war. In Nigeria, currently the herdsmen killing in Benue, Plateau and other Northern states can lead to language endangerment and possibly extinction.

**Natural disaster, famine and diseases:** Any natural disaster that is severe enough to wipe out an entire population of native speakers has the capability of endangering such language. A typical example is seen in the 2004 ocean earth quake and tsunami that occurred in India.

**Cultural, Political and Economic Marginalization:** These situations and circumstances normally create very strong incentives for people to abandon their language and embrace other languages that they consider more prestigious, this makes for language shift.

Language shift is described as a preferential switch in the choice of language use from native language to a more prestigious one associated with social and economic powers and is more widely used and accepted especially on global front. Ultimately the abandoned language becomes endangered and faces possible extinction. Certain policies and socio-cultural and economic realities make language assimilation a disreputable integer in our society. This is evident in many parts of our country. For instance, in the northern part of Nigeria Hausa language has gained dominance over other ethnic language groups, submerging and endangering other languages to the point of extinction. The same is also true in other places like Bauchi State which has the highest number of languages in the country with sixty plus languages. Rivers State also is noted for its linguistic diversity, with about twenty-eight indigenous languages but English pidgin seems to have assimilated all other languages as it is the most widely spoken language across all demography. Additionally, the Marxist philosophical and sociological concept of cultural hegemony contributes immensely to the endangerment and consequent death and extinction of many a language. Given the culturally diverse nature of the Nigerian society it becomes easy for the ruling and the more populated class to dominate other social classes and impose their language on them. The poor and minority classes are often subjugated into belief and adoption of the ideals of the ruling class as universal ideologies, perceived to be of benefit for everyone while it actually benefits only them and erodes the poor masses at the end of the day. This is evident in pedagogic hegemony where the imposition of colonial language as the medium of instruction and their preferred methods of instruction on their subjects (teachers and students) is retrogressively impacting on the growth and development of populace. Cultural hegemony may also arise from conquest and domination of less influential societies by a larger and more influential one. Increasing cultural contact with larger and stronger language communities through better communications are other sure routes to loss and death of indigenous languages.

**Religion:** Language is the mean stream of religious delineation and rendering. For any religion to survive and be handed down from generation-to-generation language must be employed for the purpose of communication. The

choice of language used for a particular religion by religious leaders is usually done to the exclusion of others. This contributes to language endangerment and eventual death. Typical examples abound, the choice of Latin for the catholic church until recently and Arabic for Muslims speak volumes. Over time religious practitioners tend to abandon other languages that are not approved in course of worship and gradually those languages face natural endangerment and possible extinction since native speakers no longer use them as frequently as it should and sometimes are completely dropped out and cut off.

**Political repression:** This is one of the causes of language endangerment and death in Nigeria. This is usually the case when nations or states promote a particular language as a national language thereby limiting the opportunity of using the minority languages in public sphere. In the case of Nigeria, the three major languages Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are promoted over and above other more than five hundred languages in Nigeria consequently, most minority languages are relegated to the background and this leads to extinction. Like earlier observed the national policy on education is stipulated in favour of the three major languages though after the first three years in school the languages of the immediate environment will not be used again especially because most native languages do not have orthographies. Even then the use of language of immediate environment means that children from ethnic groups other than that of the immediate environment will be taught using languages that are alien to them. According to the national policy on education (2004) in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The question here remains what about the other languages? A question still begging for answer. This is simply a subtle ploy by the federal government of Nigeria to discourage the use of other indigenous languages thereby leading to endangerment and eventual death of the minority languages. Besides, the continual use of English as the nations official language will definitely bring our local languages to the place of extinction.

**Urbanization:** Migration and movement of people from rural to urban areas make people learn and use the language of their immediate environment thereby reducing drastically the importance and use of their native languages in an increasing manner that normally leads to extinction. Example, virtually all the major cities in Nigeria like Port Harcourt, Warri, Benin, Lagos etc. use English pidgin as lingua franca and as such pass it down to their children generationally creating situations where children and young adults acquire pidgin English or English as first and only language (mother tongue).

**Intermarriage:** Often in marriages between members of different ethnic groups there is usually pressure from either of the spouses for them to stick and maintain a particular language either that of the wife or that of the husband. This most times makes the children speak only one language either that of their mother or father as agreed by the couple as a family.

**Code mixing and Code switching:** Sociolinguistics regard code mixing and code mixing as the offshoot of bilingualism. Bilingualism or multilingualism has become the mode of communication for many people in this modern world. In many situations a fluent bilingual changes his language by using words from other language(s), that is mixing codes even within very short utterances. This is called code mixing.

In Code Switching, any bilingual/multilingual who speaks two or more languages chooses between them according to situations. In this way, the person creates a new code in a process known as code-switching.

Code-switching and code mixing are key aspects of groups of speakers who communicate in more than one language. There are two kinds of code-switching; these are situational and metaphorical code-switching. Situational code-switching means the change in language according to the situation. In this type, the speakers find themselves speaking in one language in one situation and another in a different one. In metaphorical code-switching, topic change is involved. When a change of topic requires a change in the language used is it called metaphorical code-switching. Huston [1996] says; ‘‘In code-switching the point at which language change corresponds to a point where the situation changes, either on its own or precisely because the language changes. There are other cases, however, where a fluent bilingual talking to another fluent bilingual changes language without any change at all in the situation. This kind of alternation is called Code-Mixing. The purpose of Code-Mixing seems to symbolize a somewhat ambiguous situation for which neither language on its own would be quite right.’’ It clearly suggests that in code-mixing we find the case that a bilingual or multilingual person usually adds in phrases or words from other languages whenever he/she gets into a conversation. Most of the time people mix a language with the other language.

It is imperative to note here that the term code-switching has gone beyond just linguistic phenomenon were speakers switch back and forth between their native or first language to a second language or another language that is spoken by the majority as a more acceptable or prestigious language. Code-switching has been identified in places and people that are monolingual. The term has spread and now encompasses sets of behaviours and attitudes beyond multilingualism and language. These manifests in exertions that changes our mannerisms, voice tones (some persons actually have what is described as ‘‘phone voice’’ and ‘‘phone demeanor/compartment’’) This is about having different ways of presenting oneself at different times and situations for different purposes. Behaving differently at work, at

leisure with friends, at worship centers etc. These shifts are also called code-switching. By and large this is thought to be a survival strategy because people make efforts to fit in, make subtle choices to be more 'acceptable' for different reasons sometimes for economic reasons at other times for social reasons. This is referred to as contextual identity and has to do with adaptability which is at the core of human experience. When contextual identity is not in tune with originality (whom we truly are) that is absolute identity then that is where the problem really is. It is no longer a choice to adapt but forced attempt at hiding. This brings us to the damaging effects of code-switching and code-mixing to members of minority population of Igbo language speakers which is at the core of factors that endanger language - the Igbo language.

### **How Igbo Language is Dying Gradually Via Codes-Witching/Mixing**

- i. Sendiara m airtime – Send airtime to me.
- ii. Helputu m juo ya – Help me and ask him/her.
- iii. Sitigodi down – Sit down.
- iv. Standigodi up – Stand up.
- v. Biko shiftuoro m – Please make space for me.
- vi. E closuola m the shop – I have closed the shop.
- vii. E disturbuzila m biko. – Please stop pestering my life.
- viii. Chekie m up in de next five minutes – Come back to me in the next five minutes.
- ix. I reachie die gi gwa m – Let me know when you get there.
- x. A choro m i entergodi bike – I want to go by bike.
- xi. Kedu ihe I na e speak sef – What are you even saying.
- xii. Aka m na e think ya – I am still brooding over what was said
- xiii. A di m busy kita – I am busy right now.
- xiv. A ga m a call gi back later – I will call you right back.
- xv. After anyi ga ediscuss everything – We will discuss everything later.
- xvi. E givekwana up – Don't you give up.
- xvii. Takie time gi – Take your time.
- xviii. Chere ka m parkia moto m – Hold on let me park my car.
- xix. A choro m I ga watchia match – I wish to go watch match.
- xx. Settlo m biko – Give me what is due me please.
- xxi. Startia de gen – Put on de generator.
- xxii. Adi m broke – I ran out of cash.

### **Igbo Language as Endangered Language:**

Igbo is one of the four major languages spoken in Nigeria by about forty-four million people. It is said to have originated around the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD in areas near the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers from where it spread to the entire area of southeastern Nigeria. The Igbo language has about thirty dialects scattered around the Igbo speaking geographic areas of the eastern region of Nigeria, some of these languages are hardly mutually intelligible to speakers from diverse areas. Igbo Language is also one of the three major native languages prescribed as language of instruction in Nigeria. Though implementation has been of serious concern since the policy has been described from numerous quarters as unimplementable.

Recent studies show that Igbo language is no longer effectively transmitted to children in urban cities and rural areas. Little wonder then why it is tended to endangerment and possible total loss. This is true due to loss of contact with ecological heritage, knowledge and history which are usually transferred by oral traditions and the negative attitude of many parents towards Igbo language and preference of the younger generation for foreign culture, identity, name language and what have you.

Since according to legendry Chinua Achebe, proverbs make for palm oil with which words are eaten, it goes without saying that language is the lifeline. So why are we letting our dear language die?

Simple random and casual investigation reveals that many parents of Igbo extraction take delight in raising children who cannot speak Igbo. Sadly, these children cannot also speak English or any other language at that.

A brief encounter with a set of kids (four – twelve-year-old) at children's birthday party of a relative exposed a heart rendering malady of the true situation of Ndi Igbo and their language. These children could not understand their language let alone speak. On enquiry some of their parents who happen to be present at the birthday ceremony proudly lauded that "fa adigh anu igbo" meaning they don't understand igbo. As if that was not enough one of them added "suolu fa oyibo" speak English for them with that tone of finality that suggests – you should know better than to imagine that my child is unintelligent. This goes to say that ability to speak English is akin to intelligence and cleverness.

Flipping to English to continue the conversation more out of curiosity revealed yet a more heart rendering malady. Simple courteous investigative expressions were all it took to confirm that the situation was worse than we often think. With questions like:

QUESTION	ANSWER
1. What is your name?	Ifeanyi
2. What is your father's name?	Papa
3. What is your mother's name?	mama
4. What is the name of your school?	Adonai
5. Tell me more about yourself.	

Answers to the first four questions were monosyllabic, sharp and precise. Noting could make anyone of them say any more or less. It was obvious that conversation in the only language they prided themselves in was impossible.

Answers to the first four questions were monosyllabic, sharp and precise. Noting you can say that again that could make anyone of them say anything more. It was obvious that conversation in the one language they prided themselves in was impossible in fact it was just as bad as communicating in Igbo language as well. Their vocabulary, register, lexicon, grammar(tenses) etc. were all badly inadequate. Depressing! You can say that again. Same seems to be true in other circumstances. Encounter with teachers at various levels of education will break your heart. The education industry seems to be the worst hit as it has turned into a dumping ground where all those who failed to achieve their goals and aspirations in life end up. Their English come in varying competencies and proficiencies. Much like the children at the party the general English of adults including teachers of English is nothing to write home about. Obviously, they were good enough the children they teach and nurture will also be good. Unfortunately, they are not and so are the kids. Thiers are largely a pathetic mixture of English pidgin and Igbo language something that can be described as 'Igbonised English'. The problem is societal in nature, the tendency to believe that speaking English Language is a huge sign of upward mobility and no longer the preserve of the upper class whose children have access to big and expensive schools in and outside the country. Some parents go as far as motivating children to speak English at home and even mete out punishment for noncompliance as if schools don't do enough. The impulse for parents is well taken particularly for those of them from the lower social strata, the need for a better life for their children is real especially in a nation like Nigeria where mental poverty and mental slavery intermingles well with economic realities and the end product is delusion and fanaticism. Or how else do you describe a situation where people imagine that the sure way to escape poverty and get into economic freedom is simply by proficiency in English Language. At the cost of their own language, their one and only language that embodies their customs, traditions, culture, belief native tongue at a time when developed nations around the world have moved in the education industry with mother tongue as language of instruction haven discovered same as the best for the purpose.

#### **Means of Preventing Language Endangerment and Loss:**

Haven Looked at the likely causes of language endangerment and death, it would be worth the while to also look at the value of language and ways of preserving it in order to avoid extinction. The value and excellency of language can neither be quantified nor overemphasized considering the fact that it is the only means of communication and cognition. It is through language that our cultural heritage in form of legendary stories, historical narratives, poetry and songs including other traditional values are transmitted to the younger generation. Consequently, measures must be put in place to either sustain or revitalize endangered languages.

**Education:** Emphasis should be placed on education and literacy in minority languages involving language communities and linguists.

**Enactment of laws:** Most countries in the world have enacted laws protecting and stabilizing the use of indigenous languages. Thus, it will not be out of place in Nigeria to do likewise.

**Linguists:** Should be encouraged to document endangered and extincted languages for possible revitalization, for instance, the kolokuma dialect of southern ijaw of Bayelsa State has been revitalized with the help of prof. Kay Williamson and other linguists.

Besides UNESCO'S [2003] document entitled language vitality and endangerment outlined 9 factors for determining language vitality.

- i. Intergenerational language transmission.
- ii. Absolute number of speakers.
- iii. Proportion of speakers existing within the total global population.
- iv. Language used within existing context and domain.
- v. Response to language use in domains and media.
- vi. Availability of materials for language education and literacy.
- vii. Favourable government and institutional language policies.

- viii. Positive community attitude towards their language.
- ix. Amount and quality of documentation.

### Conclusion:

The Igbo language, like many other indigenous languages in Nigeria and around the world, faces the threat of endangerment and possible extinction. This decline is primarily driven by factors such as globalization, political marginalization, cultural hegemony, and the preference for more dominant languages in education and daily communication. The diminishing number of native speakers, especially among younger generations, exacerbates this issue. The loss of language not only diminishes linguistic diversity but also erases a critical component of cultural heritage and identity. To prevent the extinction of the Igbo language, proactive measures must be taken to preserve and promote it within the community and beyond.

### Recommendation:

1. **Promotion of Igbo Language in Education:** Integrating the Igbo language into the curriculum at all educational levels, especially in regions where Igbo is predominantly spoken, is crucial. This includes making it a compulsory subject and using it as a medium of instruction alongside English. Teachers should be trained and incentivized to teach in Igbo, and educational materials should be developed in the language to support this initiative.
2. **Cultural and Community Engagement:** Encouraging the use of Igbo in everyday life through cultural festivals, media (radio, television, social media), and community events can help revive interest in the language. Local governments and cultural organizations should promote initiatives that celebrate Igbo literature, music, and traditions. Additionally, creating spaces where the language is spoken, such as language clubs or community centers, can foster its use among younger generations.
3. **Legislative and Policy Support:** The government should enact and enforce policies that protect and promote indigenous languages. This includes recognizing Igbo as an official language alongside English, providing support for language revitalization programs, and offering incentives for media houses to broadcast in indigenous languages. Legal frameworks should also be established to support the documentation and preservation of endangered languages, including the creation of language archives and research funding for linguists working in this field.

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