Towards the Standardization of the Igala Language

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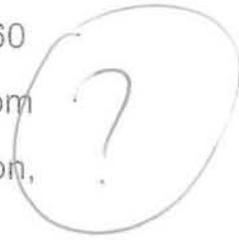
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Abstract

The paper observes the issue of standardization as a challenge among other challenges to Igala language studies in most schools in Kogi State. It discusses the different stages of language standardization and recommends that the issue of standardization can be addressed by the Government, educated group that more economically, socially, and politically recognized in the Igala speech community. The group make official pronouncement and constitute a body like Igala language center, the Igala standardization committee, the Igala language Academy among others, to reduce issues of dialectical difference in the existing writing, film productions in the Igala language.

Introduction

Observation has shown that efforts at ensuring and improving the study of the Igala language studies in Igala speech community remain some of the major challenges to the Igala people. The issue of lack of interest in the teaching and learning of Igala language in most primary, secondary and tertiary institutions of learning in the Igala speech community and environs is significantly high. In some villages, parents and children's interest in the Igala language studies may be higher because of the activities of mostly Christian missionaries and evangelists in propagating and evangelizing Christianity among the Igala people. The interest rate of most parents and children in urban areas of Igalaland with respect to the Igala language studies is very low. Most parents especially the" educated" ones frown at their children use of the Igala language as a medium of communication both at home and schools. They prefer the use and study of English language to the Igala language. They prefer private schools where English language is used as medium of instruction and subject of study for the children as against public schools where the Igala language is often used as language of instruction or language of the child's immediate environment in the first three years in primary school. The challenge here is that the Igala language is not even studied as a language or subject in most primary and secondary schools in Igalaland. Yet it is studied by few students

whose interests are minimal in Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa and some few linguists at both undergraduate and post graduate levels in some languages and linguistics departments of some universities. Unfortunately, Kogi State University, Anyigba which would have helped in the study of the Igala language and other Nigerian Languages is yet to establish such department.

To ensure the study and development of the Igala language, its sons and daughters would need to identify and tackle such challenges like;

i.   Lack of trained and qualified teachers in Igala language

ii.   Lack of job opportunities for the scanty trained indigenous language teacher

iii. Lack of fund and facilities to carry out research in Igala language

iv.   Lack of conducive environment for the implementation of research findings.

v.   Non- implementation of national policies on indigenous language education in Kogi state.

vi.   Lack of quality language and literary textbooks in Igala language and non-standardization of the Igala language.

The sixth challenge which is the focus of this paper may anchors other challenges if properly assessed and examined. The reason is that some Igalas speak the Igala language habitually within the larger

language group (Dialects). The term dialect according to Adeyanju (1989) is used to apply to the linguistically distinct, historical stages through which a language has passed. We have observed different set of pronunciation, vocabulary grammatical structures, discourse and interactional strategies within the Igala language usage. the Igala language studies will be improved by first addressing the challenges of standardizing the language.

Standardization of the Igala language.

Standardization refers to formal codification and acceptance within the language community of a set of norms for 'correct' usage. This according to Adeyanju (1989) usually includes the existence of a standardized writing system dictionaries, and grammar books, perhaps an academy and schools. The position of this paper is that other challenges identified above may be reduced or possibly tackled if serious attempt will be taken to standardized the Igala language by providing projects and programs via the Igala Information Technology bas, the Igala film production; providing job opportunities for trained teachers and linguists in the Igala language, mass communicators, film producers, actors and actress in the Igala language. Awarding prices to creative writers, News papers and magazines producers in the Igala language. Organizing quiz competition, debates and drama presentation

in the Igala language by providing the platform needed for development and growth of culture and language in relation to the current Government reform agenda on aspects of language and culture, that will enable us to begin to see the importance of our culture and indigenous languages. The relevant population will ensure the promotion of the use of the Igala language through speaking , reading and writing in most of the Igala projects , programmes and activities at local, state, national and international levels. But this must start with the interest of the educated elites (Igala) at all levels, as we await it gradual spread.

The issue of standardization of the Igala language constitutes one of the greatest challenge facing the development and growth of the Igala language studies. With the available sons and daughters as trained and qualified linguists in different areas of linguistics such as phonetics and phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics, the challenge may appear subtle should a committee for standardization be constituted to identify these linguists and involve them in the serious business of the Igala language studies and standardization. The standardization takes into consideration the following processes to make the Igala language a standardized language; selection, codification, Elaboration of functions or use,

Acceptance by the society of speakers and writers of the particular language. (Adeyanju,1989).

At the level of selection, the speech form of the language is selected to become standard in consideration of the importance of speech form to language development. This is mainly done by the educated elites who are politically, socially and economically successful in the society. The speech form is based on the one spoken and written by these elites that becomes the standard dialect. In the Igala language studies linguists like Dr Omachonu Ộ. S., and others are already making progress in that regards.

Another process of standardization is the process of codification- a process which involves standardizing and developing a norm for a language. Its process varies depending the stage of standardization which the language already undergone. It means developing a writing system (this we already have in Igala language), set up official rules for grammar, orthography, pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary as well as publishing grammar books, dictionaries and similar guidelines. These areas are best handled as a group or a committee, in Igala language. Individuals have written few books on the grammar (syntax).Phonetics (pronunciation) and dictionaries, but because of variants in spelling,

pronunciation of words and grammatical rules, there is need to make standard rules and spelling that will address these differences.

According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia in some countries codification in done by a body, constituted by the state such as *the Academie Francaise.* Codification which is second step in the standardization process is required because of new inventions, change in values or other cultural influences. What have we done in Igala language in relation English word to browsing 'internet', 'computer', 'telephone', mobile phone recharge cards among others? Although the Igala language has been reduced to writing, but documents resulting from such writing, like grammar books, the Quran or Bible are yet to be subjected to correction and acceptance by the educated elite. This calls for the need for standardization of the Igala Language.

At the process of elaboration of function, this has to do with answering question on the purpose for which a language is to be spread. Which fields of human endeavour are we going to use the language, education, law, Government etc. this elaboration of function may necessitate the borrowing of new words.

Acceptance - this entails the variety that is accepted by the relevant population as the language for the state of speech community as the case may be.

Conclusion/Recommendations

My hope for the standardization and development of the Igala language begins to raise when of recent, when I read from facebook, a social network, the issues olia'ka (10 kobo) and Igbi (snail) in the Igala language. This social network as means for language standardization and development is already been explored by other Nigerian languages (Chinyere, 2013). The Igala language should not be left behind. It is against the above background that we conclude and recommend that we need to standardized the Igala language to ascertain the dialectical difference in the language, for usage in commerce , government and serve the local need of it users effectively.

(i)   The Igala studies Association should constitute a committee, center or Igala academy which will be saddled with the responsibility of standardization.

(ii)   The standardization of the Igala language studies should take into consideration the exploration of such social network like facebook among others where issues are raised, discussed, and commented on in Igala language, the of words and usage will help determine the acceptable vocabulary, spelling by the constituted Igala Academy.

(iii)   The Igala language standardization committee should put in consideration the study and analysis the language of the Igala films, music among others.

(iv)   The linguists should provide a platform for the utilization of research findings through effective teaching and learning, quiz competition, debates and drama presentation. The usage of the accepted standardized   variety of the Igala language in these areas

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