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Impact of Poor Reading Culture on Igbo Language

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Abstract

Any tribe that toys with its language is calling for extinction of that language. Over the years, Igbo language has been facing a lot of problems in terms of its growth. Poor reading culture is playing an unhealthy role or impact on Igbo language. The impact of poor reading culture on Igbo language is to the manner in which Igbo people are neglecting their language. This paper examines the causes, the positive and the negative impacts of poor reading culture on Igbo language. The paper discovers that one of the major causes of poor reading culture in Igbo language is lack of interest in Igbo language. Finally, the paper gives some recommendations on how to improve reading culture in Igbo language.

Key words: Impact, Igbo language, reading, culture, and poor reading culture.

Introduction

Language is an invaluable asset which man uses to explore, understand and relate harmoniously with the world in which he lives. It is also a vehicle through which various facts of people's cultural heritage are preserved. There is virtually no way one can communicate without making use of language. It is a system of communication that employs conventional signs composed according to set of rules, interacting into the experience of its users. According to Ihezuonu, (2013), language is defined as any symbol of system for the storage and exchange of information. She further views language as a means of communication and a subject taught at school which plays a pivotal role in education. This means that language education plays a very important role in educational sector.

Impact of Poor Reading Culture on Igbo Language

Concepts of impact, Igbo language, reading, culture and poor reading culture

Impact is the action of one thing on another thing through forceful action. Hornby (2006), defines impact as, the powerful effect something has on something. In other words, one is affecting the other either positively or negatively and where the negative effect outweighs the positive, urgent attention is needed as in the case of poor reading culture on Igbo language. Online Business Dictionary says that, impact is the measure of the tangible and intangible effects (consequences of one thing's or entity's action or influence upon another. It further gives this example, the two cars collided into one, the impact of which ended up killing the driver of the red car while the driver of the blue car was seriously injured and hospitalized.

Igbo language is one of the languages that make up the new Benue Congo group of languages. It is mainly spoken in the South Eastern part of Nigeria, although we can still see or find native speakers of the language in some parts of South-South zone of Nigeria. Igbo language is spoken in such states as Enugu, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Imo and some parts of Delta and Rivers State. According to Nwadike (2006),

Igbo language is one of the kwa group of languages widely spoken in Nigeria by well over 50 million people. It is a tone language It is a language of education, commerce, technology and social activities!

In these areas mentioned by Nwadike (2006), Igbo serves as a medium of instruction. The word 'Igbo' has three uses,

1. To describe indigenous Igbo territory
2. To the domestic speakers of the language
3. To the language spoken by them.

Over the years, many scholars and lovers of Igbo language have raised alarm over the gradual death of Igbo language. This is as a result of indifferent attitudes of the Igbo people towards Igbo language. Ejiofor (2006, iii), who is emphatic about the impending demise of the

language which prompted him to cry “I have said that Igbo language is dying” in view of this, that Nwadike (2006:56), has advised other concerned Igbo people who have raised this alarm thus:

Those who weep for Igbo should stop doing so, even though, they are right in raising alarm over the Malady of a people, people who adopt the cultures of others, Myopic people who think that some languages are better than others.

Those who raised this alarm have reasons for doing so because Igbo people do not value their culture rather other peoples’ culture and this has affected the development of the language. Only few Igbo people can pick up material written in Igbo language and read. It must be pointed out that those Nigerian languages that are seen to be making waves are doing so on the imitative of their speakers who are bent on sustaining the languages. Life and death of any language is in the hands of their owners. Therefore, Igbo people must rise up and see that Igbo language does not die. Igbo language performs certain functions that a language is known with. It is informative, which means, it informs us and tells us what we know and what we may not know. This function helps us in the propagation of knowledge. Igbo language appeals to the feeling of emotion of the people with the capability of arousing such emotions as pity, joy, sadness and anger etc. It directs the actions of the people. It may make people do something or not do it.

Despite the fact that Igbo people are highly educated, industrious and wealthy and can be found in many parts of the country and beyond, the growth and development of the language and its culture has been dwindling over the years. Culture is a peoples’ total way of life. It is how they dress, the food they eat, the language they speak and everything about them. According to the National Culture Policy (1985), culture is the totality of the way of life of a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, religious organization. World Book Encyclopedia (1993), defines culture as; a term used by social scientists for a people’s whole way of life, in everyday conversation. It may refer to activities in such fields of as arts, literature and music. This means that all the behavior of a people is part of their culture, some people are known for handwork, stealing, going to school etc.

Impact of Poor Reading Culture on Igbo Language

Wikipedia says that, culture is the characteristics of knowledge of a particular group of people encompassing language, religion, social habit, music, and arts etc.

Reading according to Hornby, (2006), means, to look at and understand the meaning of written or printed words or symbols. Reading is a human activity that is characterized by the translation of symbols or letters into words and sentences that communicate information and mean something to the reader. Volunteering reading is important and not just for personal uses and lifelong education, but even learning in schools. In its broad meaning therefore, Ogbonna (2014), states that, reading literally refers to the ability to recognize and understand characters to speak words that may be printed or written on paper and other formats of recording human knowledge. For Igbo language to develop more than it has developed, Igbo people and those that understand Igbo language should read materials written in Igbo.

According to Francis (2006), reading “Maketh a full man”. This means that a man improves his life through reading extensively. On the other hand, reading culture according to Calking (2000), is the ability to obtain meaning from words and habitual and regular reading of one’s book. He goes further to states that, it is a learned practice of seeking knowledge information or entertainment through the written materials. From what Calking said, it means that reading is part of one’s culture. Iheanachi (2007), opines that a healthy reading culture has a pivotal role to play in the social, economic and technological development of any country, reading is a very essential commodity in the task of nation building. Sanders (2007), defines reading culture as a learned practice of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through the written words, she says that the practice could be acquired by reading books, journals, magazines and newspapers. Having a reading culture is imperative for citizens if the future of the country is to be guaranteed, regular reading one gets knowledge entertainment also one cannot just get reading culture, it is through constant practiced for a long time because one practice takes several number of time before it is regarded as culture before one gets used to it. Gbadamosi (2007), says that, reading culture evolves when an individual habitually and regularly reads books and other information

materials that are necessarily required for him to advance in his profession or career. This means that one cannot just read anything he sees, rather what can help him to progress in his career.

Poor reading culture is inability of reading sufficient materials one needs in ones career. Hornby (2006), defines poor reading culture as the habit of not reading as expected. He further says that the quality of reading is very low. The implication of low quality reading can affect both the individual and the society Calking (2000), defines poor reading culture as the inability to obtain meaning from words and irregular habit of reading materials.

Causes of Poor Reading Culture in Igbo Language

There are so many factors that are linked to the poor reading culture in Igbo language.

Lack of interest: Many Igbo people do not like to communicate in Igbo language. In every sphere of life be it church, school, office, market place and business centre etc conversation between two Igbo people is normally in English language or even Hausa, if they do not want to use English language, that was why Aguiyi (2006) has categorically stated that some Igbo people do not speak or encourage their children to learn or speak Igbo. Ajunwa (2006), gives the reason for this lack of interest in speaking the language thus:

“Many Igbo people today tenaciously view that their mother tongue is as lexically too poor and therefore, inadequate to be used as an instrument of communication.”

Before one speaks or picks up a book to read in any language, he or she must have interest first, therefore, if there is no interest in just speaking the language, is it to reading a text written in such language that will be will the of interest to the reader be? According to Odokara (2016), says that, migration is another cause of poor reading culture in Igbo language. The movement of Igbo people from one ethnic group to mix with another make parents and their children to abandon their language and assume the predominant language of their surroundings to the detriment of their own language, even to find materials written in their own language (Igb0) is a big problem. This kind of scenario leads to poor culture of reading in Igbo language.

Impact of Poor Reading Culture on Igbo Language

Poor implementation of language policy by government: The Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education (2004) states that for the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) other than his own mother tongue. The policy goes further to say that, at secondary level, English language fully becomes the language of instruction while Nigerian languages are taught as a subject. Today the reverse is the case, in most states of the federation including Igbo states very few schools teach these languages (Hausa and Yoruba) and it is only at the secondary level no primary school in these states teach Hausa or Yoruba as a second language subject. It is only in some unity schools that we can bet few teachers in these subjects language lack of teachers to teach a child the mother tongue can affect his reading culture in Igbo language.

Yet another factor of poor readings culture in Igbo is pride among the Igbo youths. So many Igbo youths shamelessly admit that though their parents are Igbo, they cannot speak further of Igbo language. In the tertiary institutions today, an Igbo child studying Igbo language in the university is taken to be the dullest child. One hardly sees an child reading works in Igbo language such as Igbo journals, newspapers, textbooks and magazines etc. while Aniago (2006:5), laments that Igbo literature is declining, Ejiofor (2006:2) has stated that, it is now a popular saying that if you want to hide something from an Igbo man, all you have to do is to write it in Igbo and drop it on the person's table this implies that, as the person is unable to read what has been written for him, he will not be able to get the information that requires his attention. Agreeing with Ejiofor, Aguiyi (2006:9), lament thus:

Some Igbo people do not speak or encourage their children to learn or speak it not to talk of reading books in their language.

If the Igbo people refuse to read works of Igbo, our rich cultural heritage full of wisdom, our riddles and jokes, our tongue twisters, our identity and those things that Igbo people are known for are gone. Therefore, authors are discouraged to write books in Igbo language. Inter-tribal marriage: This is where two people from different cultural background came together as husband and wife. In this type of home, children do not know which culture or language to follow, talk of

reading books in such languages. In such families, English language takes the place of both parents' language while their native tongues suffer. Technological distractions: As the world has gone technological, this has affected reading culture in Igbo language and other languages parents and children have taken over watching moving or what sapping, browsing to reading Igbo novels or plays.

Late formation: Parents/teacher should start from primary school level to teach children the act of reading at an early stage. There is this saying in the Holy Bible that, "teach a child the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it. If reading culture is formed or introduced in a child's life early, he grows with it and will never leave it. Novels and drama books should be given to children to compete on who finish the novel first, from so doing, the child, imbibes reading habits. Parents can help make them read regularly by motivating the child with what he loves eating, or doing. Other causes include; inadequate materials in the library and bookshops, laziness to pick up Igbo works and read, and ignorance etc.

Positive Impacts of Reading Culture on Igbo Language

The benefits of reading culture to the individual and to the society cannot be over emphasized. Isaac (2007), listed the following as benefits. Reading is an active mental process-unlike TV; books make one to use his brain. By reading, one thinks and becomes smarter.

It improves vocabulary while reading books, especially challenging ones. It exposes one into many new words that would not be otherwise. Reading aloud is used for speech development delivery in public gathering. Silent reading is used in developing reading habit. It improves concentration and focus. Other benefits outside Isaac (2007), are:

National integration: An individual who reads widely can integrate into the society very easily. This is because he uses what he had read to face challenges in the society or beyond. It can be to improve on his lifestyle or education.

Job opportunity awaits an individual especially in Igbo language. He can work in radio houses, newspaper or in movie houses because he is very fast and fluent in Igbo language. This is not just a credit to the person also to the language.

Impact of Poor Reading Culture on Igbo Language

During reading competition, one who has reading culture habit tends to perform well and wins prizes and awards for himself and his state.

Bold or fearless in public gathering

Improves academic performance: Reading enhances acquisition of skills and for handling complex ideas or issues

Negative Impacts of Poor Reading Culture on Igbo Language

There are so many negative impacts of poor reading culture on the language and on the graduates of the language (Igbo). These negative impacts are;

Fear of attrition: This is a situation whereby the owners of a language have neglected to use their language because they have alternative language. Agbedo (2007) says that the process of attrition occurs when intergenerational transmission of a heritage mother tongue or native language has effectively stopped. For Igbo language to continue to exist, the owners must value and hand it over to the younger one. If this is not done a time will come when Igbo language will go into extinction or die completely. In a similar vein, Emenanjo (2005:5) who has warned that as a living organism, any language is capable of growth and death” this has gone to buttress Nwadike’s (2007:9), view that:

*Some other creations of God equally face endangerment and extinction,
such things are languages and culture.*

Igbo language is capable of dying if not preserved by using it.

- Low quality of graduates in Igbo language. It is not funny that some graduates of Igbo language in higher colleges cannot express themselves in Igbo language. This, rates Igbo language graduates low nationally and thereby denying them job opportunities and placement for further studies outside Igbo land.
- Discourage authors. It is when books written in Igbo by Igbo authors are bought when the markets that authors are encouraged to write more. This is effect mean that as the Igbo people have no interest in reading Igbo books the language.

- Redundancy on the part of library workers: Poor reading culture generally make those working in the library redundant. This is as a result of non patronage. They are not challenged, this make them sit down one place without sorting or arranging books used by people. This makes their productivity very low also low academic performance.

Conclusion

Language is the backbone of any tribe. It is a vital means of communicating ones thought; idea, feeling etc. Igbo language is the identity of Igbo people therefore, should not be allowed to extinction, reading culture in Igbo language is very poor and this has affected the development of Igbo language. Some of the causes of poor reading culture in Igbo language are highlighted as follows; lack of interest, migration of Igbo people, late foundation, Igbo language policy implementation etc. Finally, the negative impacts of poor reading culture on Igbo language may lead Igbo language into attrition or even death if all Igbo people do not wake-up to arrest the situation.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this paper, therefore, the following measures are recommended in order to improve reading culture in Igbo language. Parents should start very early from primary level to inculcate reading culture in their children. The earlier it is done the better. Also parents should communicate with their children in their mother tongue or native language. This can help the child know the language as well as read and write in the language.

- i. Library should be provided to schools also State libraries in all the Igbo States where the general public can go and get information. The responsibility of the library is to make information available in different formats to encourage reading culture among people. Schools that do not have libraries should provide time in the school time-table and use the classroom during reading time and this should be supervised by the class teacher. If reading culture is not properly inculcated the future generations in Igbo land are at risk of going straight from an oral to a digital culture, skipping over writing and reading culture in the process.

Impact of Poor Reading Culture on Igbo Language

- ii. Government should provide Igbo language teachers to schools especially in the rural schools and make sure that language policy is well implemented.
- iii. All the stake-holders in Igbo land must join hands to make sure that Igbo language does not die. This is well carried through societies like Igbo studies associate (ISA), NkuziOdenigbo, Ogbakondi Igbo, Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) and Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) etc.
- iv. Teachers should help their pupils/students to development and maintain a positive attitude towards reading.
- v. Mass media like newspapers, television houses radio stations, etc. in Igbo land should air programmes in Igbo language especially on the benefits of reading culture on Igbo language.
- vi. Finally, for Igbo language to survive in a multilingual nation like Nigeria, the owners of the language (Igbos) must take it upon themselves to make their language survive and of the ways is through good reading culture in Igbo.

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