

Dialectal Interference in the Teaching and Learning of Standard Igbo Language in Senior Secondary Schools of Enugu State Ezeagu Dialect Example

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Abstract

This work investigated the dialectal interference in the teaching and learning of standard Igbo Language in Senior Secondary Schools of Enugu State using Ezeagu Dialect as an example. The extent of interference of Ezeagu phonemes was examined. One research question and one hypothesis were formulated. Questionnaire was used to collect relevant data from a sample of 70 Igbo teachers and 210 students selected from 7 Secondary schools in Ezeagu Local Government Area by purposive sampling. Mean was used to answer the research question, while t – test statistic was employed to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of probability. The study revealed that phonological discrepancies exist between Ezeagu dialect and standard Igbo and these interfere with the teaching and learning of the standard variety.

Background of the study

Language is a system of communication by written or verbal, which is used by people of a given locality. Language makes it possible for a man to transmit knowledge across space and time. It serves not only as the principal medium that human beings communicate with but also means of socialization. It is the bond that links people together and bind them with their culture. In fact, without language people will not be identified.

Igbo language is one of the three recognized Nigeria vernaculars known as the WAZOBIA (Nwadike 2005).

Igbo language is important to the Igbo man for communication, transaction, teaching as well as learning. It is spoken in many parts of the Igbo land comprising Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States of Nigeria. There are other Igbo speaking groups of people in parts of Akwa Ibom, Benue, Cross River, Delta and River States of Nigeria.

Igbo, then as a language has two major forms, the standard variety and non – standard variety. It is the non – standard variety that is known as dialect. Dialect according to Hartmann and stork (1973; 65 - 66) is a regional or social variety, differing in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary from the standard language which is in itself, a socially favoured dialect. The Igbo people speak Igbo language as their first language (L1) dialect and study or learn the same language as a second language (L2) that is the standard form. In Igbo land 60% of the radio and television programmes are carried out in standard Igbo language but no State uses it as an official language except Anambra State that tried to enforce it on her people recently, to be used on certain days of the

week. (emphasis mine). It is used as a medium of instruction in school especially in the Nursery and Primary sections to be in line with the (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004). In the National policy on Education, it was stated that each child should be encouraged to study the language of his immediate environment as a means of reserving the people's culture.

Long time ago, the Igbo people had contact with the Western civilization, all their activities and mode of speaking were based on their dialects. They used their dialects in political, social, economic and cultural matters except in literary works because of multifarious dialects. This numerous dialects led to non – production of many literary works and also hindered the scientific study of Igbo dialects which began quite early in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the missionary circles in English, Fernando DO, and Sierra Leone. The missionaries saw knowledge of African language as a necessary tool in the bid to evangelize the continent. By the mid nineteenth century, the study of Igbo language had taken deep root. The numerous dialects however, continued to constitute a grate hindrance to Igbo studies because teaching and learning of the language has not been effectively reduced into writing and there were no acceptable rules of the language. Corder (1974: 25) in Ushi (2006) stated that every language consists of a set of rules for generating phonologically well – formed sentences. This view was also upheld by Umaru (2005) who opined that every language has phonological rules that guide the arrangement of its speech sounds. For Igbo language to be reduced into writing and function as a standard language with phonological rules, it underwent all the standardization processes which included codification, elaboration, implementation and cultivation with varying degree of success. (Anagbogu in Ikekeonwu and Nwadike(ed) 2005). These processes according to Anagbogu made Igbo language a standard variety which is a mixture of Central and Onitsha dialects.

Then, it is observed that, some parts of writing or speech of a learner deviate from the set rules of Igbo language teaching and learning due to the already mastered dialect. The deviation occurs when the learner transfers habits associated with his dialect or mother tongue or the first language (L1) as the case may be to the language being learned, that is L2. When this happens, it is known as interference. Interference is used to describe the effects of transferring the habits associated with one's L1 to the L2 being learnt.

Dialects are not understood by all Igbo speakers except the owners and the users of these dialects. In view of this, the need for a higher and better language for easy communication, teaching and learning of Igbo language arises. Then, in the course of teaching and learning, the already learnt dialectal habits become a hindrance to Igbo language study that is L2 because they cause mispronunciation and wrong spellings. It is this hindrance that is known as 'Dialectal Interference'. It is this dialectal interference that brought about the poor performance of Ezeagu Students in Senior School Certificate Igbo language it is in lieu of this poor performance that the researcher wants to know the extent and how to alleviate its associated problems. The tool that can be useful for the alleviation of the dialectal problem is the contrastive analysis. Contrastive Analysis compares two languages and finds out their similarities and differences. It is very efficient for L2 teaching and also very effective on native language (dialect) over the L2 learning.

In pursuit of the possible cause of this poor performance of Ezeagu students in Senior School Certificate Igbo language Examination, let us look into the variable. Phonology – (phoneme) has been identified as one major cause of the poor performance. Onuigbo

(1996) viewed phonology as the arrangement of the speech sounds of a given language according to the acceptable rules of the language. Encarta (2004) also opined that phonology is the study and identification of the meaningful sounds and sound units, from what may be considered a universal stock of human speech sounds organizes these sounds in such a way that they function as a group to make meaning for the speakers of the language. The phonology of a language includes the actual speech sounds of the language; the abstract sound units to which the actual speech or phonic segments can be assigned. Such abstract units are referred to as 'phonemes' in linguistics. The aspects of phonology that are relevant to this work are the vowels and consonants. These made up the phonemic system of any language. It can be used to contrast meanings of lexical items or words in any given language.

Phonologically, Ezeagu dialect has been found to interfere with the teaching and learning of standard Igbo in the area of their phonemes. Some of the phonemes in the standard Igbo are not pronounced correctly the way they should. Teachers and students transfer the phonological features of their dialects to the study of standard Igbo causing a great hindrance due to the distinctiveness of the two sound units.

Statement of the problem

Alhassan (1995) observed that almost any subject can be taught in a way that enlists full intellectual and effective response from the students. But this has not been the case with Igbo language. The West African Examination Council, the Chief Examiner, in (1998; 2000; 2002; 2004) respectively reported low achievement over these years by candidates writing the Senior School Certificate Examination. This poor state of written Igbo has been blamed on teachers and students.

The Chief Examiner stated that most of the candidates could not write in standard Igbo. They wrote in their dialects thereby making it difficult for the examiners to understand them especially in easy writing where grammar and sound system abound.

In view of the above discussed variable and the observation by the Chief Examiner, this study is being undertaken to find out the extent to which Dialectal Interference affect the teaching and learning of standard Igbo in Senior Secondary Schools of Enugu State, using the phonemes of Ezeagu Dialect as example. The problem of this study in a question form is therefore, To what extent does Ezeagu Dialect interfere with the teaching and learning of standard Igbo in Senior Secondary Schools of Enugu State?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to find out the extent of the interference of Ezeagu dialect, as it really obstructed the free flow of teaching and learning of standard Igbo in Senior Secondary Schools in this part of local Government Area of Enugu State.

Specially, the study attempts to find out the degree to which Ezeagu dialect had really been a hindrance to the teaching and learning of standard Igbo in the area of phonology. How the phonemes of Ezeagu dialect differ from the phonemes of the standard Igbo language.

Significance of the study

The outcome of this study will be used by the Ezeagu Igbo language teachers to identify areas of interference by their dialect that cause the persistence poor performance in Igbo language in both Junior and Senior internal and external examinations in their Secondary Schools.

Secondly, by the identification of the interference areas, the teachers in this local government area will learn and correct these errors of interference as they surface in the course of their everyday teaching and learning.

Thirdly, as these interferences have been identified, both teachers and students will now see the need to always endeavour to use the standard Igbo form in the classroom teaching, in order to make it part and parcel of them. For practice they say, makes perfect. For, if dialects should be allowed to be used as medium of instruction no teaching or learning would effectively take place in the sense that some dialects are more difficult than others and at the same time some are more prestigious than others. That is to say, only the owners and users of the dialect can understand it and any stranger who finds himself in such learning environment will get lost. For instance if one is not from Ezeagu, he will not know that mgbuyo means azuulo – backyard oruhuyo means mgbede – evening. Likewise if one is not from Nsukka, he will not know that gboshime means inyuamiri or urinating or if one is not from Abakaliki he will not even know that its real spelling is Abakaleke, how much more knowing that mboko means ‘uwa’ that is ‘the world’.

Fourthly, the study will also open the eyes of both the teachers and students to know that their dialect interfering with teaching and learning of standard variety is the causative factor for their persistent poor performance in their local government area.

Fifthly, the outcome of this study will help to fish out the non – Igbo scholars who think they can teach the subject merely because they speak it or passed it in their school certificate examination without having the required erudition in the subject area. Imagine how this subject ‘Igbo language’ has been degraded. Can this type of degradation happen in any subject? Therefore, these untrained teachers should realize that they are causing more harm than good to the subject generally and to the students in particular. They should immediately desist from such irresponsibility and go in for training in the subject if so desired.

Finally this study will re – orientate the teachers to become role models. When they speak the students will echo what they heard. They should also know that Igbo language is fraught with multifarious dialects, that the need for using only standard Igbo in teaching is highly imperative. With their continuous usage of standard Igbo in the classroom, the students will internalize this form unconsciously and with time, it becomes part of them and this will affect their teaching and learning positively. Then, their performance in external examination - Senior Secondary School Certificate will yield positive result.

Scope of the study

The study was carried out in seven senior secondary schools in Ezeagu local government Area of Enugu State. The schools will be selected and studied as points of reference. This study will also deal with the operation of phonemes and how they differ from those of the standard Igbo language.

Research Question.

To help guide this investigation, one research question was stated.

1. What phonological differences exist between the phonemes of Ezeagu dialect and the phonemes of standard Igbo?

Null Hypothesis (H0)

There is no significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the mean rating of the phonological differences between Ezeagu Dialect and standard Igbo as observed by teachers and students.

Methods

Design of the study

A descriptive survey was used, for the study. The survey design was used because the study merely sought information from the respondents as the situation exists without manipulating any of the variables.

Area of the study

The study was undertaken in Ezeagu local Government Area of Enugu State. Ezeagu is made up of six quarters – Owa, Umana, Obinofia, Umumba, Olo and Oghe.

These quarters are surrendered by towns like Udi, Amokwe, Nachi, Nsude, Akiyi Umulokpa, Eke and Ngwo. The study was carried out in Seven Secondary Schools of the Local Government Area. The local government area has records of poor performances in SSCE examinations especially in Igbo language.

Population of the study

The 70 Igbo language teachers and 350 students in senior secondary schools three (SSS III) in 42 government owned secondary schools in Ezeagu Local Government Area served as the population for the study.

It consisted of students and teachers from boys only, girls only and co – educational schools. (source: statistics unit, PPSMB Enugu).

Sample and sampling technique

Purposive sampling was adopted to select the samples. All the seventy (70) teachers teaching in senior secondary schools in Ezeagu Local Government were chosen as part of the sample because of their fewness. 30 students each were chosen from seven (7) secondary schools so as to have representation from – Owa, Umana, Umumba, Obinofia, Olo and Oghe – the six quarters (clans) making up Ezeagu Local Government Area.

Table 1: Distribution of Students According to type of School and Clan

S/No	Name of School	No of Students	Type	Clan
1.	Community secondary school (C.S.S) ImeziOwa	30	Co -educational	Owa
2.	C.S.S UmumbaNdi Uno	30	Co -educational	Umumba
3.	C.S.S Olo	30	Co -educational	Olo
4.	Ezeagu Secondary School Isi – UgwuUmana	30	Boys	Umana
5.	SedesSapientaOghe	30	Girls	Oghe
6.	C.S.S ObinofiaNdi – Uno	30	Co -educational	Obinofia
7.	AguobuOwa High School	30	Boys	Owa
	Total	210		

Instrument for data collection

A research designed questionnaire structured on the Likert type scale was used to elicit information from the teachers and students on how Ezeagu phonemes differ from standard Igbo. Section A of the questionnaire consists of the bio data of the respondents

while section B required the respondents to choose from options on a four scale of strong agree – 4 points Agree – 3 points; Disagree – 2 points; strongly disagree – 1 point.

Validation of the Instrument

The instrument was validated by two language Education experts of the faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and one Igbo language specialist in the Department of Linguistics, Igbo and other Nigerian Languages.

Reliability of the Instrument

This was determined by the test – retest method using spearman’s Rank Order formula. The validated instrument was administered to (20) Igbo language teachers and 30 SS III students randomly selected in Udi local Government area of Enugu State. The dialects of Udi communities are very similar to those of Ezeagu. The re – test was done after one week on the same respondents and the reliability co – efficient was found to be 0.78.

Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher to the teachers and students in their various schools. The students were guided on how to complete their own. There was no instrument mortality as the questionnaires were collected at the spot.

Method of Data Analysis

The mean was used to answer the research questions. The mean ratings based on a 4 point modified Likert type scale were interpreted as follows:

Above 3.50 strongly agree; 2.50 – 3.50 Agree; under 2.50 disagree.

A null hypothesis was tested using the t – test statistics at the 0.05 level of significance if the t – calculated is greater than the t- critical at 0.05% level of significance the null hypothesis is rejected. If the t – calculated is less than the t – critical 0.05% level of significance the null hypothesis is accepted.

Research question

What phonological differences exist between the phonemes of Ezeagu dialect and the phonemes of standard Igbo?

The mean rating of the responses given by the teachers and students are shown in table 2.

S/N	ITEM	Teachers X	Students X	Decision
1.	Phonologically, Ezeagu dialect differs from standard Igbo	3.86	3.90	Strongly agree
2.	Ezeagu dialect interferes with teaching and learning of standard Igbo in the senior secondary schools in Ezeagu.	3.93	3.81	Strongly agree
3.	Standard Igbo Phonemes like /nw;/ny;/n;/l;/h/; are not used in Ezeagu dialect	4.00	3.84	Strongly agree
4.	Some phonemes in Ezeagu dialect are also not found in standard Igbo. Ezeagu uses /gh/for/n;/w/for/nw;/n/for/l;/y/for Ny/sh/for/s/v/for/b/sh/for/h;/v/for/z/ etc.	4.00	3.90	Strongly agree

5.	These variations lead to some words being wrongly spelt and pronounced e.g Ezeagu pronounces oye? For onye? Who? Oghughu for onunu – drinking.	4.00	3.90	Strongly agree
6.	Students transfer the habits of their mother tongue into standard Igbo spelling and pronounce the words the way they heard their teachers and parents do.	3.86	3.86	Strongly agree
7.	Ezeagu dialect use /V/ for /b/ as in ivu – ibu – load or fatness; /f/ for /p/ as in futa – puta (come out)	3.93	3.86	Strongly agree
8.	Ezeagu dialect makes use of schwa/Sw/ e.gashwa for ahia; ashi for ah/asi; nshi for nsi	3.86	3.83	Strongly agree
9.	Standard Igbo serves as medium of instruction in the whole Igbo land.	3.86	3.83	Strongly agree
10.	Ezeagu dialect uses dental fricative/o, /i.e theta (o) and ashe () as in wz)- uzo (pathway) a I a-broom; a w – azu (fish)	3.79	3.67	Strongly agree
11.	Standard Igbo is given adequate phonological attention in Ezeagu L.G.A	2.00	1.12	Strongly agree
12.	Standard Igbo is difficult to speak and write by teachers and students in Ezeagu L.G.A	3.71	3.71	Strongly agree
13.	Students prefer using their dialect for they communicate fluently with it.	3.93	3.83	Strongly agree
14.	Students comprehend more easily when taught with Ezeagu dialect.	3.93	3.90	Strongly agree
15.	The phonological discrepancies existing between Ezeagu dialect and standard Igbo make reading and writing standard Igbo very difficult.	3.93	3.90	Strongly agree
	Grand Mean	3.77	3.65	

Items 1 – 15 of the questionnaire solicited information on the phonological differences that exist between the phonemes of Ezeagu dialect and the phonemes of standard Igbo. The responses by the teachers gave a grand mean rating of 3.77 and students 3.65 which are both above our bench mark of 2.50 for positive result both for Ezeagu dialect and standard Igbo. Item no 11 however shows results of 2.00 and 1.12 for teachers and students.

Hypothesis (HO)

There is no significant difference ($P < 0.05$) between the mean ratings of the phonological differences between Ezeagu dialect and Igbo as observed by teachers and students.

Students Observations of Phonological Differences between Ezeagu Dialect and Standard Igbo.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Df	Standard Error	t - calculated	t-Critical	Decision
Teachers	3.77	0.48	70					
Students	3.65	0.68	210	268	0.074	1.486	1.960	

Analysis of null hypothesis which involves items 1-15 of the questionnaire.

Table above shows the two – tailed t – test of the means of the teachers and students observations. The t – calculated value is 1.486 with the degree of freedom – 268, and 0.05 level of significance the critical t – value is 1.960. the null hypothesis is rejected when the t- calculated value is greater than the critical or table value. Since the calculated t – value of 1.486 is less that the critical t – value of 1.960 we do not reject the null hypothesis. There is therefore, no significant difference between the mean ratings of the teachers’ and students’ observations of the phonological differences between Ezeagu dialect and standard Igbo. Any differences observed are such as could have arisen from sampling errors, which, is high being greater that 5%.

Findings

The only research question which sought to find out what phonological differences exist between the phonemes of Ezeagu dialect and that of standard Igbo that cause dialectal interference in the teaching and learning of standard Igbo. The result of the analysis in the table below shows that both the teachers and students strongly agree that there are phonological differences between Ezeagu dialect and standard Igbo. The result also shows that there exist gross disregard for the phonemes of standard Igbo by both teachers and students. Again from the table, it shows that some Igbo words are usually miss-spelt and wrongly written since the students prefer using their mother – tongue as follows:

Ezeagu Dialect: wrongly spelt and written words	Standard Igbo: correctly spelt and written words	English Equivalent
Wayi	Nwaanyi	Woman
Uye	Nwunye	Wife
Wata	nwata	Child
Oghu	Onu	Joy
Shie	Sie	Cook
Futa	Putu	Come out
Ashuia	Ahia	Market
Ivu	Ibu	Fatness / load
Oye	Onye	Who
Oyiye	Onyinye	Gift/Offering
Enu	Elu	Up

This table shows that Ezeagu dialect uses /y/ for /ny/; /w/ for /nw/ ; /u/ for /uw/; /gh/ for /n/; /sh/ for /s/; /f/ for /p/; /sh/ for /h/; /v/ for /b/; /n/ for /l/ etc.

These differences make the students perform poorly in written scandalized examination (WAEC 2002).

Discussion of the Results

This result of the research question shown in table 2 revealed gross disregard for the teachers and students in Ezeagu Local Government Area of Enugu State. The inadequate attention given to the phonemes of standard Igbo is much to be blamed on the language teachers who do not use appropriate techniques in their teaching. Wilkins (1972: 1998) opined that drilling is a very important technique in language teaching and learning. If the learner is constantly and intensively drilled, the expected habit – which is to use standard Igbo phonemes will be built up. Anasiudu (2001) is of the view that appropriate drill materials should never allow errors of interference to intrude in the teaching and learning of standard Igbo. If these errors or interference are repeated (and are approved of) they will be internalized and make reading and writing standard Igbo difficult (WAEC 2002).

The t – test of the hypothesis showed that both teachers and students agree that Ezeagu phonemes interfere serious with the phonemes of standard Igbo.

This is however not peculiar to Ezeagu dialect and standard Igbo. Spencer in Ogbuehi (2003) observed that the phonology of a second language (standard Igbo) will always receive some imprint from the phonology of the mother tongue (Ezeagu dialect).

For example, Ezeagu uses the palato alveolar fricative /sh/ in place of the alveolar fricative /s/ in standard Igbo so faeces – ‘nsi’ in standard Igbo becomes ‘nshi’ (Ezeagu). On some other occasions glottal fricatives /h/ in standard Igbo is replaced with palato alveolar fricatives /sh/ in Ezeagu. Thus body – ahu – becomes ashi, and grass – ahia becomes ashushuia. These differences in the phonological sound system of Ezeagu dialect result in phonic interference in the teaching and learning of standard Igbo.

Educational Implementation

- Phonological discrepancies between Ezeagu Dialect and Standard Igbo engenders poor performance in the Senior School Certificate Examination.
- Anyanwu in Otagburuagu and Anyanwu (ed, 2002) is of the view that a language learner need a strong verbal attitude, proper motivation and a conducive learning style. These characteristics do not agree with non-challant attitude exhibited by both teachers and students, who use dialect in total disregard to the expectations of the external examiners of standard Igbo.
- In the course of this research it was found that most of the teachers teaching Igbo are not qualified to teach the subject and so cannot be role models in the correct way to speak and write standard Igbo.
- Teaching and learning Igbo is also being neglected by Principals of schools and the regulatory authorities (Ministry of Education and the Post Primary Schools Management Board). Trained Igbo teachers prefer to teach Literature – in – English because they are being looked down upon by the society.

Recommendation

Based on the educational implementation of this study, the following recommendations have been made.

- There is a dire need for in depth studies of Ezeagu dialect and indeed other dialects of Igbo land for continuous developments, enrichment and standardization of the entire Igbo language.
- Igbo teachers should be encouraged to update their competencies through workshops, seminars organized by the relevant authorities.
- Universities that offer Igbo language should as a matter of urgency continue to re – evaluate their curricular to take into cognizance of the areas of dialectal interferences not only in Ezeagu dialect but as many dialects as possible and equip their products with the required capacity to combat these interferences in the classroom setting.

Conclusion

Phonologically there exist glaring discrepancies between the phonemes of Ezeagu dialect and the phonemes of standard Igbo. These differences interfere with the smooth teaching and learning of standard Igbo.

Again, there is gross disregard for or non – application of the rules of standard Igbo during teaching and learning situation in Ezeagu local Government Area. Both teachers and students feel at ease using Ezeagu dialect both in writing and speaking.

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