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INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES OF NIGERIA: CURRENT STATE AND PROBLEMS OF CONSERVATION

*“Losing the language means losing the culture.
We need to know who we are because it makes
a difference in who our children are.”*

Dottie Le Beau

The problem of preserving indigenous languages – the languages of the country's indigenous peoples – is an urgent problem of modern mankind. About half of the languages existing today (about 6,000) are threatened with extinction. According to UNESCO, one language dies every week in the world, 50 years later, such a developed language as Igbo, which is spoken by tens of millions of people, may disappear [9].

The idea of protecting indigenous languages is clearly reflected in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted at the 31st session of the UNESCO General Conference (Paris, France, October 15 - November 3, 2001): “...Cultural diversity is as necessary for humanity as biodiversity is for living nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of mankind and must be recognized and consolidated in the interests of present and future generations”[9].

Russian linguist, researcher of languages that are on the verge of extinction, Professor V. Plungyan writes: “With the disappearance of each language, we lose the opportunity to say something that cannot be said in any other language. With the disappearance of the language, we are deprived of the most valuable information about a person, we are losing contact with the history, psychology, and anthropology of an entire nation. His legends, traditions, myths, songs are disappearing. Therefore, the endangered languages need to be urgently recorded" [10].

Sociologist Mike Gibson also emphasizes that up to 50% of the world's languages are on the verge of extinction. He notes that according to the UNESCO World Atlas of Endangered Languages [MOSELEY 2010], there are approximately 3,000 languages. “With the death of a language, there is a danger of loss of local knowledge. Moreover, a particular community runs the risk of losing one of the main features of its ethnic identity, which can cause social instability” [4.84]. The way of life of people is changing, traditions, the names of local plants are being lost, since disappearing languages contain words that define the differences between plants unknown to modern science.

Nigeria is a famous country in the world and she is recognized as the giant of Africa. This is owing to its large population and economy, and is also considered to be an emerging market by the World Bank; it has been identified as a regional power on the African continent, a middle power in international affairs, and has also been identified as an emerging global power. Nigeria inhabits more than 250 ethnic groups who as expected speaks about 500 different and unique languages identifying to a very wide variety of cultures.



Map of indigenous languages in Nigeria (from open sources)

70 % of the population of Nigeria is accounted for by three peoples: Hausa – 29 %, Yoruba – 21 %, Igbo – 18 %. [2.1148]. These languages are leading in three regions of the country – North, West and East. Each ethnic group have their own way of life and lifestyle which has been passed on through generations. Some of these ethnic groups include: Abua of Rivers State, Afo of Nasarawa State, Bachama of Adamawa State, Bunu of Kogi State, Etunu of Edo State, Efik of Cross River State, Chamba of Taraba State, Dandsa of Bauchi State, Palli of Adamawa State, Gure of Kaduna State, Hona of Adamawa State, Igala of Kogi State, Ningi of Bauchi State, Pero of Bauchi State, and the three vast ethnic groups Hausa of the Northern Nigeria, Yoruba of the Western Nigeria and Igbo of the Eastern Nigeria. They all live in harmony together while practicing their separate cultures and traditions. However, this sometimes creates interethnic misunderstandings, confusions and complications.

Such problems include while trading, business deals, offices, transport, trying to show interest in what people are saying or even expressing your own opinions and many more. Well, these are all summarized into one word 'communication'. The language barrier creates communication problems within the indigenes. Nevertheless, through the colonization of the British, Nigeria adopted the English language. Because the country has no common language known to all its occupants, English language was chosen to facilitate linguistic unity at the national level.

The use of the English language in Nigeria dates back to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century when British merchants and Christian missionaries settled in the coastal towns called Badagry, near Lagos in the present-day South-Western Nigeria and Calabar, a town in the present-day South-Eastern Nigeria. As a result of slave trade and Christian education some indigenes have learnt English and at the time of abolishment of slave trade they served as translators to the other indigenes who did not understand English language. With the attainment of independence in 1960, English gradually grew to become the major medium for inter-ethnic communication which very pivotal for business, marketing and transport within the country as a whole. The problem of indigenous languages in Nigeria is controversial. Some scholars talk about the importance of giving English the status of the state language. Many are in favor of developing an indigenous language that is spoken by

the majority of the region's population. The governments of the new states in Nigeria, where people of more than 1 million people live, declare the languages of these peoples official. In the twenty-first century, Nigerians are making more efforts to develop and preserve autonomous languages. Research on indigenous languages is being conducted at universities in the country.

Recent studies show that conscious and sustained awareness is needed if the Igbo language is to survive and remain relevant in the preservation of African values. Efforts made by to preserve the Igbo language include adding it to exams in schools as well as state exams like the WAEC. This means that Igbo language is taught in schools from primary to secondary level, giving the Igbo child the opportunity to learn his/her indigenous language and culture in full detail. Also, some churches now conduct their masses in Igbo language completely or partly. Parents now take their children to the villages during festivals, this way they get to interact with the peers in Igbo language as well as learning their traditional cultures from the older ones. Tradition and culture is passed down generations and preserved this way.

Africa, Nigeria, and indeed the Igbo Nation lay much emphasis on good moral behaviour, and continue to teach it to her citizens as a guiding line and principle. Such moral values like honesty, the sanctity of human life, respect, hospitality reverence, obedience to law and order, truth, trustworthiness and a whole

number of them have been stressed over time as appreciable values in our society. For these values to be inculcated to our young ones early enough, indigenous language plays a vital role.

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УРАХУВАННЯ ОСОБЛИВОСТЕЙ РІДНОЇ МОВИ У ПРОЦЕСІ НАВЧАННЯ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ЯК ІНОЗЕМНОЇ

Методика навчання іноземної – самостійна педагогічна дисципліна про закони і правила навчання мови, про способи оволодіння мовою, а також про особливості освіти і виховання засобами мови [2, с. 63].

Опис нерідної мови з метою її викладання іноземцям – окрема галузь педагогічної граматики з певними особливостями. Якщо порівняти граматичні правила української мови, представлені у шкільному підручнику, підручнику для іноземців і в академічному виданні, то можна побачити відмінності в презентації матеріалу.

Наведемо простий приклад. Тема «Види дієслова» в навчальних посібниках всіх трьох типів розглядається по-різному. У шкільному навчанні пояснення будується таким чином, щоб учень міг визначити вид дієслова в тексті, ставлячи запитання *Що робити? Що зробити?*