

LANGUAGE SHIFT: IMPLICATIONS ON THE IGBO LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Language contact situation manifests differently in different linguistic environments. This may result from how the languages in contact interact. This paper examines language shift and its implications on the Igbo language. The Labovian approach to language study is applied in this paper. Two methods of data collection were adopted. One is audio recording of natural interactions between the researchers and some of the respondents. Two is a surreptitious audio recording of speech events between and among the respondents, all in different domains. The analytical method used in this research is content analysis. The results show that English is the dominant language predominantly used in the study area. The Igbo language is observed to be under threat and may be assimilated by the dominant English as there is a shift towards English. This indicates that in future, if urgent steps are not taken, a different variety of English may become the language used in the study area. Another implication of this language shift on Igbo is the loss of cultural values and identity of the people.

Keywords: Languages in contact, Speech, Dominant, Cultural Values, Identity.

Background to the Study

The coming in contact of the English language with the indigenous languages of West African nations, particularly Nigeria, tremendously accelerated interactions within and among multilingual and multicultural ethnic groups in the Nigerian society as well as with people from other English-speaking nations of the world. English language is the official language in Nigeria. It is extensively used in the electronic and print media, the judiciary, the armed forces, the legislature, and so on. It is the language of education (Adegbite,

2009 p. 74). English is a medium of instruction from nursery to university levels of education, and also a core subject of study in Nigerian schools. The roles of English in Nigeria have conferred some prestige on the language. According to Wardhaugh (2006), the main motive to learn English is an economic one. As noted by Sallabank (2010), people migrate to cities as a result of rural poverty. Those who speak English have better opportunities for white-collar jobs. The prestige that goes with speaking English is another reason why people want to learn the language. Little wonder, everybody in Nigeria wants to be proficient in the English language, at the expense of the mother tongues.

Igbo language is the native or mother tongue of the Igbos who occupy the southeastern part of Nigeria, comprising: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo as well as some parts of Delta and Rivers States. During the pre-colonial years, most Igbos were monolinguals, speaking only their mother tongue. Writing was mostly in form of pictograms (Golder, 2016). There was no pressure for school or white-collar jobs. Intergenerational transmission of Igbo language was effective at that time because the language at home was also the language outside the home domain. The language was in its pure form, embellished with idioms, proverbs, riddles, etc., for cultural aesthetics.

Then came the colonial period (1900-1960) when the Europeans engaged in missionary activities, trade and also colonization (Jowitt, 2012, p.15). English language, Christianity and education were introduced to areas now known as Nigeria. With this, many Igbos became bilinguals and also sought white-collar jobs. Since independence, English has been retained as the official language as well as the lingua franca in Nigeria. Technology and globalization have encouraged the use of English more than Igbo. Consequently, the language at home is different from the language at school, work or business. The domains of Igbo language use have dwindled. Igbo children have started losing competence in their mother tongue. There is reduced intergenerational transmission of the language from parents to their children. There are lots of code-switching and code-mixing in the utterances of the Igbo speakers, generally as a result of the attitude towards English (preference). Jideofor (2013) and Ihemere (2017) observe that code-switching and mixing characterize the utterances of the Igbo speakers.

Children, particularly from educated parents, speak English to their parents at home (Ugo-Ochulo, 2017). According to UNESCO (2003), this is a sign of an endangered language. Brenzinger *et al* (2003) noted that “parents may still speak their language to their children but their children do not typically respond in the language”. From UNESCO (2003) ranking of endangered languages, Igbo is definitively endangered. UNESCO (2003) has predicted that in the next 50 years Igbo language would go extinct. There may be no more speakers of the language, if nothing is done to salvage it. Igbo language may become critically endangered, i.e., the language will be used mostly by very few speakers of great-

grand parental generation (UNESCO, 2010), or go extinct, if urgent steps are not taken to revitalize it.

When languages come in contact, there might be a gradual or total displacement of one language by another. The result is often language shift, which may, consequently, lead to language endangerment or death. Language shift is “when changes in habits or language use become pronounced and one language or language variety comes to be used in a significantly smaller or wider range of circumstances in a speech community” (McGregor, 2009 p.171). Potowski (2013) notes that language shift is “the replacement of one language by another as the primary means of communication and socialization within a community”. Furthermore, Ostler (2017) observed that in language shift, some or all the speakers of the old language change their allegiance.

Literature has identified many factors as being responsible for language shift. According to McGregor (2009), disruption of a speech community in terms of physical or social separation of speakers can cause language shift. The separation does not give sufficient opportunities for interaction among the speakers. Attitude to a language can also cause language shift. Minority languages are associated with poverty, illiteracy and hardship, while the dominant language is associated with progress (Sallabank, 2010 p.57). Language shift can emerge as a result of political reasons.

Sallabank (2010) stated that educational policies which ignore or exclude local languages, lack of recognition of the languages and bans on the use of minority languages in public life result in language shift and, consequently, language endangerment. For instance, in Nigeria, the three indigenous languages spoken by the major ethnic groups have been made optional in secondary school curricula and they are no longer core subjects (Ojajune, 2013 p. 1). This act by the government may lead to the endangerment or death of these indigenous languages. Just recently, the teaching of Yoruba was made compulsory and a core subject in public and private schools at all levels in Lagos by the Lagos State House of Assembly (Yoruba Language Bill, 2018).

Language is a vehicle for conveying culture (Modo, 2004, p.199). Where there is no language, there will be no culture and, consequently, no identity. Salawu (2006), buttressing this point, notes that because of the significant role that language plays in the totality of culture, any impairment or erosion of a people’s language, significantly, signposts the death of that culture and, essentially, the essence of their being. In most private schools, speaking of indigenous languages is prohibited. A policy that prohibits the use of indigenous languages gradually leads to language shift and, consequently, results in language endangerment. Some scholars have examined language shift from different perspectives.

Potowski (2017), for instance, studied language maintenance and shift, using several immigrant and non-immigrant contexts around the world, with particular focus on the United States. The study notes that language maintenance must involve intergenerational transmission of the language. Babane and Chauke (2016) investigated Xitsonga in language shift. They noted that the speakers of Xitsonga in Polokwane City (South Africa) are involved in language shift from Xitsonga to English and Northern Sotho. Thirty (30) participants were used for the study. Data were collected using observation and interview methods. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The result shows that internal and external factors are responsible for the language shift by the speakers of Xitsonga. The study further reveals that language shift in Polokwane City is either temporal or permanent and it is as a result of linguistic mobility. The study concludes that English is a global language and because of the need to be in touch with the wider community, “there is a growing trend of abandoning native languages” (Babane and Chauke, 2016). Although language shift has attracted these research interests, the present study is an attempt to deepen research on language shift, particularly its implications on the Igbo language. The paper examines whether there is a language shift from Igbo to any other language, the extent of language shift, if any, and the implications on the Igbo language.

Methodology

Data were collected using audio recording of natural interactions as well as surreptitious audio recording of speech events. However, the privacy of the speakers was respected as no reference was made to the individuals or groups. Emphasis was rather on speech events and how they relate to the theme of the study. The data were collected from different domains such as market, motorparks, churches, social gatherings, educational institutions and families. The data generated were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively using content analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for the study is the Labovian paradigm. Professor Labov’s research is on the relationship between language and society. He developed a field of linguistic study known as Variationist Sociolinguistics. Hence, Labovian theory is all about language variation and change (Gordon, 2017). Labov “stressed the value of observing naturally-produced speech” (Gordon, 2017). The theory was developed in 1963 (Gordon, 2017). Labov obtained an audio recording of different styles of speech of respondents in New York. Two methods used were: interview schedule of questions to be answered and a recording device. This method enabled the researcher to elicit formal styles of speech (Holmes, 2013, p.251). The second elicited information in a more casual style when the respondents were most relaxed. Labov used Africa-American interviewers

to collect data from African-American adolescents, on the streets where they were met (Holmes, 2013, p.252). According to Holmes (2013), the basis for the distinctions between the styles was the amount of attention people were paying to their speech.

The authors employed the Labovian method of data collection, where language is studied using data obtained when people speak naturally and in a relaxed mood without the possibility of manipulating speech events. This method of data collection is considered appropriate to show whether there is a shift in language use among the respondents.

Findings

In order to determine how and where the features of language shift have manifested in the study area, the data for the study were collected from different domains, namely: social gathering, church, motorpark, market and homes. The school domain was removed due to the fact that English is the language of instruction and as such should be the dominant language in the domain. The data were content-analysed using a concordance (AntConc). The following represent the result of the analysis:

Total number of words tokens = 849

Languages identified in the data and frequency distribution of words: 4, namely: Igbo = 367, English = 473, Pidgin = 6 and Yoruba = 3.

The following figure shows the identified languages and the frequency distribution of the words of the languages used in the data which suggest a shift towards the dominant language.

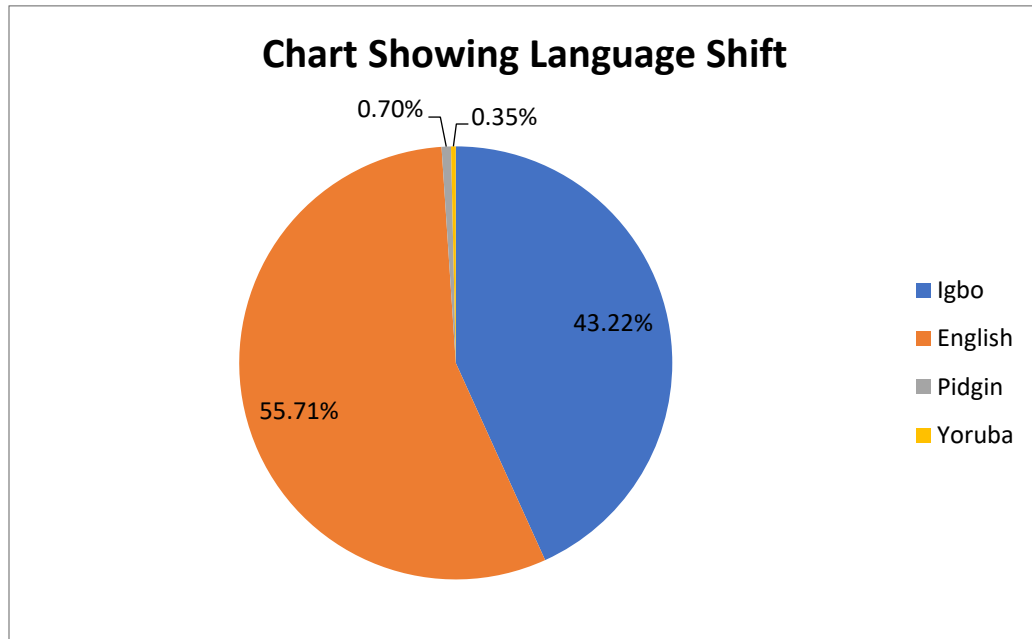


Figure 1: Content analysis of language use

Figure 1 shows that four languages were identified in the data even though Igbo was supposed to be the language of communication in the domains where the data were collected within the research location. Of these four languages, the speech events of the subjects contained 43.22% (n = 367) of Igbo words, 55.71% (n = 473) of English words, 0.70% (n = 6) of Pidgin words and 0.35% (n = 3) of Yoruba words. This result is an indication that English is overwhelmingly the dominant language as it features prominently in Igbo speech events. The result also shows that there is a shift towards the use of English by Igbo speakers of English.

Domains of Language Shift

Since data were collected from different domains, a domain-by-domain analysis of the data is considered necessary to show how language was used in these domains, indicating the incidences of language shift by the subjects.

Social Gathering

The occasion was the 80th birthday anniversary of a woman held at Old Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria. The birthday song was rendered in English. The following speech events were recorded during the ceremony;

Table 1: Order of photograph speech events

No	Speech Events	Meaning
1	umu ya, umu umu ya	The children and grand children
2	Mma jide aka na cake	Mother, place your hand on the cake
3	Mma welite ihu gi elu	Mother, raise your face up
4	Mma – agile, elegant	Mother – agile, elegant
5	Mma’s children, mma lee m anya	Mother’s children, mother look at me.
6	Alright, unu esechabeghi?	Alright, have you not finished taking the photograph?
7	Alright mma’s sister	Alright, mother’s sister
8	Unu mee ka ese osiso	you should be fast to finish the photograph on time
9	Beautiful grand children	

Table 1 shows that the subjects could hardly make complete sentences without interspersing their expressions with English. Some ideas and thoughts are at present better expressed in English, which is an evidence of a shift towards the use of English by many educated Igbo English bilinguals. For instance, such expressions as cake, Mma’s children, alright, Mma’s sister and beautiful grandchildren are concepts that should have been better expressed in Igbo, but due to the overwhelming influence English has on Igbo, these were rendered in English. Mama’s qualities such as her agility and elegance were equally captured in English rather than Igbo, which is the L1 of the subjects.

Prayer for Mama: One observation made from the data is that the Igbo speakers of English often render their prayers in English. This may be a carryover from the common mode of worship in most pentecostal churches. The data showed that the prayer for the celebrant, Mama, was also rendered in English. The following is an excerpt of the prayer, with little or no presence of Igbo in the prayer:

You will make your face to shine upon her. You will release your grace upon her. As her years are, so shall her strength be. We command that any sickness, even that which is common among the aged, shall be far from her. Remember what you said in Isaiah, those that have no strength, you increase their strength. Even that day she will just lie down and sleep. She will not bury any of her children. Lord, thank you because cattle on a thousand hills belong to you. You shall supply all her needs; your name is glorified. We cover her with the blood of Jesus. Rejoicing will not cease in this home in Jesus’ name. Somebody, shout Halleluiah. Enwekwara abu Yoruba, o nokwa ngaa?

Church Domain

The data obtained from the church domain show that church services were done mostly in English. However, few Igbo words/expressions were sandwiched between English utterances in the church, in some cases leading to issues of code switching or mixing. The following excerpts were some of the data from the church domain.

Speaking on contests – Have you seen wrestlers? They do a lot of exercises; *o wu anwuru* to win a contest (is it snuff to win a contest?). *Si ura hapu m aka ka m nu ihe ana-ekwu* (tell sleep to leave me so that I can listen to what is being said). Now that we are fasting, the devil will tell you *I gakwa enwe ulcer; I ga-enwekwa nsogbu oo...* (Now that we are fasting, the devil will tell you “you will have ulcer; you will have problems oo). Christianity *abughi ita bread na akarajojo* (Christianity is not eating bread and cassava cake). It takes determination. Heroes don’t operate under intimidation

Divine encounter: enemies of divine encounter. Let’s go to *babalawo* (native doctor). Let’s go to beer parlour. God’s hand is not shortened neither His ear heavy. The problem is sin oo (sin). Let people see you as *mumu* (fool) but let Christ see you as a wise man. Abi heaven wey person go regret. (Is it heaven that someone will regret?). When we get to heaven, many children of God will regret not using the power given to them. If you ask children to go and wee wee, they will see somebody. You will discover that nothing was there.

Guo abu ahu unu na-agu (sing that song that you have been singing). *Guo yanu ozo*, (sing it again). *Onye daddy, guo ya* (Anyone who is a father, sing it).

Note: bible passages were equally read in English.

After the battle, heroes are decorated. The third person is like the son of man, and *O wu Jisos, o wu ya* (He is Jesus; he is the one).

Prayers were said in English.

Market Domain

- (10) Nke a, obu nwa nnu? (Is this small salt?) - Referring to udara, known in English as African Star Apple). Nwa nnu (small salt) is the name used locally to refer to the variety of the African Star Apple which is very sweet.
- (11) O di very sweet but o bughi nwa nnu. 8/100 (meaning it is very sweet but it is not *nwa nnu*, 8 udara for 100 naira).
- (12) Bia zuta onions. Bia 100/200 (meaning come and buy onions, come 100 and 200 naira worth).
- (13) Ha emenwela ezigbote increase. (They have started reasonable increase). The word increase is used here to indicate that the price is increasing.
- (14) Change a dighi (referring to change, the difference to be given to the buyer who paid with a higher denomination). The speaker could not say ‘change’ in Igbo

- (15) I nwere my size? (do you have my size). Size is here expressed in English instead of Igbo
- (16) Bia zuru garri. Ana m ere ya cheap. (come and buy garri; I sell it very cheap). Cheap here implies low price.
- (17) Were ya one thousand (1000) (take it for one thousand Naira). Igbo speakers hardly use Igbo in discussing/negotiating price or cost of commodities. Most speakers of Igbo are guilty of this.
- (18) Ihe a bu fresh okwuru. (This is fresh okro)
- (19) Ima na nwa a tufuru fonu ya ebe ahu? (Do you know that this child lost his phone there?)
- (20) Ego ole? Ole last. I naghi ere 15. (How much? How much last, are you not selling for 15?)
- (21) Pure water juru oyi. I mee ya two. (cold pure water, you did not make it two?)
- (22) Orange a, miri odikwanu ya? (This orange, is there water in it?) This means does it have enough liquid in it.
- (23) Another thing bu uto ya. (Another thing is how sweet it is)
- (24) Nye anyi six. Wete ndi dimma. Ana m e mix ya e mix. Amam ihe m mixiri. (give us six. Bring good ones. I am mixing them. I know what I mixed).

Motorpark Domain

- 25) Banyewa there (enter there)
- (26) O foro only one chance. Bata motor ka anyi gawa. (It is remaining one passenger. Enter; let us go).
- (27) Nye ya nani five hundred naira. (Give him five hundred naira only)
- (28) I na aga town? (Are you going to town?)
- (29) Chere ka m parkia motor m (Wait let me park my vehicle)
- (30) Setuluo m biko (settle me please) the meaning is contextual. It could mean give me my change; pay me my money; release me so that I can go, etc.
- (31) Nyetu m mineral. (Give me soft drink).

Family/Home Domain

- (32) Ok, ndi a di five (Ok, these people are five).
- (33) Akwa ndi ozo na-abia, so I will be going there... (More clothes will arrive, so I will be going there...).
- (34) M ga-ajust nwere tape. (I will just take tape)
- (35) Unu kwuzie price, mma ga-adikwa worried, nke a unu na-abatabeghi. (You should agree on a price. Mama will be worried now that you have not returned).
- (36) Ana akpo nkea mother and child. (These are called mother and child).

- (37) Ahia nke m na gi ahu anaghi enwebata n'ahia. (This transaction of ours is not favourable)
- (38) Nke red ahu, ego ole? (How much is the red one?)
- (39) Ten thousand. Nke ahu o nwere jacket? (Ten thousand. Does that one have a jacket?)
- (40) Nke black, ego ole? Ten thousand. Enweghi akwa 5000
- (41) M justuru resi gi akwa. (I have just sold the cloth to you). There is a difference in meaning between the Igbo expression of *justuru* and *just* in English, in this instance. *M justuru* in the example presupposes that the seller was favourably disposed to selling the cloth to the buyer even if the buyer offered an amount that was below the selling price. This differs significantly from the translation in English which is an affirmation of the fact that the cloth has just been sold to the buyer.
- (42) I can always shape it. I nwere skirt ozo m ga-eji yie ya (Do you have another skirt I can use to wear it? It will match it very well).
- (43) Ha ga-ala very early. (They will leave very early).
- (44) E mee ya, you would like it. (If it is done, you will like it).
- (45) Which one is 8000 naira skirt a? (Which one is 8000 naira...this skirt?)
- (46) A choghi ihu umuaka na palour, until auntie ha esi ebe a puo. (The children should not be seen in the parlour until their aunt goes out of this place).
- (47) Nkea ana e use e use. (This one that has not been used) Used here indicates that the thing is still new and has hardly been used.
- (48) O naghi ebe akwa but o gaghi ehi ura (She does not cry but she will not sleep). (Referring to her daughter)
- (49) O buru na o naghi apu o gaghi a turn out a with ordinary water. (If it does not run colour, it will not be like this with ordinary water).
- (50) Auntie, your friend goro nke a. I've been bringing customers. M ka aga akpota onyeozo. I want you to prosper. Actually, what happened bu, I first opened Lakara (type of material). (Auntie, your friend bought this. I have been bringing customers. I will still bring another person. I want you to prosper. Actually, what happened was that I opened Lakara first).
- (51) I miniri ihea? Do you mean that?
- (52) Nyem balance m Give me my change.

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|---|--|
| (53) Ọ zụtara the soap? | Did he buy the soap? |
| (54) E miss kwala i lota n'oge. | Do not fail to return early. |
| (55) O nyela m the money. | He has given me the money. |
| Please, buy some fruits for me at the market. | |
| (57) Tinyere m food ka m rie, a dim | Serve me some food to eat; I am very |
| | hungry. |
| (58) Ana m aga toilet ka m eazie onwe m | I am going to the toilet to ease myself. |
| (59) Adim busy, biko call me back | I am busy; please call me back. |
| (60) Huna I sweepuru ulo tutu m bata. | Ensure that you sweep the house before I |
| return. | |
| (61) Onye kuru aka na gate? | Who knocked at the gate? |
| (62) Kpọturum your number. | Call your phone number for me. |
| (63) Tinyere m stew na rice m | Put stew on my rice. |
| (64) Gbanye mmiri oku na flask. | Pour hot water in the flask. |
| (65) I nwere bottled water? | Do you have bottled water? |
| (66) I ji m na eeti play? | Are you playing with me? |
| (67) Sendiara m airtime. | Send airtime/recharge card to me. |
| (68) Helputu m juo ya. | Help me to ask him. |
| (69) Sitigodi down (standigodi up). | Sit down first. |
| (70) Shiftuoro m | Shift for me. |
| (71) A chorọ m I ga watchia match | I want to go and watch the match. |
| (72) Startia the gen | Put on the power generator. |

Domestication of English Words

The analysis also shows that as a result of preference for English, some English words have been adopted in Igbo and are made to behave like Igbo. This involved the use of epenthesis, insertion of Igbo vowels, etc., to accommodate the phonological demands of Igbo language. The following are examples of the domesticated English words found in the data.

M ga-ajust - I will just (ajust for just)
a gam a callu gi back - I will call you back (callu for call)
Closuola – closed
Commentia – to comment
Discussuo – to discuss
Helputu – to help
Disturbuzila – to stop disturbing (insertion of –zila which denotes ‘not to’)
I miniri ya – do you mean it (miniri – to mean)
Mixiri – to mix
Postugodi – to post something first
Parkia – to park something or a vehicle
Addia – to add something
Sendiara to send to
Setuluo – to settle (this means payment, to make peace, etc. in Igbo)
Shiftuorom – Shift for me.
Sitigodi – to sit down first
Sweepuru – to sweep. Also indicates an action already done.
Startia – to start
Standigodi – to stand first

Discussion of Findings

Following the analysis in figure 1, it is evident that there is a shift from Igbo language to the English language. The findings revealed that a total number of 849 words were used; Igbo - 367 (43.22%), English 473 (55.71%), Pidgin 6 (0.70%) and Yoruba 3 (0.35%). The Igbo–English bilinguals, both educated and non-educated, can hardly make sentences in Igbo without inserting English words and utterances, leading to code-switching and mixing. This was observed in all the language domains studied in this work. The result is in consonance with Jideofor (2013), whose study noted that the owners of the language engage in code-mixing, code-switching and excessive borrowing. He further stated that

the consequence of this negative language behaviour, if not checked, is the endangerment of Igbo language. Ihemere (2017) also agrees with the findings of this study. He identified Igbo–English as a classic case of code-switching.

The extent of language shift is seen in a speech event during the 80th birthday celebration of a woman in Old Umuahia. The study revealed that English words were also sandwiched in Igbo utterances as seen in Table 1. The birthday song was rendered completely in English. Prayer for the celebrant was done in English as well. A probable reason why the birthday song was rendered in English could be because the traditional Igbo society is not given to celebrating birthdays. It is an English culture and as a result the language of the foreign culture was used. Mama was prayed for in English because most churches in the urban areas conduct their services in English. Bible reading, announcements, prayers and sermons are often done in English. Again, because many Igbo–English bilinguals read English bibles, it may be a herculean task to quote the bible in Igbo as they pray. A few Yoruba words were spoken because Mama spent her youthful years in Lagos and speaks Yoruba fluently with the children. The language used during the birthday celebration was also a reflection of the language used in the church domain. A few Igbo words and expressions were inserted into English utterances.

The market domain, is made up of mostly non-educated people. Surprisingly, Igbo language was not spoken in its pure form. The matrix sentences were said in Igbo in the market domain. However, there was hardly a supposed Igbo utterance that did not contain an English word or expression. Another discovery is that Igbo numbering system was rarely used in bargains in the market. Some examples are:

Ọ dị very sweet but ọ bughị nwa nnu. Eight/100 (8 udara for ₦100)

Bia zụta onions. Bia 100/200 naira (come and buy onions. Come 100 and 200 naira worth)
Were ya one thousand. (Take it for one thousand naira).

Incidentally, the counting system has an Igbo equivalent, yet they are hardly used for bargaining. This trend includes traders from the neighbouring villages of Umuahia, Abia State. The English counting system is preferred to Igbo probably because the English language has been entrenched in the linguistic repertoire of the Igbo people.

At the motor park domain, some of the English words inserted into Igbo utterances were made to change their morphological forms to the extent that such words could hardly be recognized as English words.

Examples from the excerpts are:

Setuluo m biko (Settle me, please).

Chere ka m parkia moto m. (Wait, let me park my vehicle).

In *Setụlụọ m*, the consonant cluster was split and vowels inserted to conform with the Igbo pattern of spelling (CVCV). In the second example *parkia*, 'rk' was probably not split because 'r' is silent when pronouncing 'park'. However, 2 vowels are added at the end of *park* (i a) because Igbo words do not end in consonants. They end in vowels. Therefore, *park* was transformed to agree with this Igbo pattern. Other English words found in Igbo sentences at the motorpark were pronounced without changing their forms such as:

Ọ fọrọ only one chance.

Nye ya nani five hundred naira.

At the home/family domain, it was expected that family members will discuss purely in their mother tongue. Contrary to expectation, many English words were domesticated that the L1 speakers of the language may never recognize those words as English. Examples from the home data were:

I *miniri* ihe a? (Do you mean that?)

Hụ na i *sweepuru* ụlo tutu m bata (Ensure that you sweep the house before I return).

Sendiara m airtime (Send airtime to me).

Sitigodi down (Sit down)

Names of colours were also said in English.

Examples:

Nke *red* ahụ, ego ole?

(How much is the red one?)

Nke *black*, ego ole?

(How much is the black one?)

All these examples show the extent to which Igbo language has shifted towards the dominant language, English. This is unlike the precolonial years when the Igbo language was spoken in its pure form.

Although data from the school domain was removed because English is the language of instruction, it was observed that, informally, Igbo is spoken among some colleagues. Such expressions were not devoid of code-switching and mixing as noted in other domains.

Examples:

I deela aha gịna list?

Have you written your name on the list? (referring to invigilators' list)

A hụrụm na ịdị very busy. (I can see that you are very busy).

It was interestingly observed that the senior workers in a university address the sweepers and labourers in Pidgin English, although they are all Igbos. One wonders why Pidgin English is used for communication in this situation. Some colleagues, however, communicate in English among themselves irrespective of the ethnic origin of the

interlocutors. The findings of this study have proven that there is a gradual displacement of Igbo by English. It is important to point out that some English words found in the data do not have Igbo equivalents such as jacket, tape, flask, skirt, bread, cake. One may argue that *bread* and *cake* mean *achicha* in Igbo but how would a subject distinguish between the two lexical items in Igbo?

Definitely, the gradual shift from Igbo to English has some implications on the Igbo language. It would lead to endangerment or death of the language. Another implication is loss of Igbo cultural values since language and culture are interwoven. The culture is embedded in the language. Finally, there could be loss of identity of the Igbos as the L1 speakers of the language cannot speak the Igbo language fluently without sandwiching English words and expressions in their seemingly Igbo sentences.

Conclusion

This research was carried out to examine if there is a language shift from Igbo to any other language among Umuahia residents, the extent of language shift and the implications on Igbo language. The study revealed that there is a shift from Igbo to English. Many Igbo – English bilinguals insert English words in their Igbo utterances in all the domains examined. This leads to language switching, mixing and borrowing. At the market domain, no respondent used the Igbo numbering system to bargain. Colours were also named in English. Some English words were so domesticated that the L1 speakers of the language can hardly identify them as originally English words. The implication of this shift is gradual language endangerment or death, if nothing is done to salvage the situation. Another implication is the loss of Igbo cultural values.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- i. There is need to document Igbo language by documentary linguists and keep in the language archives for the future use of children and unborn children so that the predictions of UNESCO (2003) concerning Igbo language will not come to pass.
- ii. It is important that church services be held in Igbo language even in the urban areas. This will complement homes in maintaining intergenerational transmission of the language.
- iii. The teaching of Igbo language should be made compulsory in public and private primary/secondary schools in the southeastern states. The status of Igbo language as a core and compulsory subject at secondary school level should be restored. This way, Igbo children will develop speaking and writing skills, and would become competent in the language.

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