

**RESEARCH ARTICLE****Influence of English Language; a Study of Igbo Language**Nnagbo, Ijeoma Uchechukwu<sup>1\*</sup>**Abstract**

English Language is recognized as a world language, so it performs international functions and also serves as the official language in the country, while the indigenous language (Igbo) is one of the three major languages in Nigeria. It is seen that the English Language has influenced the indigenous Language (Igbo) to the extent that some of the Igbo do not know how to speak and write their language. English language, being a second language remains dominant posing as a problem currently facing the effective communication in the use of the Igbo language. This work was effectively and efficiently carried out and data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed in frequency tables using simple percentage. It was discovered that the English Language exerts significant influence on our indigenous language. Finally, the researcher suggests solution to help tackle the problem which includes a compulsory study of indigenous languages as a course in different levels of learning.

**1 | INTRODUCTION**

It is a well-established fact that English Language has established itself firmly in Nigeria thus, its importance cannot be over emphasized. Apart from being an official language, English Language is the rope that ties members of the different speech communities together in continuing interrelationships.

Language is said to be a human specific mode of expressing our thought through the verbal (i.e. spoken and written) and non-verbal means. With this we will agree that English Language necessarily serves humans in a multitude of ways. It is said to have a great impact on the cognitive development of man: Man is able to express his thoughts and view via a language; English. The majority of world English speakers use English either as a second or third language. In many countries, including Nigeria, English is the main language of instruction in schools and also used in official business transac-

tions. In recent times, English is used in almost every sphere of life in Nigeria; it still comes in contact with practically all indigenous languages. Thus, English language is the language spoken by the citizens of Britain, Ireland, Australia, North America and many countries in Africa which use it as official language of transaction.

On the other hand, indigenous language can be ascribed to a particular place or area which one is talking about or with the place where one lives. Languages, therefore, means a way of preserving the people's culture; language and culture are inseparable. Although there are about four hundred indigenous languages in Nigeria, yet English is used for all official purposes and is superimposed on these indigenous languages. This is largely due to the assumption that the English Language is a more effective medium of communication between Nigerians from different linguistic backgrounds. It is used by those people who Hugh Smythe (1960, p.69) described as the elite and the marginal elite class,

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by the mass media, in commerce, in governance and nation building, in politics, in education and generally as the basic language of communication.

The issue of how English Language has influenced our indigenous languages among undergraduate students in Nigeria is a major problem currently facing the effective communication in the use of Igbo Language. All over Nigeria, English Language, even though a second language, remains dominant. This has invariably relegated the indigenous languages of Nigeria to the back burners. This situation, as many have observed, does not bode well for our indigenous languages. Therefore, this work tries to find out how English influenced our indigenous language (Igbo), with a view to determining its possible amelioration and/or remedy.

### **Indigenous Language**

Determining the exact number of languages indigenous to Nigeria is a daunting task. Estimates have ranged from 200 to over 400. But there can be no doubt that the number of native speakers of three of Nigeria's dominant languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, run to several millions, and each of these is a Mother tongue (MT) in at least three of the thirty-six states of the federation. Of the other languages, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Tiv, Efik (or rather, Efik, Ibibio-Annang), and the Edo group each undoubtedly has more than one million native speakers. Ijaw (Izon) is spoken in three states and Nupe, Gwari, Igala, and Idoma have substantial number of speakers. Bendor – Samule and Stanford (1976,p.9).

Indigenous languages have gained ground in the school curriculum in recent years. David Jowitt, (1991), citing the National Policy on Education (1977, p.10) stipulates that the MT should be used as the medium of instruction in the first two years of primary school, the National Policy on Education requires that at junior secondary level, one of the three main languages be studied in addition to the MT, and arrangements were made to see that teachers who are native speakers of the additional languages become available.

All levels of Nigerian society are replete with individuals who can speak more than one Nigerian language, often fluently. This is surely the rule rather than the exception in the old North (excluding Benue and Kwara. There also exist, at the same time,

many Nigerians who speak no additional Nigerian language but speak English, and of course, many others who know only their MT. It remains to be seen whether the National Policy on Education, as it concerns the junior secondary curriculum, will succeed in making the Nigerian population of the future bilingual in two Nigerian languages, as would appear to be the aim.

### **The Igbo Language**

The Igbo language is one of the eight major languages in the Benue-Congo Group of African languages, Echeruo (1971,p.1). The Benue-Congo family of languages is itself a sub-group of the major Niger-Congo family of languages. The Igbo language is estimated to be about 6,000 years old. This view is traced to glottochronologies who say that the languages of the kwa sub family of which Igbo is a member, started assuming distinct forms from about 6,000 years ago. The Igbo's are assumed to have started emerging as a distinct cultural group around that time.

The Igbo language has to its credit a number of dialects, distinguished by accent which are almost always mutually intelligible. It is one of the three official Nigeria Languages (the other being Yoruba and Hausa) in the Nigerian Constitution (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999).

In addition, the Igbo community occupies the South-Eastern region of Nigeria. These groups of people speak the Igbo Language, and thus, constitute a speech community. A speech community, as Trudgill (1994, p.100) defines it, is a totality of linguistic varieties used by a particular community, or a group of people who do not have the same language. Romaine (1994, p.22) however, describes a speech community as a group of people who do not necessarily have the same language but share a set of norms and rules for the use of language.

The Igbo people are a culturally homogenous people whose orthography was set down by Onwu in 1961 – Anozie (2003, p.63). Their rich culturally heritage is reflected in their proverb, songs, music, dance, drama, paintings, drawings, marriage ceremonies, festivals, chieftaincy installations, and others. Through the use of language, all these aspects of culture which bind the Igbo people are meaningful, expressible and operational.

The current Igbo orthography was produced by Onwu, in 1961 Anozie (2003, p.63). The Igbo language is a unifying factor of the Igbo culture and has proven an efficient and useful tool for the dissemination of the Igbo culture from generation to generation Omega (2007, p.168). Surprisingly, in the words of Obinna (2002, p. 30) majority of the Igbo are generally not good speakers of Igbo nor good readers of Igbo, and of course, hardly do they listen to Igbo language programs on radio nor view same on television. Nwadike (2002, p.97) notes "The greatest problem that has faced Igbo from all times is the apathy of the Igbo man towards his language". Igbo people no longer speak their language freely because of the influence of foreign language. English is used to teach even at kindergarten level.

In most schools, English is made compulsory, while Igbo language is a taboo, Igbo is already a lost language in most Igbo families as most parents no longer speak nor teach children the language. Instead they scold their children for speaking their mother tongue, whether in public or private places. Even most of the Igbo cultural festivals are now being moderated in the English language. Akponye (2007,p.37) reveal the United nations organization (UNO) has conducted a research on the languages being spoken around the world today in order to determine their longest. In view of prevailing trends, it is not surprising that the Igbo Language is listed as one of the languages that will become extinct in the next twenty-five years because it is losing vibrancy and dynamism.

### **Multilingualism**

Multilingualism can also refer to language use - the ability of an individual to use multiple languages. There is no gain saying the fact that multilingualism is the linguistic reality of many countries in the world.

Nigeria, for example, is a heterogeneous society with over 400 ethno linguistic units. At the individual level, multilingualism is the use of more than two languages in a speech society and community. This does not imply that the speaker in that community is competent in more than one language. Going by the definition of multilingualism by different scholars, it is then obvious that Nigeria is a multilingual nation ab initio. English has added to the multilingual nature of the nation. Alarmingly however,

it is not just competing for prominence with the indigenous languages, but incontestably taking over the functions of the indigenous languages, thereby prematurely pushing our indigenous languages into extinction.

### **Effects of English on Igbo Language**

Some scholars have drawn attention to the fact that Igbo is a language in danger for instance, Kuju (1999, p. 55) makes the following observations:

It is not only the so-called minority or small languages that are endangered in Nigeria. Even the rich also cry of late - there has been an increasing outcry by concerned Igbo indigenes that the Igbo language is registering fewer and fewer speakers. The phenomenon is noticeable even among the Igbo people resident in Igbo towns and cities where ordinarily, Igbo should be the chief means of communication.

The dominance of English and the low value ascribed to Igbo are the bane of the Igbo Language. This development has invariably birthed the trend to bring up children as monolingual speakers of English, a trend which Ohiri-Aniche (1997, p.75) blames for killing the Igbo Language. Problems associated with the negative attitude towards Igbo are also closely linked with the dominance of English and its status as the preferred language in Nigeria. Although Igbo is encountering losses, these are however, non-life threatening losses, even though Fishman (1991, p.2) explains these losses, in turn, lead to shift of domains which often reduce the prestige attached to the language.

The Igbo people portray negative attitudes towards their language (c.f Duruaku 2004, p. 102 and Irono 2005, p. 31). In support of the above statement, Eme (2004, p.304) says:

Some Igbo parents, especially the literate ones, do not speak Igbo to their children even at home. In some cases the parent's bane their children from using Igbo to communicate among themselves.

She went further to say that such parents do not feel ashamed to tell anybody that cares to listen that their children do not understand nor speak Igbo. In fact, they feel elated at their children's achievement at mastering the prestigious English Language and degrading the awkward Igbo Language.

Most Igbo parents do not take delight in transfer-

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ring Igbo to their children. It is in line with this that Nwadike (2008, p.39-40) observes that: many Igbo parents do not want their children to speak Igbo. Once, a mother at the University of Nigeria Nsukka, asked her children to desist from speaking that useless language (Igbo). This class of parents gets offended with teachers who teach Igbo as a subject to the children.

There are certain factors that have pitted the English Language against the indigenous language (Igbo):

**Education:** Education can trigger either a positive or negative attitude-towards language. According to Chumbow (1990, p.63), language is the indispensable medium for the education and training of skilled manpower. This statement explains why the use of the English Language in education, government, trade and other linguistic transactions in Nigeria led to the Igbo people developing a favourable attitude towards it. The English Language acquired a greater influence which detrimentally affected the use of the Igbo Language. As a result of this, the Igbo Language declined and is gradually going into extinction. Consequent upon this, the Igbo Language has been abandoned – from the primary school to the tertiary levels – as language of instruction in favour of the English Language resulting in the continued decline of the Igbo Language.

**Government Policy on Education:** It is a common belief among scholars that when the government of a country makes a language policy which elevates one language as the official language of that nation, the given language will definitely enjoy a privileged status among the people since it serves as a means of carrying out official functions. This became the case of English language in Nigeria; its elevated status has given the English Language the privilege and an edge over and above the indigenous languages in terms of use and function and Igbo seems to suffer most from this dilemma.

**Globalization :** The concept of globalization has so powerfully permeated the economic and political territories of most nations so much so that any country that does not measure up to its demands are termed underdeveloped and backward. Globalization plays a big role in determining whether a language thrives or not. It discourages diversity and promotes homogeneity, thereby suggesting the speaking of the same

kind of language. On this, Fishman (2001, p.61) states, “in our day and age, it is definitely the globalization of the Western culture that is the motto shift”. And since America’s dominance, globalization has become the major economic technological and cultural thrust of word-wide modernization and westernization. Hence efforts to safeguard threatened languages (and therefore contextually weaker languages) must seem to oppose the very strongest processes and power.

Igbo people seem to have been forced and deceived by the powers of globalization to develop a negative attitude towards their language. It has been observed that Igbo language is fast deteriorating. In our schools, markets, public places, business sectors and most annoying at homes, no one seems to speak Igbo language anymore. In the words of Obinna (2002,p.30) With a population that fluctuates between twenty and thirty million, and reaching out from Imo, Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebony State and beyond, “the Igbo language continues to mark time or even regress.” This view seems to be strengthened by the increasing reality that the Igbo people are generally not good speakers of Igbo.

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*Unpronounced Letters:* In the Igbo Language, there are no pronounced letters - all letters are pronounced. The English Language however has introduced the writing of unpronounced letters into the Igbo Language, which is uncharacteristic and irrelevant.

**Table1**

<i>English Spelling</i>	<i>Igbo Spelling</i>
Mbah	Mba
Ezeh	Eze
Umeh	Ume
Ikeh	Ike
Udoh	Udo

*Approximation:* The use of approximation caused the English man who does not have (o) ( □:) in his language to use the combination of ‘a’ and ‘w’ that is /aw/to represent the speech sound on some particular names that are yet to be put right.

Table 2.

<i>English Spelling</i>	<i>Igbo Spelling</i>
Awka	oka
Awkuzu	okuzu
Nawfia	Nofia
Awka-etiti	oka-Etiti
Amawbia	Amobia

Similarly, the use of ‘or’ in place of ‘o’ in various names of places and settings. This is called linguistics erosion. The English man used ‘or’/□ as an equivalent to ‘o’ in the Igbo language.

Table 3.

<i>English Spelling</i>	<i>Igbo Spelling</i>
Alor	Alo
Okafor	Okafo
Ukpor	Ukpo
Uzor	Uzo
Nwafor	Nwafo
orlu	olu

*Duplication of Consonants:* Duplication of consonants is irrelevant and not pronounced. This feature is obviously an influence of linguistic colonization.

Table 4.

<i>English Spelling</i>	<i>Igbo Spelling</i>
Achalla	Achala
Iwolla	Iwola
owerri	owere
Urualla	Uruala

Ewelu (2010, p.269)

*The Concept of ‘ch’:* Then, the Igbo ‘ch’ does not exist in the alphabet of the white man’s first language, hence, they approximate it with ‘tsh’ or ‘tch’ as in

Table 5.

<i>English Spelling</i>	<i>Igbo Spelling</i>
Onitsha	Onicha
Eyutchae	Eyiuche

*Adoption:* This is a process by which both the content and form of a linguistics unit are borrowed into Igbo with little or no phonological changes. Example: Radio, Tea, Bread, Fridge, Electric, Jacket and others. Also, there are some words which the Igbo Language has borrower from the English Language, such as airtime, motorcycle, and others.

Without the evolution of English in Nigeria we would not have had needs for such names because they are not in our experience. Put differently, speakers cannot have words or meaning for what do not fall within their experience or for what do not for them exist.

In Nigeria, contact situation such as we have in Nigeria, each of the indigenous languages such as Igbo, Hausa, Igala, Idoma, and others were performing all the lingua-cultural function before superimposition of English on it. With the evolution of English in Nigeria went the introduction of certain concepts, objects, ideas and phenomena which were alien to the different culture groups in Nigeria.

In Igbo language, the grammatical rules are more complex in that the toning of words are very importantly governed by grammatical rules according to the context of the word in question is being used.

- Examples
- Akwa (Cry)
  - Akwa (Bed)
  - Akwa (Cloth)
  - Akwa (Egg)
  - Oke (Male)
  - Oke (Share)
  - Okè (Boundary)
  - Oké (Rat)
  - Isi (Head)
  - Isi (Blindness)
  - fsi (Smell)
  - fsi (to cook)

On the whole, the researcher is not against the use of the English Language for it is the major language of literacy. However, its unmitigated and unregulated use is gradually killing our own language. As language and culture cannot be separated, the limited the use of our indigenous language (Igbo) has led to the gradual erosion of our allures, values, world view and identity. The result of this is that the younger generation is beginning to lose the core values and rites of their cultures. Rather, the younger generation is increasingly reflecting the culture of the English language. They speak more English and gradually and increasingly continue modifying their names to be pronounced as English. This dominant use of English in Nigeria has negatively

affected the quality of the indigenous language (Igbo). They can hardly speak pure Igbo without code mixing with lexemes or phrases of English or code switching from Igbo to English intermittently. At every point in life, the criterion for measuring success and social status is the English Language

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because English appears most functional in the society.

To culminate, it is pertinent to note that the researcher is not averse to proliferation of the English Language in Nigeria. In fact, it is the only language through which the numerous tribes that constitute the Nigerian nation can unite. The use of the English Language has enabled Nigeria achieve national growth and development, especially considering the divergent multilingual and heterogeneous nature of the populace. However, despite the many contributions of the English Language to national development, its use and reach should be limited and strictly monitored so as to safeguard and ensure the viability of our indigenous languages. Strict measures should be put in place to achieve this as failure to do this will eventually result in the total obliteration of our indigenous languages and consequently our cultures and ways of life, as language is intricately tied to and is a very strong expression of a people's culture, values and social identity.

## 2 | METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive survey design. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and supplemented by field observations.

The population of this study was made up of 40 young adults of Igbo extraction in various tertiary institutions. The study was carried out in Awka metropolis, one of the major Igbo cities in Nigeria.

The purposive method of sampling was employed, as only individuals that fit the Igbo-English bilingual parameters were being considered.

The data was collected and analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentages.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

#### Data Presentation

After data had been collected, they were organized and presented in an orderly manner using table, data presented in labeled rows and columns.

**Table 6. Distribution of Questionnaire & Retrieval**

		Percentage (%)
Total No of Copies of Questionnaire	40	100
No of Respondents	40	100
Returned	30	75
Not returned	10	25
Total	40	100

*Interpretation:* This table shows the total number of questionnaire distributed, the number returned and not returned.

**Table 7. Sex Range of Respondents**

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	5	17
Female	25	83
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* This table above shows that females have the highest number of respondents which resulted to 83% while the male has the lowest number of respondents which resulted to 17%.

**Table 8. Age Range of Respondents**

Categories of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
16-20	8	27
21-25	10	33
26-30	5	17
31-35	7	23
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* This table shows that 26-30 has the lowest number of frequency and percentage while 21-25 have the highest number of frequency and percentage.

**Table 9. Respondent Class Level**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1001	3	10
2001	7	23
3001	12	40
4001	8	27
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* It shows that 300 levels have the highest number of frequency and percentage.

**Table 10. Respondents Martial Status**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Single	22	73
Married	8	27
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* This shows that the single has the highest number of frequency and percentage of 22 and 73%

**Analysis of the Ten Questions in the Questionnaire: Responses by Students**

**Table 11. Response to Question 1: Which language do you speak at home?**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
English Language	10	33
Native language	17	57
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* From the table above, a total number of 17 respondents which amounted to 57% speak native language, 10 respondents which amounted to 33% speaks English language at home while 3 respondents do not speak either English Language or native language.

**Table 12. Response to Question 2: Are there any possible solutions to the negative effect of English Language, on our indigenous language (Igbo)?**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Agree	8	27
Disagree	5	17
Strongly agree	10	33
Strongly disagree	3	10
Undecided	4	13
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* From the table above, 10 respondents strongly agree to this questions which amounted to 33%, 8 respondents which amounted to 27% agreed to this question 5 respondents disagreed, 3 respondents strongly disagreed, while 4 respondents are undecided which amounted to 13%.

**Table 13. Response to Question 3: How often do you speak Igbo language with your parents?**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Always	12	40
Once in a while	3	10
Not at all	15	50
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* From the table above, it is clearly stated that 15 respondents do not speak Igbo language with their parents which resulted to 50%, 3 respondents speaks it once in a while which resulted to 10%, while 12 respondents always speak it.

**Table 14. Response to Question 4: Which language do you prefer?**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
English language	12	40
Native language	18	60
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* It is stated in table 4 and 18 respondent prefer native language to English language.

**Table 15. Response to Question 5: Which language are you most fluent in?**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
English language	16	53
Native language	14	47
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* From the table above, it is stated that 16 respondents are fluent in English language.

**Table 16. Response to Question 6: Do you feel uncomfortable when speaking your native language?**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Agree	5	17
Disagree	6	20
Strongly agree	7	23
Strongly disagree	9	30
Undecided	3	10
Total	30	100

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*Interpretation:* 9 respondents do not feel uncomfortable when speaking their native language, 7 respondents strongly agree to this question, 6 respondents disagreed, 5 respondents agreed while 3 respondents are undecided.

**Table 17. Response to Question 7: Which language did you speak first as a child?**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
English language	5	17
Native language	25	83
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* from the table above, 25 respondents do speak native language first as a child than the English language which has 5 respondents that amounted at 17%.

**Table 18. Response to Question 8: Does the English Language influence the pronunciation of Igbo words?**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Agree	8	27
Disagree	3	10
Strongly agree	10	33
Strongly disagree	4	13
Undecided	5	17
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* 10 respondents have the highest no of percentage which is 33 while 3 respondents has the lowest no of percentage.

**Table 19. Response to Question 9: Does the English Language influence your reading and writing of Igbo words?**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Agree	8	27
Disagree	4	13
Strongly agree	10	33
Strongly disagree	5	17
Undecided	3	10
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* 10 respondents strongly agree to this question and this number of respondents has the highest percentage of 33 while 3 respondents are undecided to this question and also have the lowest percentage.

**Table 20. Response to Question 10: Has English language influenced you Igbo language negative?**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Agree	4	13
Disagree	8	27
Strongly agree	10	33
Strongly disagree	3	10
Undecided	5	17
Total	30	100

*Interpretation:* 10 respondents strongly agreed that English language has influenced Igbo language negatively, 8 respondents disagreed to the above question which amounted 27%, 5 respondents are undecided which resulted to 17%, 4 respondents agreed which resulted to 13%, 3 respondents strongly disagreed which resulted to 10%

### 3 | CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having carried out an analysis, it is important to make certain recommendations which are

- The study of indigenous languages should be made compulsory and not optional in schools. For the gap between English language and indigenous language to be balanced, indigenous languages must be made compulsory just as English language is a compulsory subject that must be credited by students to gain admission into universities. In the same way, students should offer indigenous language, it is only then that indigenous languages can be valued in the true sense of the word.
- The Igbo-speaking students should develop love towards the indigenous languages, and this love can be cultivated by a student when a high value is placed on the language. For instance, when Igbo language is used in the media while translations are done in the English Language.
- At the state level, the government through the Ministry of Education should enact intervention policies for the corpus development of its numerous indigenous languages. Both private and public schools and tertiary institutions must adhere to the policies as it is for a general good.



- Parents should be sensitized on the importance of teaching their children to speak their mother tongue. The media should be used to popularize the idea of language preservation. Programs should be introduced on television and radio to aid awareness.
- There should be conscious attempts to motivate teachers of indigenous languages and to private training and learning of such languages.
- The Federal government should take a major step to work hand in hand with the language bodies already in existence and many more should be formed all over the country. In this way a more realistic language policy will be formulated.
- The Federal government should mandate the use of indigenous languages in schools and discourage the stigmatization of those who speak it. Students who excel in their indigenous languages should be handsomely rewarded to serve as encouragement to them and also a motivation to others.
- The state governments should assist in reviving our indigenous language by mapping out a day to be dedicated to the propagation of our culture. On such days only indigenous languages should be used in all schools and government parastatals. Students, teachers and workers should appear in native clothes. This will promote teaching and learning of the Igbo Language and culture. The Executive Governor of Anambra State has since enacted this policy that every Wednesday, all citizens of the State, irrespective of your age, school, place of work dress in complete Igbo native clothes. This step should be taken further by mandating only the use of the Igbo Language on such days for a more holistic and redemptory experience.

## Conclusion

The role of language in the expression and development of a people's way of life can never be overemphasized. Language, as we all know, is a veritable tool of culture dissemination and preservation. Since colonial times, the English Language has adversely impacted on the Igbo Language. This negative trend seems to have escalated in recent times. It is the desire of the researcher that the knowledge generated

by this paper will assist in curbing, halting and possibly reversing this fatal trend before the prestigious and rich culture of the Igbo people as expressed by the Igbo Language is precipitated into extinction.

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