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# The Neglect of the Family's Role in Language Preservation: Implications for Indigenous Languages

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**Abstract:** Language is the oil that lubricates every form of human expressions and its importance has permeated into all works of life including the family and the society at large. Language is also a means of communication used exclusively by human beings via interaction, exchange of ideas or thought, feelings, desires and by complex vocal and written symbols. The family in the human society is a group of people recognized by birth, marriage or by co-residence and with shared consumption. It is "a family of orientation" and tries to locate children socially and plays a major role in their enculturation and socialization.. Language preservation by the family is reflected on their power of conversation and interaction levels. Indigenous languages are facing extinction because users have neglected speaking it to the new generation The family's immediate communication, pattern however promotes or mar language preservation in the society. Language therefore is at risk of being lost when it is no longer thought nor spoken to the younger generation especially when fluent speakers of the language are elders or no more. This paper examines the concept language, the relevance of language, the role of the family in language formation and preservation, language challenges, effects of language extinction and how to preserve our languages. Finally, the paper conclude that the family is recognized as the first teacher of the child and should not deny its younger generation with the right of its immediate language as no one understands anything he cannot vocalize or reduce to language.

**Keyword:** Enculturation, socialization, communication, preservation.

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## Introduction

Language is most obviously a form of human communication: oral, written or non-verbal. It is the most sophisticated and fundamental form of human communication. Language fulfils a wide range of other functions critically important to individuals and social lives. All human endeavours have correlates in language which is the tool humans' use to negotiate and create meaning and to articulate their perception of experience.

The study of human individuals has allocated a central place in language. Language is central to the intellectual development and socialization of children, which is basic to all learning and concept formation. It is a means of growth, individual cultural enrichment and recreation. It is a source of individual and personal identity.

Human societies and nations give prominence to language. Human society is inconceivable without language. It is the primary means for transmission of knowledge and past

achievement and for ensuring contact between generations. In the society, language is an instrument of power and a means of emancipation and freedom.

### **The Concept Language**

Language differentiates humans from other living things and also makes them similar to each other. It also varies in ways that reveal some of the diversities and differences between human groups. Language is the product of cultural, artistic, economic and intellectual endeavours and also their tool. Language therefore impinges on all aspects of public and private life. Thus, the individual, ethnic, racial and national identification and allegiances often are inextricably bound up with language. It is easier to identify or designate a language than to define one. Language is in the ear of the hearer. However defined, language identifies a cultural unit, a group of people with shared knowledge and with a common interest (Ukwu, 2009).

Language is that means of communication solely by human beings. It can be described as arbitrary representation of sounds which can be spoken or written. Others include signs and body movement, example:

Frowning	-	disapproval
Nodding	-	realization
Smiling	-	mockery/approval

It is referred to as human speech forms in general and to the rules and principles that govern the users form or use. Language is all about communication created by communities and culture. It is a kind of contact human beings signed by coming together in groups or communities by communicating to understand one another through shared audio visual expressions.

The dictionary defines language as:

- the words, their pronunciation and the methods of combining them, used and understood by a community;
- audible articulate, meaningful sound produced by the action of the vocal organs;
- systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures or markers having understood meanings and;
- A formal system of signs and symbols including rules for the formation and transformation of admissible expressions.

It is all about communication created by communities and culture. It is designed as a means of communication used exclusively by human beings and a kind of contract they signed by coming together and agreed on representing this with that and that with that in groups and communities to understand one another through shared audio – visual expressions.

### **The Role of the Family in Language Formation and Preservation**

In human society, a family is a group of people affiliated by consanguinity (recognized by birth) and affinity (by marriage) or co-residence and shared consumption. In the families parents teach values by first living those values. Children learn more what their parents do than what they say. They learn indigenous languages by listening and speaking with their parents. When they speak and communicate in their languages, they express their culture. Language is an expression of culture and who a group is as a people. For language to be present, it must be upheld by each

individual, each family each community and each nation, what out which language could be in an endangered state.

The family is in a world of community of indigenous people, faced with many common challenges to preserve languages. For instance, when the smallest of our communities hangs on to themselves (Kirkness, 2015) it allows the community to continue and to redevelop and recreate itself as it luck one generation to another. The family is profoundly important to the developmental, emotional and cognitive growth of a child. The child will learn about relationships, manners, self-esteem, worth and loyalty all by watching and participating and keep trying.

A child learns about right and wrong in the family. Though today's parents face many challenges in teaching these values, children from their early ages use the internet and have access to the world. Through the internet services they are bombard with messages that are often inconsistent with the parent's values and behavioural standards for their children. Despite all these, parents can also teach about values by sharing family stories, setting boundaries and serving others.

Children also spend most of their learning time in the family. Though school counts, but the home is more lasting over years. It is in the home that the closest relationships build and allow the inhabitants to express themselves for good or ill. Children need to learn about disagreements and how to handle conflict.

The most important support parents can give their children is consistent structure to the daily routines of life. That structure and consistency gives the child security. In the family also, parents models how to handle emotions when they react to their own feelings, Luedtke (2012) say parents can teach their kids about emotions, words to describe their feelings. According her words help us to make the shift from reacting to responding.

Similarly families play enormously important role in children's social and emotional development. In addition to being your child teacher you are also his personal coping consultant. Nurturing family relationships lay the foundation for all other relationships. Through these experiences children learn to trust others and seek out friendship and comfort. These early lessons pave the way for satisfying personal relationships later.

## **The Relevance of Language**

Language is a means of communication by which human beings interact and exchange their thoughts, ideas and feelings. In agreement, language is a means devised by human beings for communicating their ideas, feelings; motions and deserves through complex vocal or written symbols (Anabogu, Mba, and Eme, 2002). Language is therefore an indispensable tool in any given human society. Nwaozuzu (2008) referred language to as one of the most fundamental aspects of human behaviour.

Though language is universal in human society, every society is associated with one or more languages. Lo Bianco (1987) referred language as a form of human communication and in all its manifestation – oral, written, non- verbal language is the most sophisticated and fundamental form of human communication. Lo Bianco maintained that all human endeavours have correlates in language which is the tool humans use to negotiate and create meaning and to articulate their perception of experience. Example man use language to drive home innate feelings which could be Negative, positive or indifferent. He uses language to express his desires and wishes, love or affection to persuade or instigate or hypnotize in expression of annoyance

and hatred. The importance of language is shown in all human society. For instance, the study of human individuals has allocated a central place to language. Language is central to the intellectual development and socialization of children and concept formation. It is a mean of personal growth, individual cultural enrichment and recreation. Language therefore is a source of individual personal identity.

Language also is important in the study of human group and cultures. This study has revealed the centrality of language. As the primary means of interpreting reality, language becomes basic to cultural evolution change and thus a code for the unique experiences of different cultural groups. Language is thus a source of group and cultural identity (LoBanca,1987).

The relevance of language is also seen in the study of societies and nations. Human society is inconceivable without language. Language is the primary means for transmitting knowledge and past achievements, for ensuring contacts between generations. Social groups often mark their boundaries and destructiveness with language. In society, language is an instrument of power and sometimes of domination but can become a means of emancipation and freedom. Language therefore is a source of national identity.

The relevance of language is also seen in it sharing universal features, which make all humans similar to each other and distinct from other living things. Languages vary in ways which reveal some of the diversity and differences between human groups. Languages are the products of cultural artistic, economic and intellectual endeavours as well as the tool of them. By revealing ways of being, human, languages are a source of human identity (LoBanca,1987).

Languages therefore hands on all aspects of public and private life and parades all aspects of society. Individuals, ethnic, racial and national identification and allegiances are often inextricably bound up with language. These identifications can shift overtime and languages itself change over time and is constantly modified and use. Language also influences a society. The way a group of language speakers uses it influences that society. The age, region, gender of the speaker influences the way a speaker of a language uses it.

### **Language challenges**

As a world of indigenous people, we are faced with many common challenges in our attempt to maintain the vitality of our respective languages. Today, parents face the challenge in teaching values in the families. This is as a result of internet use through early knowledge of information and communication technology (ICT). Through internet, the access to the world is precedent in this generation and as such children know have messages that are inconsistent with their parent's values and behavioural standards. There is challenge of teaching something different from what we do. Parents are supposed to teach about values first by living those values. Children learn what they see than what they hear. But most parents say one thing and do another. For instance, parents will tell children not to be outside after 7 or 8 in the evening but will always come home by 10p.m. When parents come late like that, when will they observe, maintain set boundaries and serve others? When will such parents be their children's teachers and personal coping consultants? Though these family failures may be linked to the present political and economic situations in Nigeria presently, but who will perform those roles if we continue in these ways? These therefore demonstrate that our language is in endangered state and will drastically decline if nothing is done soonest. However, the challenge we face today as families, is to ensure that the work at all levels to prefect and preserve our languages is done to provide the specific needs of

the communities.

Language identifications shift over time. It changes over time and is constantly modified by use. My mother tongue is Igbo language which is one of the major world languages and one of the three Nigerian languages which is spoken in "seven states and 50 Local Government Areas within the Igbo land" (Ukwu, 2009).

The Igbo language is in crisis of extinction. Not enough is done to preserve or promote it because the family has lost its genetic role and natural order of creation. Catholic catechetical week of 2015, states that oral tradition is the process of transmitting or handling on the social values through speech or word of mouth through oral narratives, epics legends and explanatory tales, poetry, praise, poetry, chant, and songs, and epigrams, proverbs, riddles, puns and tongue twisters, combined serve to link the past and the present, construct collective world views and identity, educate the youth, express political views and provide entertainment and esthetic pleasure. Oral tradition has intricate connection between oral communication and language preservation. It is a medium for construction, dissemination and consumption of ideas performed in the forms of drama, song and dance of different forms and shapes. The family is the propionate of this role.

The Igbo people are migrants, concentrating in the major cities where they are the largest group. They are found in large parts in the United State of America, Europe and have developed a large Igbo Diaspora. As a result, Igbo language is no longer taught to the younger generation of the community or learnt by a large number of the children. So at the international level, Igbo language is down graded as a subject for study. In the primary school, it has long been abandoned and there is very little in the school curriculum to the children about their home and culture (Ukwu,2009). Not until the 1977 to 2013 when it repeatedly reoccurred as the issue of using the medium of instruction in primary education is supposed to be the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment for the first 3 years of basic education (NPE, 2013). At their individual homes, Igbo language is no longer spoken and taught, leaving the remaining fluent speakers who are old members with the language. At the secondary level, the Igbo language is not a compulsory subject for the speakers and so there is very little to teach the young ones about their home culture, mores and environment to enable them be a proud Igbo community member. At the elite pre-primary level and kindergarten schools, Igbo language does not exist at all (Ukwu, 2009).

### **How to Preserve our Languages**

Fishman (1996) identified that language is the mind sport and soul of a people. Therefore every effort must be made to protect, preserve, promote and practice our indigenous languages. Language users must gather unto the circle all the knowledge, wisdom, and energy they possess to ensure their survival.

Over the years, various programs, projects, policies and linguists have been initiated and attempted to keep our languages alive. The Igbo language for example, Ukwu (2009) noted writers like Chinua Achebe, Olaudah Equiano, Elechi Amadi, Cyrian Ekwensi, Flora Nwankpa, Onuoha Nzekwu, Anezi Okoro, Adiele Afigbo, V.C. Uchendu, Buchi Emecheta and many others so numerous to mention have done the nation proud by the quality of their output that have brought awareness of Igbo life and culture to the whole world. We must be grateful and especially recognize and thank these elders and language teachers for their perseverance in efforts to save our languages despite the lack of support given to them.

However, to save what remains of our languages, it is important that we preserve them immediately by recording on audio tape, video tape all our fluent speakers, most of whom are our elders (Kirkness, 2001). We must capture the purest oral forms of our language to ensure that they will be available to future generations. According to Kirkness (2012) today it may not be important to many of our people to speak their ancestral languages, when the “wake-up” call does come, as I am sure it will, the languages that we “bank” now will make possible a new period of cultural renaissance among our people. However, the very act of recording our languages may produce the spark that inspires the community to begin the process of language revival and maintenance.

To save our languages, there is need to ensure that our people know why our languages are nearing extinction and why our languages are so important to our lives and to whom we are. To do this, we can employ two things. We must ensure that every man, women, and children know their languages, to retain their identities, and maintain their culture through it. According to Freire (1978) it is only through knowing can people recognize their ideological distortions that influence and shape their understanding of social and political reality.

Secondly everyone has to know the effect language has on his/her life. Language gives people their identity and expresses their cultural world view. Language is the ultimate symbol of belonging. It is through language that culture is shared and transmitted. If people loses their language, they have essentially loses a way of life, a way of thought, a way of valuing a particular human reality. If language is taken away from the culture, one can take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures its wisdom, and its prayers (Fishman, 1996).

Similarly, we must use our human resources to save our languages. Our speakers of the language, whether totally or marginally fluent, are the key to enable us maintain what God has bestowed in us. According to Kirkness (2001) to set up a language bank example, will take speakers who may not consider themselves to be fluent, but who have sufficient command of the language, to interview the more fluent speakers. This role falls on the youngest generation of speakers who have the education, vitality and stamina to pursue the range of activity that is needed to save our languages.

The other critical and important resource needed is money. The government and even the churches should came up to acknowledge their responsibility in the demise of our languages to get them provide financial resources required to enable people save their languages. Government should revitalize and revive their language polices to help save our languages.

We must have appropriate certified training programs available to enable our people to become language teachers, linguistics interpreters, translators, curriculum developers and researchers. In Nigeria for example, it is not unusual for polices to be modified after a period of their operation. But a close examination of the National policy on education showed that frequency of the revisions of the policy has little to do with experience during the operation of a previous policy. Indeed several of the provisions have not even been implemented before new changes are introduced (Bangbose, 2016). Lack of policy implementation is a major government problem to train language teachers to save our languages.

Curriculum development is necessary if we are to be successful in recreating an intergenerational transmission process. It is only passing on the language from parent to child that our languages can truly survive. If two successive generations do not speak the language, it will be lost. We therefore need a planned intervention. Kirkness (2001) advocate that a

community approach to developing language curriculum would be the most effective way to ensure that there is an opportunity for everyone to get involved in learning the language. The family and the community must be responsible for this not only for the school alone if we must achieve this goal. Federal government of Nigeria, through the NPES 1981, 1998, 2004, 2007 and 2013 should after rearrangement of subjects in the curriculum at different levels of primary and secondary education according to the 2013 edition, “accommodate.... recent developments in the context of the transformational agenda” of 2012 for the 4-year strategic plan for the development of the education sector 2011-2015.

This will go a long way to cushion the problem of curriculum reform and implementation of mother tongue usage in primary and junior secondary schools and encourage National Institute for Nigerians to kick off its mandate of producing language teachers in Nigerian languages. If this is done our languages will be saved.

Finally, we must work together as a family, community or on a nation. We must take stock of where we stand in respect to our languages. If we are preaching for languages save, the family, community or the nation must be prepared to do its part very well. We must each help to get the language families together to make long range decisions about our languages. When we get these done, we can then expect a better life for ourselves and for the future generations.

### **Effects of Language Extinction**

The impact of the neglect is dangerous and disastrous. Ukwu (2009) stated that the figure of adult literacy in English is well above the national average in the South East Zone (56,3% against a national average of 37.8%). But when it came to adult literacy in any Nigeria Language our performance was disgracefully (33.4%, against a national average of 50.6%). When the adult population cannot speak their mother tongue, the child speakers will not be enough to ensure the survival of a language, and then the language becomes endangered.

Igbo language has a limited use in official matters, government, textbook writing, educational instruction, law making and other formal settings (Obianika and Onu, 2016). The language suffers neglect in the eyes of its owners, and to the rest of Nigerians and foreigners thus confirming to the predictions of the UNESCO document that Igbo language might undergo extinction in the next few decades.

Through language, people’s culture is shared and transmitted. If a people loses its language, they essentially lose away a life, thought, value and in particular human reality. For example, if language is taken away from culture, people’s greetings, curses, praises, laws, literatures, songs, riddles, proverbs, wisdom, prayers are taking away (Fisherman, 1996).

### **How to Preserve Languages**

Parents can preserve language by speaking the language proper. A child learns about relationships, manners, self-esteem and royalty by watching and participating in the family. Parents can teach values by sharing family stories, setting boundaries serving others in their own language because the child spends most of his or her time in the home. It can also happen through formal classroom education as well as through informal social networks media and other mediums of culture. Though school counts, but home is more lasting over the years.

The family must know the effect of language and so nurture the young generation. Language is the ultimate symbol of belonging. When people lose their language they are essentially losing their way of life, thought, value, and particular human reality. For instance,

when language is taken away from a people's culture, their greetings, curses, praises, laws, literature songs, riddles, proverbs, wisdom, prayers are taken away (Fisherman, 1996). Language and keeps man true of natural order of the creator.

No matter where one is living, our children must be made to know where they come from, their environment, traditions and values. They must be made to understand, read and write their language. In the nursery and primary levels, the teachers must be equipped to teach properly. The pupils must be exposed to the appropriate folk tales, games and books to build up their knowledge and pride as a language speaker. The language preservation also can be extended into the classrooms, for example at the secondary school level all schools in the speaking language states must make language compulsory subject and provide adequate staffing, material, and equipment to ensure effective teaching of the language.

At the tertiary level, the provisions and facilities for teaching and research must be vastly expanded. The tasks of preserving, reviving or developing and promoting language requires action by various stakeholders in the family, in integrated and coordinated fashion. It is only through these ways that language can be preserved. The family whether totally or manageably fluent, is the key to enable us maintain and promote language preservation.

## **Summary**

Language is tied to literacy and educational achievement of any country. The issue of indigenous language is tied to the advancement and economic development of any group or nation. Advancement also is tied to languages.

We therefore should adhere to it by introducing the new generation to its usage. Aziza (2015) found out from her work on the correlation between languages and development and standard of living and report that under development was endemic in Africa, particularly those countries that would not develop their language and culture in their education. If language is not used beyond its natural habitat, without mincing words, the language is bound to die with its culture.

Before our very eyes, if no step is taken to intervene now, many of our languages that are not committed to writing nor are there orthographic designed for them will die. Often you hear people saying I cannot speak my language well should be a thing of shame to the users. Without doubt, many cannot read nor write the languages, even when such languages have been committed to writing. For instance, educated as the Igbo language is, there are teeming thousands of their elites who are guilty of this accusation. The Igbos should wake up to the clarion call to reactivate their language.

## **Conclusion**

The need for indigenous language (mother tongue) has been common knowledge and the advocacy for such from educated quarters has been in the air since the 1969. The debate on indigenous language also has been alive in Nigeria, culminating in the provision of its inclusion in our National policy on education (NPE, 1977). Though there is hardly any step forward such that the reality of language preservation through formal classroom education is between rhetoric and implementation, living the family as the sole preserver of indigenous languages or mother tongue language. Language and thought processes are linked together and both are first begin and formed in the home of the learner. Thus language of the immediate environment is recognized by this paper as the best and the only right a child has in life and should not be denied

him/her. The family is recognized as the first teacher of the child and should not deny its younger generation with the right of its immediate language as no one understands anything he cannot vocalize or reduce to language. Thus, the neglect of the family's role in language preservation is the easiest means of extinction of any indigenous language or mother tongues as advocated by the UNESCO document.

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