

Igbo Language as an Instrument for Managing Security in Anambra State

By

Christiana Ngozi Ikegwuonu

Department of Igbo Language

Anambra State University, Igbariam Campus

e-mail: ngooikegwuonu@yahoo.com

08037776192

Abstract

This paper discusses Igbo language as an instrument for managing security in Anambra State. Language is a means of communication through speech and writing. It usually has an effect on the people of a defined area. It is a vital symbol and tool for the expression of identity, hence, experiences and activities of a people are expressed through language, especially the indigenous language(s). Language is inherently part of man and also the functional part of every society. In any nation, it is through language that adequate security can be achieved. It did not start today. It started from the creation. No peaceful nation can exist without language. Again no society can boast of meaningful development when the people feel insecure. Security is essential to the existence human beings in the society. Security is the primary target of any government that wishes to develop. In spite of the several efforts made by both the state and the federal governments to tackle the problem of security in the country, yet, the problem still lingers. In order to maintain adequate security in any socio-political setting, activities and information must be carried out in the local or native language(s) of the people. Language contributes immensely in instilling patriotic and nationalistic feelings among citizens, as well as bringing about positive changes. The paper suggests the need for the state government to strengthen and guarantee language empowerment of the people through the instrumentality of their local language(s) or their mother-tongue(s).

1. Introduction

Language is essentially a communication channel through which human beings can express their emotions and thoughts. It is also a veritable instrument through which people of diverse ethnic groups can communicate with the rest of the world. It is the fountain spring of all the activities of mankind, whether educational, political, social or economic. Language is a special identity of a people. The strategies for achieving security and development of any society depend basically on the understanding of the language in which they are being performed.

Security is the primary assignment of any government that genuinely seeks to develop the state. To be secure is to be free from danger, harm or anxiety. Security is the pivotal to all human endeavours. It is the villages, towns and cities that make up a state. They are also the basis for assessing the success and failure of any government. It is when adequate security is provided in a community that development would be ushered in. Therefore, security is very essential to enable development to take place in a state.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of nationhood is its ability to provide security for the citizens, defend her sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is a minimum requirement for a nation or state that wishes to build a solid prosperous economy and begin the ultimate march towards social and political wellbeing of the citizens. Any nation or state which seeks to make records of success in maintaining strong security should do that through the use of local language(s) or the native language(s) which is or are rooted in the culture and traditions of the people.

It is obvious that every human society needs security in order to sustain livelihood of its citizens. It is as a result of this that every nation or state government work assiduously to enhance security. Indeed, achieving strong security brings about happiness, positive changes and development in any given society but, if adequate security is not ensured, the citizens would tend to harbor the feelings of bitterness, fear, acrimony and rancour as we are experiencing today in our country, Nigeria. Adequate security that will foster development is best achieved when it is consciously planned and implemented in the language(s) the people understand very well. Security is central in achieving development in any nation or state. More so, we have to accept the fact that no society witnesses any economic prosperity in the atmosphere devoid of adequate security. At this juncture, it is important to emphasize that there are different kinds of security

such as physical security, financial security, social security, information security, health security, economic security, food security and so on confronting the world today.

This paper has eight sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two discusses what language is. Section three looks at security. Section four treats the role of language in security. Section five discusses the efforts of the state government to ensure security in Anambra State. Section six discusses the language situation in Anambra State, while section seven discusses the measures to ensure security in the state. Section eight discusses suggestions while nine is the conclusion.

2. Language

The concept of language has been variously defined by scholars from different perspectives. The human language is very complex. It is the mirror of the mind. Language is a channel of communication which can be expressed through speech, writing or gestures made with hands or any part of the body. It is structured with grammar and often involves a writing system. According to Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010:1) “language is a means of which human beings have devised for communicating ideas, feelings, emotions, desires through complex vocal or written symbol”. Language is the most precious resource which is naturally designed and endowed solely to human beings to enable them communicate with one another. It defines our lives, it heralds all we are and have. As individuals meet on daily basis, they use language as a medium for expression of feelings, ideas, emotions, thoughts and intensions (Ikegwuonu, 2012:673).

A language is not only a means of communication but carries with its vocabulary, its structure and its context much that it is an indicative of the meaning of life to people. No known human community has ever existed without language, no matter how primitive the community has been. In fact, language enables man to carry out his daily activities. The existence of man is the existence of language. None can exist without the other. Therefore, language is to a large extent, the embodiment of a people’s world view.

3. Security

Security means providing safety, freedom from danger and anxiety. In other words security is the degree of protection against danger, damage, loss and crime. Security is not the absence of threats but the ability to respond to security and threats with expediency and

expertise. Macmillan dictionary defines the term 'security' as the protection or safety of country's secrets and citizens <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/British/national-security18/06/2014>. The Institute for Security and Open Methodologies (ISECOM) defines security as a “form of protection where separation is created between assets and the threats” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/national-security.16/06/2014>).

Laswell (1950:79) opines that national security means "freedom from foreign dictation". National security is the ability to preserve the nation's physical integrity; to maintain its economic relations with the rest of the world on reasonable terms; to preserve its nature, institution and governance from disruption from outside; and to control the boarder. Maier (1990) in his view describes national security as the "capacity to control those domestic and foreign conditions that the public opinion of a given community believes necessary to enjoy its own self-determination or autonomy, prosperity and wellbeing".

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999:10), section 14(2)b states that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government". As the Federal government is making efforts to protect the nation against danger and harm, the state government is equally doing the same in the state. Security must take into account the actions of the people attempting to cause destruction. We should not neglect the fact that security is important in every community or nation. Security is a *sine qua non* to the existence of a nation or community, because it is the bedrock for fostering unity within all her citizens. Thus, information technology, propaganda, diplomacy or even wars are all geared towards achieving the security of a nation or state.

Absence of security could lead to a state of anomie where life is nasty and brutish. For instance, presently, the communities in Anambra State and the entire communities in Nigeria are no longer feeling secure because they are being threatened by incessant bombing by the Boko Haram, killings, armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism and other negative vices. It is important to note that it is the primary responsibility of the state and federal governments to provide for the welfare of the citizens, ensure law and order, and also take effective measures to ensure adequate security, for their continuous survival and existence.

4. The Role of Language in Security

Language as it is generally known performs several functions. It is used to ensure security, especially when there is crisis between different cultural groups. Language allows the individual to gain full membership of his community and, makes him complete human being. It provides a medium for interpersonal communication for different members of the society. Language plays significant roles in ensuring proper security and development because it is central to the society in all its ramifications and stratifications. For adequate security to take root and blossom, it has to be presented in the language of the people. There is no doubt that language and security go hand in hand in order to usher in development in a society. Language is an integral part of security and development process in a society. The role of language in security is not just to act as a facilitator at individual level but also at the collective and societal level so that every member of the community can enjoy adequate security.

Igbo language which is part of the culture and traditions of the people of Anambra State serves as an indispensable tool for ensuring adequate security that will enhance development. For instance, if a suspect is interrogated by the security agents, the only way they could elicit authentic information from him or her is by using the language which the suspect understands very well.

In some communities, there is a kind of loud scream somebody would raise, and the people around would know that there is robbery or danger. An example is "Onye ekwela ụzọ ga o!" This means "no movement is allowed" within the period. Anybody who hears this will be at alert. This is a kind of security measure. In many communities, issues concerning security are supposed to be discussed in Igbo language to ensure that everybody is carried along with.

Apart from shouting, there are other means through which information about security alert could be disseminated to the people. It can be done through the use of local musical instruments like the 'ekwe and ogene'. The beating of 'ekwe/ogene' signifies many things to the people. Every sound is peculiar to the beating and the information to be relayed to the people. It may signify a call for meeting or emergency, a call for community work, a call for security alert. The 'ekwe' is a wooden gong, that is, a piece of wood carved hollow, which when beaten with a small stick produces a dry sound. The 'ogene' is a metal disc with folded rim that gives a resonant sound when struck with small stick. Their main function is that they attract attention through their resonant sounds. When the gong is struck in any area of the community, usually at night, absolute quiet descends. The town crier then delivers his message. In the case of security

alert, the crier does not stay one place to avoid being located. He moves around the community. Sometimes, whistle is used to send security alert across to the people.

5. Efforts of the State Government to Ensure Security in Anambra State

It is a fact that the state government is making serious efforts to ensure adequate security in the state by instituting the following security agencies: State Security Services, Customs and Immigration Services as well as Federal Road Safety Commission, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Civil Defence, Town Union Vigilante Groups and other agencies to work collaboratively with the police in order to ensure that the state is safe for all and sundry. The question is “Do we enjoy adequate security in this country now?” The answer is No. One can observe that in spite of the numerous agencies instituted by the government and different security measures mapped out; adequate security is not guaranteed to the citizens both at federal and state levels. The security measures are still porous. This affects lives, properties and the rate of development in the country and the state.

The immediate past government, under Mr. Peter Obi seriously reinforced the police, the army and the town union vigilante groups by giving them facilities to ensure that their works were carried out effectively. But, unfortunately, all these efforts and measures did not go a long way in solving the security problems. People lived in fear because of the activities of the terrorists, kidnappers and hoodlums in the state.

The present existing government under Dr. Willie Obiano again deems it necessary to place security first in its development plans, because security is the bedrock of development and progress of any nation or state. This sincere desire of the Governor has made him to summon a two-day security summit held on 10th and 11th April, 2014, which involved all the sectors in the state to deliberate on the issues concerning ensuring adequate security. In addition, the state government through the media warned all the citizens, the owners of private buildings against harbouring any kidnapper, armed robber or anybody with questionable character. The punishment meted out on any building being used as the hideout for the hoodlums is instant demolition. The government also made this GSM number 121 available to the masses for use when there is need to reveal secretly any information about the activities of the hoodlums in the state. These good measures will enhance adequate security in the state if they are properly carried out since security concerns everybody - the rich, the poor, the adults, the youths and the children. Above all, the state government has the greatest responsibility of providing enabling environment where

the citizens will feel free and secure to achieve their full potentials, thereby enabling the state itself to achieve greatness.

Finally, it is important to point out that language plays significant roles in achieving adequate security in any community. Any agency charged with the duty to ensure and maintain security and defend the community must do that in the language the people can understand very well. Therefore, for any government to achieve progress in security, it must be performed in the local language(s) or the mother-tongue(s), which is or are rooted in the cultural heritage and the traditions of the people.

6. Language Situation in Anambra State

Anambra State is located in the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria. It is one of the Igbo-speaking states in Nigeria. Igbo language belongs to the West-Benue Congo language family of the Niger Congo phylum according to the classification of African languages by Williams and Blench (2000:31). Igbo language is among the Kwa group of languages in Nigeria. It is one of the three main languages in Nigeria including Yoruba and Hausa. It is widely spoken in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. It is a native language of one of the ethnic groups in Nigeria called Igbo. Igbo language is also one of the three major indigenous Nigerian languages recognized in section 55 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999). The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1977 revised 1981, 1988 and 2004), section 1(8) as observed in Chijioke (1995:218) states that “a child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother-tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba”. This is to appreciate the importance of language in education sector, and as a means of preserving the people’s culture. The policy gears to elevating the status of the three main indigenous Nigerian languages.

Igbo language has moved on from its past domination by foreign stakeholders supported by a few indigenes (Okwudishu, 2010:5). Presently, the language is flourishing tremendously in various dimensions that it can be used in various ways, such as enhancing adequate security and

development in the state. It has its orthography, meta-language, dictionaries and it is studied both in the primary, secondary and tertiary institution in the state.

To enhance the progress of Igbo language, Governor Peter Obi in May 26th, 2010, launched “Otu Sụbakwa Igbo” at Awka, the capital of Anambra state. This association is the brain child of Prof. Peter Ejiofor. On May, 2011, he constituted a seven man committee who will collaborate with the government to see that Igbo language progresses. Now Igbo language is accorded high recognition in the Anambra House of Representative because it is being used every Wednesday for deliberations during the sitting of the members. It is even mandatory that Igbo is spoken in offices and public places, so, also, is the wearing of Igbo attires on Wednesday. All these are geared towards elevating the status of the language.

However, it is quite unfortunate that, despite all these efforts, a good number of Igbo people cannot communicate fluently and effectively in their mother-tongue. Ahukanna (1990:175) sees this attitude as: “linguistic sabotage against indigenous languages.” One bitter aspect of it is that these people are at linguistic cross-roads-deficient in both English and our native languages. This is what Essien (1977:80) refers to as “linguistic under-nourishment, a condition of impoverished knowledge of both English and our mother-tongues”. Like the undernourished children, we cannot grow, and maintain adequate security and development in the state. This is one of the canker worms that is eating up the soul of grass-root security and development in the state and Nigeria in general.

The role of Igbo language in achieving adequate security in the state and its communities cannot be overemphasized because no society can live in a vacuum, it is the people who make it. Political, security and developmental messages should be delivered to the people in Igbo language. No other language should take the place of one's language. Igbo language is embedded in the philosophical, social beliefs, customs and traditional practices of her people. For people to participate fully in achieving adequate security and enjoy equal rights, their language should be used to communicate to them. The truth is that language is the key to the heart of people. If we lose the key, we lose the people entirely, but if we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to unfold the riches which cannot be seen from the other side of the door. Therefore, Igbo language is of great wealth and veritable instrument for achieving adequate security in Anambra State. Fortunately, Governor Peter Obi's administration recognized the significant roles of mother-tongue in governance.

7. Measures to Ensure Security in The State Through The Use of The Igbo Language

It is only when adequate security is assured that development is fostered in any society. On this note, it is important that we discuss the measures that will enable the government to ensure security in the communities through the mother-tongue or local language(s). Security involves every person. To make our society safe, every person (groups or individual) and every agency must work positively to ensure that lives and properties are secured and the society is made safe and attractive to the entire citizens and investors. Some of the measures include:

- i. **Providing Security Advice to the Corporate Bodies, Government and Individuals:** Part of the preventive strategies of ensuring security in the state is by periodically providing security advice and alerts to all and sundry including those in the rural areas.
- ii. **Community Policing:** Community policing should be embraced in the state as a veritable method of policing the entire state. The community vigilante groups, which are deployed by each community to help in policing the community, must be well-equipped with facilities that will enable them to work efficiently and effectively. They should endeavour to meet the people at their various points of security needs.
- iii. **Collaboration with the Government and Non-Government Agencies:** The armed forces, State Security Services (SSS), Town Union Vigilante groups, Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), Civil Defence Commission, National Intelligence Agency (NIA), and the host of other agencies including the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO's) as well as other meaningful individuals should work collaboratively to ensure safety and security in the state and the entire country.
- iv. **Exchange of Information:** Information sharing within and outside the state is useful to the security agencies in order to prevent crime, harm and danger. Also any information given by the masses as regards to ensuring security in the state should be kept confidential and also be handled carefully and effectively. Objectivity should be ensured in handling any security matter in the state.
- v. **Effective Use of Patrol teams and Guards:** Anti-crime patrols and guards are to be stationed at the places where there are needs for security. All these are geared towards ensuring that the security of the state is not undermined by anybody.

- vi. **Indigenous language Empowerment:** For the above measures to be achieved efficiently and effectively they must be carried in the language(s) of the people or the mother-tongue(s) to ensure that security gets to the grass-root.

8. Suggestions

The dominance use of English as the language of instructions in schools should be reduced especially in private schools while the use of Igbo language should be highly encouraged. This is because the dominant language in which knowledge is processed is a crucial factor in the learning, thinking and expressing process. People should not be expected to think and express themselves primarily in a language, other than the one in which they have already acquired and stored in their knowledge in the memory as children, that is, in their L₁. School heads, proprietors and managers should no long restrict the use of Igbo language as a medium of instructions in schools.

The young parents should be encouraged to speak Igbo to their children at homes. This is to inculcate security consciousness in the children whenever the need arises.

Igbo authors should develop vocabularies, publish their works in Igbo or translate them into Igbo so that the security agents who are non-Igbo speakers could do their day to day work by using them.

The state government should employ interpreters in different security agencies who will work collaboratively with the security agents for easy flow of information.

The state government should promote the use of written form of the language for government business dealings/records, local government functions, especially social services. Give recognition to special local efforts through awards and so on.

The state government should include the funding of Igbo language in its annual budget. This will help in making Igbo language to flourish like Hausa and Yoruba counterparts. Igbo language empowerment should be guaranteed in the state to ensure adequate security and development. The “Otu Sùbakwa Igbo” and some eminent scholars are already doing a lot to promote Igbo language in the state. But they cannot do it alone. It concerns every Igbo speaker. There is need to encourage the speaking of Igbo language and not to shy away in order to ensure adequate security and development. Effective use of Igbo language should be encouraged to enable the security agents elicit useful information when the need arises.

Finally, language is at the heart of human activities, and no investment, however, can be said to be made without language being at core.

Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, language cuts across all the human endeavours. To achieve adequate security, language which is rooted in the socio-cultural heritage and traditions of the people must be used. In Anambra State, Igbo language is of vital use in ensuring security and development because it is the mother tongue. And moreover, people are happy and free when they use their mother-tongues to communicate. Language empowerment should be strengthened effectively in the state. No investment can be said to be too much for developing our local language(s). Both the federal and state governments should play their part in promoting indigenous languages in the interest of national security, unity and development. We should realize that language is what makes a people and so it should be guarded and preserved. Our language is our identity, so we should preciously preserve it.

References

- Anagbogu, P. N., Mbah, B. M and C. A. Eme 2010. *Introduction to language linguistics* (2nd edition.). Awka: Amaka Dreams.
- Ahukanna, J. G. N. 1975. Bilingualism and code-mixing in language use: The case of Igbo-English bilinguals. In Emenanjo, N. (ed.) *Multilingualism, minority languages and language policy in Nigeria*. Agbor: Central Books Ltd,
- Chijioke, M. U. 1995. The development of Igbo language study: A historical perspective. In A. E. Afigbo, (ed.). *F. C. Ogbalu and the Igbo language*. Onitsha: University Publishing Company.
- Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999). Lagos: Federal Government Press.

Essien, O. 1997. The role of English language in our development In Akpan, M. B. (ed.) *African development studies*. Vol. 1, No. 1.

Ikegwuonu, C. N. 2012. The use of indigenous languages for good governance in Nigeria: Problems and way forward. In A. B. C. Chiegboka et al (eds.). *The humanities and good governance*. Nimo: Rex Charles and Patrick. 673 - 681.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/national-security>. Accessed on 21/6/2012.

Laswell, 1950. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/national-security> Accessed on 21/6/2012.

Macmillan dictionary <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/British/national-security>. Accessed on 18/06/2014.

Maier, C. S. 1990. Peace and Security. <http://en.wikipedia.org/national-security>. Accessed on 21/6/2012.

Okwudishu, A. U. 2010. Igbo language studies; Yesterday, today and tomorrow. In U. Nwadike *Journal of Igbo studies (JIS)*. Nsukka: Paschal Communications. 5. 1 – 13.

William, K. and R. M. Blench, 2000. Niger-Congo. In B. Heine and D. Nurse (eds.) *African languages. An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.