

SAFEGUARDING THE IGBO LANGUAGE THROUGH TEACHING IGBO CHILDREN IN DIASPORA

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Abstract

Language is one of the major ways through which the different peoples of the world are identified. A people who lose their language have lost their identity. Currently, the Igbo people of Nigeria seem to be having problems transmitting Igbo to their children. The problem is more manifest among Igbo diaspora children. This paper, aimed at encouraging Igbo parents to go the extra mile of transmitting Igbo to their children to ensure its safe and secure future, examined the possibility of Igbo parents creating an enabling environment for acquiring/learning Igbo within the family and the immediate locality. Employing the language maintenance perspective, our data came from primary and secondary sources. While secondary data were from electronic and other sources like books, journals and newspapers, the primary data evolved over some time from several observations of and/or different forms of interactions with a purposive, convenient sample of thirty consultants consisting of Igbo parent(s) residing in the north, west and south-south parts of Nigeria; Ghana, Benin Republic, England and America. The study shows that diaspora parents can lead their children not only to understand but to speak Igbo. We recommend that the Igbo language awareness and maintenance efforts should be the concern of all the Igbo, especially parents. This will ensure that all Igbo children, wherever they live, acquire/learn Igbo to save the language from endangerment and possible extinction.

Introduction

Every society transmits basically all by which it is known and identified through the use of its language. One can, therefore, rightly say that the language of a society is the life-wire of that society. Experience and research have proved that some hitherto underdeveloped societies achieved greatness and shot to limelight through their insistence on the use of their language in all their affairs, including education at all levels,

politics, trade and commerce, science and technology (Eme, 2016). This is a way of saying that any nation or society that ignores the salient role of its language in its overall development can hardly achieve greatness. It is a disaster for any speech community to lose its language, as such a loss signifies the loss of all by which the community stands for. Usman (2014:10) vividly captures this when he says,

Every language is special in its unique way... and endows this uniqueness on the social landscape where it flourishes. When the speakers of a language... abandon their language in favour of a more populous, prestigious, or economically viable one, they give up their birthright, since their language embodies their distinctive, self-defining civilisation and symbolises their exclusive contributions to human knowledge and development. When a language dies, an irreplaceable intellectual and social wealth of the people also dies, and the larger society's pool of educational, social and cultural values is diminished. The death of any language is a tragedy.

Folorunso (2016:37) avers that, "Many Nigerian indigenous languages are faced with a lot of challenges and their continuous existence is being threatened. ... it is a known fact that in most of the educated elites' homes, children are not encouraged to speak their mother tongues but English." Thus, as language is a living entity, it can grow or die, depending on many factors such as the attitude of its owners. While positive attitude enhances language growth and development, negative attitude leads to its endangerment and eventual death. According to UNESCO (2012), "A language is endangered when its speakers cease to use it, use it in fewer and fewer domains, use fewer of its registers and speaking styles, and/or stop passing it on to the next generation." Following from the foregoing, it is clear that many factors are put together in determining whether a language is endangered or not. However, the fact remains that a language may become endangered and later go into extinction when its speakers die off or abandon their language and switch to another. For Okolo (2015:50-51),

A language dies when its speakers neglect it and do not care to pass it across to the upcoming generation. In the report shown in *The Nation*, November, 2013, research was carried out in Imo and Lagos States to test the Igbo competency level of three age groups, aged 1-5, 6-11 and adults which shows that a grim picture awaits the language; 70% of children between 6-11 years and 90% of children aged 5 years and below were unable to speak the Igbo language. ... 50% of the Igbo parents in Imo State and 80% in Lagos State spoke mostly English or a mixture of English and Igbo to their children.

It does not seem many users of language have this knowledge of language growth and language endangerment. Many take our knowledge and use of language for granted that we hardly realise a great treasure it is. This could explain why many do not feel it is worthwhile doing anything to ensure the maintenance of their language through transmitting it to the younger generation to ensure its growth and development. It is necessary that parents transmit their language to their young ones. This is the thrust of this paper with regards to the Igbo people of Nigeria whose language is the Igbo language.

The Igbo seem to be having problems transmitting their language to their young ones. Although some parents living within the Igbo heartland put themselves in this situation, the problem is more manifest among the 'Igbo' children in diaspora – those living outside Igbo land. Thinking aloud of what becomes of these 'overseas' male children later in their lives, Amunike (2016:20) asks,

Will these children live overseas forever? Won't the boys come home someday to live in their father's compounds? ... If the boys eventually come home, how would they manage in the midst of their kinsmen? Would they feel at home with them or would they feel like people in a strange land in their father's land? Would they even be able to communicate with them?

Our children in diaspora are usually not privileged to be exposed to the Igbo language that is rich enough to enable them acquire or learn it. We are quite aware that a child can acquire only the language(s) to whose rich linguistic environment he is exposed. We are, however, convinced that through Igbo awareness and maintenance efforts by the creation of the rich linguistic environment necessary for Igbo acquisition or learning, Igbo parents can lead their children not only to understand but to speak Igbo. This way, these parents foster the means of safeguarding the future of the language; thus, saving the language from endangerment and possible death or extinction. This paper aims at encouraging Igbo parents to go ‘the extra mile’ of transmitting the Igbo language to their children to ensure her safe and secure future.

Literature review

Borgia and Dowdy (2010) report on the effort of a family towards the maintenance and transfer of the Seneca language, an endangered language of the Seneca Nation of Indians with an estimated number of about 150 speakers (Borgia and Dowdy 2010:117). The effort involved the establishment of a home-based language nest. Here, the “linguistic and cultural knowledge of fluent grandparents” were transmitted to grandchildren (Borgia and Dowdy 2010:115). In addition, the language nest provided daycare services to the children.

The use of language nest is reported to have been adopted in New Zealand for the Maori language (Borgia and Dowdy 2010:120). Language use in the nest is said to be informal and conversational. It provided the children with ways of greeting and interpersonal interaction. To consolidate what the children learnt, parents were encouraged to use the heritage language at home with the children (Borgia and Dowdy 2010).

Indonesia is believed to have approximately 550 languages, making it one of the most linguistically diverse countries (Arka 2013). With Indonesian as the language of wider communication among the diverse linguistic and ethnic groups, it has become the means for upward social and economic mobility. As is expected, many minority languages have become threatened and eroded by such predator languages like Indonesian and other dominant regional languages (Arka 2013). In reaction, the minority language speakers felt the need for the maintenance and intergenerational transfer of their native languages.

Rather than relying on the provisions of the national language policy, Arka proposes a ‘bottom-up community-based approach’. This approach encourages and ensures that “speech-community members eagerly participate in language maintenance programs or use the language at least in the family domain so that it is passed on to the next generation” (Arka 2013:92). In Texas, USA, a study was conducted on families of Mexican origin. The study was intended to determine the strategies parents adopt in their efforts to assist their children to maintain and develop Spanish, their ethnic language, “while developing their linguistic and academic abilities in English” (Bayley, Schecter & Torres-Ayalla 1996). The study comprised three families made up of a rural-based family, a working-class family and an upper-middle class professional family. The strategies for the maintenance of Spanish

...range from insistence upon the exclusive use of Spanish in the home among the Ranch family to use of Spanish in parent-child interactions for a set time each week in the working-class family to nearly exclusive use of English among the immediate family combined with extensive involvement in Mexican cultural activities outside the home in the middle-class family (Bayley et al 1996:390-391)

The result of the study shows that of the three families, only the rural ranch-based family children acquired native proficiency in Spanish. This was made possible by “the parents’ insistence that the children use Spanish among themselves...and frequent visits to Mexico and contact with monolingual Spanish-speaking relatives” (Bayley et al 1996:389).

Here in Nigeria, Urua’s (2005) observation is very pertinent, especially with regard to the elite parents, unlike the more isolated and conservative rural dwellers with less exposure to language contact situations. According to Urua, in a bid to give the children,

a head start over the fluency and mastery of the English language, parents who share a common indigenous language now use the English language at home and indirectly coerce visitors to their homes to speak to the

children in English on the pretext that the children do not understand the local language (Urua 2005:35).

The above scenario portends some danger to children raised in such homes. Such parents have lost sight of the fact that the heritage language of a group constitutes its identity. As Usman (2014:13) rightly claims, "...identity is important for the social and psychological well-being of the individual and group. Identity gives the individual a social sense of who he is even within a plural context".

In like manner, Amunike (2016) questions why parents avoid interacting with their children in their heritage language, when they themselves were raised by their parents in the language. She gives an interesting report concerning a well-placed US based Igbo family who also lived in other countries where the children attended different language schools in those countries. At home, according to Amunike (2016), the parents maintained the family language policy of interacting with the children in their Igbo dialect. With this, the children understand the language, though not with the same proficiency as English.

In summary, available literature has shown that there is need for the maintenance and intergenerational transfer of the heritage language in a society where the heritage language is not spoken. It is equally observed that the home must be the critical focus of native language learning.

Methodology

This current descriptive study, with the major aim of substantiating the notion that many Igbo parents are averse to their children's acquisition of Igbo as L₁, is part of a proposed project on the maintenance of the Igbo language involving thirty consultants, consisting of Igbo diaspora families – Igbo people living outside Igbo land. Each of the researchers had interactions with ten different families. The major research sites for the study are located in the north, west and south-south parts of Nigeria; Ghana, Benin Republic, England and America. Each family has at least a parent (particularly the father) of Igbo origin and at least one child as the focal child. It is important to have a focal child for more effectiveness and given the possibility of every child in each family displaying similar patterns of multilingualism (see Offiong and Mensah, 2012).

This study employed Miles and Huberman's (1994: 10) data reduction process described as "the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes and transcriptions. ...data reduction occurs continuously throughout the life of any qualitatively oriented project." As such, out of these thirty consultants, seven were selected (one from each major site) on representative basis. All the consultants constitute a purposive, convenient sample selected due to their affinity or having come in contact severally with any of the researchers. The intermittent contact periods that have lasted about two years, were usually reunions during ceremonies, holidays like long vacations, or Christmas and Easter periods which provided opportunities for participant observations and oral interactions, as primary data sources.

Hence, the researchers describe the ethnographic observations of the consultants' normal attitudes in their language socialization process to identify direct or indirect, positive or negative attributes in terms of each family's primary medium of communication and inter and intra communication patterns: parents and children, between siblings and other people interacting with the children in Igbo at home or the immediate locality. Each focal child was both observed and engaged in oral conversation in Igbo and the attitude or reactions/responses of all members of the family were noted. These observations and interactions took place several times on different days and at different times of the day, when the researchers met with or exchanged visits, each of which lasted from ten minutes to two hours, with each family to observe both linguistic and extra-linguistic aspects of communication like the use of language together with gestures and bodily actions. Some of these observations also took place at different ceremonies and in the presence of other native speakers of Igbo, including relatives and friends of the families.

Furthermore, the researchers describe what they noted about these parents' usual line of thought in oral discourses directly centered around the dominance of English over Igbo in the diaspora children's L₁ acquisition; the shift from the Igbo language towards other languages by most Igbo children who had acquired Igbo at home as L₁ before the family relocated outside Igbo land. Also noted were these diaspora parents' attitude towards and contributions in discussions relating to the need for positive disposition by Igbo parents adopting, in their families

and localities, different measures or strategies to reverse this unfortunate phenomenon in their children in order to maintain the Igbo language. The interactions also involved telephone conversations during which the researchers enquired from some parents how well their children understand and speak Igbo. For this particular paper, we describe our observations of and interactions with two out of the seven families selected.

The study classifies the families encountered into three: negative, positive and carefree. The negative family is described as one seriously averse to the Igbo language, its use and development. They deny the importance or relevance of Igbo in the current global dispensation, arguing that Igbo cannot be of use in the global community and cannot help their children to achieve their potentials in the internet age. Hence, they vehemently prohibit the use of Igbo in the family. Such parents endeavour to enroll their children in schools that do not include the local languages in their curriculum. However, the most positive family is one where the parents are highly aware of the significance of safeguarding their heritage and ensuring that their children acquire Igbo properly as L_1 from the onset and maintain it for lifelong learning and use. Another class of positively disposed family is one that has come to realize their mistake in causing their children's linguistic and cultural deprivation and endeavour to reverse the shift from Igbo. The parents in positive families appear to formulate a positive family language policy and make concerted efforts to enable the children learn and use Igbo as L_1/L_2 from the family in contexts that inform the use of Igbo for lifelong learning. A good number of them send their children to Igbo land to do their secondary and tertiary education to enable the children's contact with Igbo. There are also families at the middle range with carefree disposition, and could be referred to as *laissez-faire* families for whom anything goes and decisions about language choice are reserved for personal discretion. They are more liable to initiate Igbo maintenance strategies later.

For the secondary sources of data, newspaper reports, journal and book articles that discussed Igbo families either in support of family maintenance and reversal of shift from Igbo (see Offiong and Mensah, 2012; Umeodinka, 2016; among others) or indications of negative attitudes towards Igbo, particularly by the Igbo (Ohiri-Aniche, 2002; 2004; 2007; 2008; Njemanze, 2007; Okwudishu, 2008; Ani, 2012;

Ejiofor, 2013; Osuagwu&Anyanwu, 2014 and Amunike, 2016) serves evidence to support the feasibility and invaluable advantages of family language maintenance and reversal of shift. In this present study, for ethical reasons and because the study is still evolving, a high degree of anonymity is maintained at this stage about the consultants, who are yet to be contacted and their consent officially sought. As such, the families are identified by alphabet letters. Family A was selected based on its negative perception of Igbo and Family B involved a *laissez-faire* father who later turned positive. One positive family was mentioned as a model diaspora family, which we call Family C.

For the analysis, excerpts were selected from the observations and informal oral conversations between any of the researchers and a parent; parent(s) and relation(s); a focal child and parent(s), sibling and one or more other people. In the main study, data from one family are grouped together to get a complete picture of each family. Cross-casing is also employed in the main study examining the attitudes and responses of members of one family as well as those of different families (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

It is important to note that the researchers come from different parts of Igbo land. As such, due to the informal nature of our data collection and the fact that most of the consultants have not studied the Standard Igbo (SI), interactions were in their respective dialects as classified by Nwaozuzu (2008): East Central Group of Dialects (ECDG) and East Niger Group of Dialects (ENGD). Consequently, the dialectal data are translated into English after the morpheme by morpheme glossing. All the Igbo data in the dialects are tone-marked using Green and Igwe's (1963) tone marking convention. Thus, high tone / ˈ / is left unmarked, while down-step / ˌ / and low tones / ˋ / are indicated.

Findings

The majority of the parents encountered by the researchers views Igbo negatively and rejects its importance in their cultural and social identity; talk more that of their children. It is not so with Family C parents. Despite that in most cases both parents are of Igbo origin and bilingual who acquired Igbo as L₁ and are literate in English, having attained at least secondary school education, the negative parents in families selected are strongly against their children's contact with Igbo, what

more helping them to be proficient in the Igbo language. They rather prefer them to be proficient in English which they consider to be of more utilitarian value in their social lives and the global community. It was almost the same case with the carefree families, with the exception of the one who later retracted and sought reversal strategies. This section gives some excerpts of our observations and interactions with members of the two families used in this current study.

Family A

Both parents in this family are of Igbo origin and are both university graduates. The father is a banker, while the mother is a secondary school teacher. They started life in Igbo land, but later relocated to the south-south when the father was transferred. This family resides in a relatively affluent and mixed neighbourhood in which English is the primary daily language of interaction and the children were enrolled in English-speaking schools. They have four children: two boys and two girls, three of whom were born while in Igbo land. The first two, boy and girl, acquired Igbo as L₁ and were proficient users, while the third child was at the verge of acquiring Igbo as L₁ when the family relocated; their ages at that time being approximately 8: 6: 1½. By this perceived elevation in the family status, the mother, in particular, saw herself as an upper middle class woman whose new status has been marked by the use of English in all domains so as to alienate the children from using Igbo. Consequently, the third child lost the little Igbo she could speak before the parents' relocation, while the first two could not go beyond the level of Igbo they had acquired. The fourth child who was born in this environment acquired English as L₁ right from the onset.

At the early stages, whenever the children and their mother came home for Christmas, the children's interactions with their home-based relations would be more in English. Attempts to communicate with them in Igbo were usually rebuffed by their mother. But the researcher would always insist and enter into conversation with them in Igbo. At that early stage, the focal child, the first girl, could understand Igbo but had to employ code mixing while responding. Later, the elder brother or any other relation would interpret to her in English for her to comprehend. By this time, she could scarcely respond in Igbo, but resorted to heavy code mixing/switching. Much later, apart from the exchange of basic greetings and pleasantries which she utters with

foreign accent, she gets completely lost in any real conversation in Igbo. At times, when the issue of these children's shift was raised between some positively disposed relations and their mother, the woman never hesitated to state her point of view as exemplified in the excerpt below:

Relation:

¹Ndaā, nīnī mètè ụmụ gị ejilà àsụla Ìgbò?
 HON., why do.PST children 2SG do.NEG speak Igbo?
 'Aunty, why don't your children speak Igbo?'

Mother A:

Kaà, sùmaana ñnwo bèkeè, bikō!(evasively, with pretended politeness)
 Please, speakIMP 3PL English, please!
 'Please, speak to them in English only, please!'

Relation:

Anàrimàà nde Ìgbò awù hù? (surprised)
 Be-NEG people Igbo be 3PL?
 'Are they no longer Igbo people?'

Mother A:

Èjilàhùàsụla Ìgbò nnoo!(with a scornful look and sarcastic tone)
 DoNEG 3PLspeak Igbo CL!
 'They do not speak Igbo, alright!'

Relation:

Àwọ²?àbèlà mị he i kwùgà, Ndaā!
 (alarmed)
 UnderstandNEG₂PERF 1SG thing 2SG speakPROGHON
 'I don't understand what you mean, Aunty!'

Mother A:

?àBèkeè wụnụ he wùgà èwùgà?'ùwàùgbuù.
 That English is.CL thingreign.PROGreignPROG in world now
 'I want you to understand that English is the reigning/popular language in today's world.'

Relation:

Oo! Ìndaā, ewēñnā iwe, kaà!
Okay! Aunty, beangryNEGCLangerplease
'Okay! Aunty, do not be offended, please!'

Mother A:

Ò rīī iwe m wēgā nnoo!
It be.NEGanger 1SG angryPROG CL
'I am not angry/annoyed, okay/do you hear that!'

Mother A:

Mànà, nnù kwèshìrìimā ³shà òrījēbee jì Ìgbòèje.
But 2PL suppose to know that 3SG be.NEG place IMP hold
Igbo going
'But, you (people) should be aware that Igbo leads people to nowhere.'

Relation:

Eziokwū?
Really?/Truly?

Mother A:

Nnù amàà shà Bekeè wụ asùsụ òzùrù ùwà ọnū,
2PL knowNEG that English be language complete world mouth
wụrụ asùsụ 'internet'?
be language internet?
Don't you (people) know that English is a universal as well as an
internet language?

Relation:

Ànyị na ga ị⁴ dọhu asùsụ kè ānyīhụadọhù?
1PLAUX FUTto throw away language of 3PLthrowing away
nnà nnā
father father1PL
Do we then throw away our own forefather's/heritage language?

Mother A:

Òlèè èbè Ìgbo⁵ kw^hūakw^hū? Èjì yàà wụ prezīdeñtì?

Where place Igbo stand standing?IMPRO use3SG being president?

Where can Igbo be placed? Can it make onea president?

Mother A:È jì Ìgbò èje Àmerikà? Ò na wunụ 'internet'?
IMPRO use Igbo going America? 3SG Auxbe internet?
Can Igbo take one to America?What about using the internet?

Relation: (quietly shakes the head, smiling wryly)

In this excerpt, the relation wondered why the children from Family A no longer speak Igbo. Mother A avoids a direct reply to the question, but with feigned politeness, marked by the use of *kaà* and *biko* 'please', she emphasizes that interactions with her children should be solely in English. The relation surprisingly asks if they are no longer Igbo people, which Mother A takes as an insult and retorts scornfully and sarcastically that her children do not speak Igbo. As such, she denies the children's earlier and natural acquisition of Igbo. She seems to impress on the relation to be aware of their newly acquired status. But the relation is alarmed at the negative impression Mother A has created and could not hide his feelings about it. Maintaining her stance, Mother A voices her reason and choice of a more 'elegant lifestyle' defined by the use of English and adoption of an alien culture which she believes to be the norm. The relation pretends to buy her idea of joining the bandwagon by rendering a mock apology which actually is a show of negative response. This is a ploy that serves to draw Mother A out the more and she acknowledges and denies being offended, pushes her ideas further with contempt. This time, in an all-inclusive disposition, she speaks in a manner that suggests that all village dwellers are uncouth and generally uninformed set of people. Hence, she starts deriding the Igbo language, comparing with English and other international languages in the digital and globalised world.

Nevertheless, Mother A fails to convince the relation, who rejects and ignores her assumed air of superiority. Though in feigned inoffensive manner, the relation implicitly invokes societal expectations mandating the family to dispose the children to learn and speak their heritage language. Thus, that it is an act of foolery to discard one's heritage while promoting foreign languages and ideologies, irrespective

of the 'gains' offered by such languages. The relation also pretended to be ignorant and utters, *Eziokwu?* 'Really/Truly?'. This is another interactional style to engage Mother A and draw out more of her negative conceptions of Igbo. The relation's acceptance of Mother A's silent but decided inference to the social difference between them is a mark of respect from a younger to an elder person to actualize their hierarchical position which Mother A seems to emphasize on. Finally, adopting a patronizing or accommodating strategy, the relation allows Mother A to have the last say, that is, appear to win the conversation, since her perceived status tends towards generating a charged situation (in the form of angrily denigrating Igbo). Consequently, acknowledging the futility of continuing the argument, the relation quietly and tactfully terminates the topic, but ruefully registering his disappointment with Mother A (*quietly shakes the head, smiling wryly*).

Family B

Family B has three children, two girls and a boy who were about 9, 6 and 3 years old in 2013 when they came home with their parents on Christmas holiday. The children were all born in the US. Both parents are Igbo and had their first university degree in Nigeria before they travelled to the US where they met and got married.

Prior to the birth of the last child, the home language of interaction with the children was English. But the man and the wife said they would use Igbo when they are alone and when they did not want the children to be part of the discussion. In other words, they used Igbo to seclude the children from their personal interaction. It did not matter to them whether the children could speak Igbo or not. They were content with their children's level of proficiency in English because it is their first language (L_1). Consequently, the daughters do not know any single word of Igbo, but they can only give the English meanings of their Igbo names.

However, the family B parents came to a turning point. This was when they realized that each time they came home for Christmas, the children did not integrate properly with the rest of the family members in the village where they usually spend their Christmas holiday because virtually everyone speaks Igbo. Thus, the couple decided to ensure that the male child should not be denied the knowledge of their heritage language. This decision was informed by

their belief that the boy would one day come to settle in Nigeria. Based on this, they decided to use Igbo as the home language of communication, often explaining to the children in English.

We report exclusively here on the boy who is our focal child. He was taught how to greet visitors to the house, how to exchange greetings with people at various occasions and also how to express appreciation as practiced in their home village. The parents used an Igbo picture book to teach him human body parts, names of animals and other objects.

In 2015, only the man and the son came home for the Christmas holiday. The boy was very enthusiastic and sought every opportunity to enable him express himself in Igbo. In the course of interaction, he was able to say: *Nnọọ*. ‘You are welcome to the house’. *Ị saala chī?* ‘Good morning’; and *Ịlọla?* ‘You are welcome’ - said to a family member who went out and has come home. *Kà chi foo*. ‘Good night.’ In a subsequent encounter, he was asked to name and identify some human body parts like *isi* ‘head’, *anya* ‘eye’, *onū* ‘mouth’, *ezē* ‘teeth’, *imi* ‘nose’, *ntị* ‘ear’, *aka* ‘hand’, *ụkwụ* ‘leg’, and *afọ* ‘belly’. He was able to do this. He was also able to name such animals like *ewu* ‘goat’, *ọkukọ* ‘fowl’ and *nkịtā* ‘dog’ which were found around the premises.

According to the father of family B, Igbo visitors to the house are encouraged to interact with the family in Igbo. The boy’s level of performance in Igbo was highly appreciated by the parents’ relations who commended their efforts in maintaining the use of Igbo at home while in the US.

Concluding discussion

This study investigated the preferred choice of home language among Igbo diaspora families. It was found that most of the parents in this study, including some of their children who had achieved some level of proficiency in Igbo, were born and bred in Igbo land before the family relocated outside Igbo land. But at the time of this study, many of the children have shifted considerably to languages other than Igbo, especially English, while some others could only utter a few basic greeting words. We consider this level of ability insignificant in terms of attaining sufficient productive proficiency in Igbo to enable them transmit the language to subsequent generations.

The parents of Igbo diaspora children who have a negative disposition towards the Igbo language have shown a strong opposition to their children's acquisition of their heritage language as L₁ or L₂. Thus, such children are denied the opportunity of transmitting the language to their own children. This kind of attitude smacks of hypocrisy and delusion and stands to be condemned. The reason is that some of such parents are leaders of their respective towns/home people residing in such diaspora places and officiate at meetings where Igbo is usually the medium of expression. This view is informed by the fact that such a linguistic orientation has been identified as the cause for the children's shift from bilingualism/multilingualism in their mother tongue, Igbo and another or other languages, to being monolingual in English. This seems to buttress the declaration by the UNESCO that Igbo is on the brink of attrition by the year 2025 (Okwudishu, 2010; Ani, 2012).

Bayley, Schecter and Torres-Ayala (1996) reveal some of the socio-cultural and historical factors which inform and constrain Mexican families in the US and their parents' language choices. In the case of the Igbo diaspora families, their daily life encounters with the dominant cultures may be interlaced with negative attitudes. These notwithstanding, Igbo parents in diaspora should look beyond themselves and their immediate environment so as to be aware of the emerging positive change towards their language.

End notes

1. The word *Nd́áá*, from Òweré dialect (an ECDG satellite: cf. Nwaozuzu, 2008) is an honourific term used to address a senior/elderly person. It does not exist in SI.
2. The glottal stop /ʔ/ is a distinctive and contrastive phoneme in ECDG (see Nwankwere, 2013).
3. *Shà* is an assimilated form of *shí ʔà(orsí nàin SI)* and literally means 'say that/that'.
4. The alveolar implosive /ɖ/ is a distinctive and contrastive phoneme of ECDG. But, while Achebe, Ikekeonwu, Emenanjo, Eme and Ng'ang'a(2010) say it is voiced, an instrumental investigation of the sound analysed it as voiceless /ɖ̥/(see Nwankwere, Nwaozuzu and Okorji, 2014).

5. Many phonological or secondary articulation features like aspiration and nasalisation are distinctive and contrastive in ECDG (see Nwankwere, 2007 and Achebe et al., 2010).

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