

TEACHING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN IGBO LANGUAGE: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE METALANGUAGE

By

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Abstract

Igbo has become a language of instruction in literature, history, linguistics education etc., but not yet in the Social Sciences. For Igbo to become a language of instruction in these areas of learning, the metalanguage played a very important role. But not much attention has been given to the development of the words and expressions for the concepts that are inherent in the study of the social sciences. To produce a metalanguage that would enable the teaching of the social science: Economics, Political Science, Geography, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, research collaboration between the scholars of Igbo language and that of the social sciences is needed. The paper suggests that to achieve this goal, a committee should be established for each branches of the social sciences. Each of the committee is to be made up of scholars of Igbo language and experts from that discipline. The works of these committees are to be supervised and coordinated by Igbo Studies Association and the society for the promotion of Igbo language and culture. The governments of the Igbo speaking States and corporate bodies should provide adequate fund to support these committees. With a sustained and in-depth research, the metalanguage for social sciences would be produced and this will enable the teaching and learning of the social sciences in Igbo language.

Keywords: Metalanguage, Culture, Collaboration, Instruction

Introduction

The task of advancing the Igbo Metalanguage has been primarily that of Igbo language scholars. The importance of metalanguage cannot be overemphasised especially in African Languages that need to be able to carry concepts that come from Languages of advanced and industrialised societies.

Maduewesi (23005) described metalanguage as:

...a language used for the learning and teaching the same language at all levels of instruction and intellectual interaction.

This points at the immense role that metalanguage plays in the growth of a language. It provides a language with coinages and expression that enable it to cope with demands constantly made on it in the classroom as well as the wider society.

According to Emenanjo (2005) metalanguage is:

...the supra-language required for talking about a language, its culture and its civilization in that language. It is the sum total of all the technical and specialized terms needed for discussing anything and everything in that language.

The nature of metalanguage thus shows that it require very knowledgeable men/scholars to succeed. The coinages they make even though new should not be strange to the native speakers' intuition. Igbo linguist and literary scholars under the auspices of Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (and recently Igbo Studies Association [ISA]) have for decades been making efforts to develop the Igbo Metalanguage. Their efforts have been of immense help to teachers of Igbo language, translators, journalist both in the print and electronic media, churches, publishers e.t.c.

Teachers of Igbo language in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions could be said to be the prime beneficiaries of the Igbo Metalanguage. They have two volumes of Okaasusu Igbo (Igbo Metalanguage) to consult to find the words for many foreign concepts, thereby to a large

extent providing solution to the age long complaint: O nweghi aha n'Igbo (it does not have a name in Igbo).

The Igbo Metalanguage equally played a significant role in phasing out the era when English was used to teach Igbo language. Using English to teach Igbo was common during the author's secondary school days.

The persistent research of Igbo language scholars resulted in many areas of learning: education, linguistics, history, literature, being taught with Igbo language at different levels of education.

A Multidisciplinary Approach

Even though scholars of Igbo language have championed the academic advancement of Igbo language, the duty of creating a metalanguage for the teaching and learning of the social sciences in Igbo language cannot be left in their hands alone as they are not experts in the social sciences. The knowledge of Igbo language alone is not adequate for this task. Armstrong's (1980) opinion concerning Igbo metalanguage for the technical sciences applies to the social sciences:

....Science and technology do not consist of a list of technical words... students can only grow in their knowledge of scientific vocabulary as they grow in their knowledge of the various Sciences.

This points to the fact that in-depth knowledge of subject matter cannot be wished away. The social scientists have the in-depth knowledge of the subject matter while the Igbo scholars have the linguistic know-how. Therefore there should be research collaboration between social scientist and Igbo linguists in order to achieve the desired result.

Igbo Language as a Medium of Instruction in Social Sciences

Areas of learning like Economics, Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, psychology and Geography have not been given the type of attention that literature, Linguistics, history etc., got as far as the Igbo metalanguage is concerned. Mbah et al (2013) Asogwa (2015, 2018) etc. are commendable efforts in furthering the growth of Igbo metalanguage for social sciences but they are still far from what is required. Without an adequate metalanguage, it would be very difficult to use Igbo as a medium of instruction in the social sciences. Words and expression(s)

have to be coined for the concepts found in the social sciences. These coinages will facilitate teaching, learning, broadcasting, writing and translation of books.

The Way Forward

A committee should be created to work on each discipline i.e. economics, political science, psychology, geography, sociology and Anthropology. Each committee should be made up of scholars of Igbo language and experts in that particular discipline. Those social science experts should equally be very fluent in Igbo language. Each committee should be answerable to Igbo Studies Association (ISA) and Society for promoting Igbo language and culture.

The governments of the Igbo speaking states and cooperative bodies should provide adequate fund for the operation of these committees. The fund will enable each committee to carry out their study in various localities in Igbo land e.g. the committee for Geography should be able to carry out their study in riverine communities when creating words for concepts that have to do with rivers. When creating words for concepts in Anthropology they should be able to visit many parts of Igbo land and interact with elders, age groups, traditional priests, title holders, and women groups etc.

The committee for political science should be able to visit traditional title holders and observe their meetings. They should also be able to observe age grade and women (umuada, inyomdi) meetings and functions.

Conclusion

If a committee is formed for each area of the Social Sciences, under the coordination of Igbo Studies Association and the Society for promoting Igbo language and culture and adequate funding is provided, it would be possible to produce an adequate metalanguage for the social sciences and the teaching of the social sciences will be greatly facilitated.

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