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SEMSTER: 2ND

MATRIC NO: 17/SMS13/008

SUBJECT: RURAL SOCIOLOGY (SOC 316)

DATE: 30/5/2020

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**Introduction**

Igbo is a major language in Nigeria with Hausa and Yoruba. It is a language of the Igbo people of South-eastern Nigeria with more than 20 million speakers (Asonye, 2013). The language is spoken in more than five states in Nigeria, including Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Delta and Rivers States. Scholarly efforts have been made to develop the Igbo language starting from the move to standardization or development of a common Igbo language in the nineteenth century in Sierra Leone which led to the evolvement of ‘Isuama Igbo’. It was followed by the period of translating materials from English to Igbo with the emergence of Union Igbo. There was the period of orthography controversy between 1929 and 1961 that saw the establishment of an official Igbo orthography in 1961 known as Onwu Orthography. In 1949, the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture SPILC (Otu Iwelite Asusu na Omenala Igbo) was formed and it had various committees charged with different responsibilities. The committees included Standardization committee, which had different sub-committees that handled1

different subjects: Igbo national dress; Publication and publishing; spelling, etc. The Igbo standardization committee made overwhelming recommendations which were presented in five volumes: volume 1 contains mechanics of writing Igbo; In volume 2 is Igbo grammar and linguistics; there is classification on Igbo poetry in volume 3; Scientific and technical terms is presented in volume 4; and finally, volume 5 contains meta language, linguistic terms, literature, grammar, etc. The journey towards solving problems confronting the Igbo language and culture did not end with SPILC as there are other groups and organizations in recent time, promoting the language, such as Otu Suwakwa Igbo, Ahaji k Lecture Series,ọ ụOdenigbo lecture series and Ogbalu memorial lecture series. These efforts notwithstanding, many people and organizations are sceptical about the language’s survival. A lot of predictions have also been made concerning the language. For example, UNESCO had, towards the end of 2006, predicted that the Igbo language among other minor African languages will be extinct by the year 2050 (Asonye, 2013). Okediadi(2009) also buttresses the fact that the Igbo people shy away from speaking their language and, therefore, the language is dying. Many factors have been identified militating against the survival of the Igbo language, which include: education, government policy on education, globalization, and language behaviour. This paper has identified the neglect and abandonment of the Igbo cultural heritage as a major threat to the Igbo language today. The neglect is considered an aftermath of negative influence of Westernization and Christianity on the Igbo people. These moribund rich cultural practices are fading away with their different language genres. The moribund cultures include festivals, dances, folktales and tales by the moonlight, local wrestling, sweeping and weeding of village squares, making of canopy with palm frond during burial/funeral ceremonies, food, and clothing. We intend to show how the neglect of these cultural practices caused by Westernisation and Christianization could lead to endangerment of the Igbo language. Before we do that let us discuss the concept of change which is the pivot for this paper. The concept of change . Change has no generally accepted definition. Scholars of different hues have tried to define the concept based on their own individual perception. Change can be defined as a shift from one state of affairs to another and from one level to another. It is the only phenomenon described as constant. As one grows up, changes occur and one increases in size and2

improves on his thoughts and perception of life. That is why Wardhaugh (2002) notes that change may not be overtly noticed but its consequences can easily be observed. Change can affect anything including language. Westernization and Christianity have had negative impact on our indigenous cultural practices, Igbo cultures in particular and by extension the language. Essien (2013) describes language change as normal and occurs once there is interaction among speakers of diverse languages. He identifies migration and alienation from language’s home land, social, cultural and group loyalty as factor that might result into language shift or the shifting language being placed in an endangered position or complete extinction. This is the case with the Igbo language; majority of its speakers have migrated out of the Igbo land and through that alienated themselves from the language, the Igbo society, the Igbo cultures and loyalty to the language. The resultant effect of this migration and alienation as well as solution to save the language is what this paper battles with. Culture and Language Interlink Culture and language are two sides of a coin that are inseparable. Utoh-Ezeajugh (2010)views culture as the sum total of signs, beliefs, artifacts, social arrangements and customs created by human beings. This view collaborates Ajalla (2010), who sees culture as the totality of the way of life of a group of people that has been developed, shaped and practiced over the years. In these different opinions, culture is perceived as encompassing everything about a society or a group of people who use the same language, including their attitude and behaviours. It is acquired as one grows up in one’s society. That is why Wilson (1997) points out that culture tells how norms, fades, moors, folklores among others combine to project theovert expression observed from any group of persons in a particular environment. In the opinion of Ndimele (2014), culture and language relate. She sees culture as a totality of a way of life of a people that includes their language, beliefs and customs among others. Alternatively, she regards language as a social instrument for human interaction and says that there is a correlation between the form and the content of a language and the values and beliefs embedded in the cultures of its speakers. Okediadi (2009) has earlier noted that language and culture are inseparable. She discloses that language has dual character: a means of communication and a carrier of a given culture. What this suggests is that in language, culture manifests and no one can possibly talk about language without mentioning culture. Ifesieh, Agbogun and Tonukari (2006) had noted three things that are lost once a language3

dies to include culture of a people, information about plant and animal wildlife, and people’s identity. Okorji and Omachonu (2006) also reemphasize that language and culture are inseparable and they form the core superstructures of any society. To them, it is language that transmits and sustains the people’s culture including customs, norms and values, pointing out that if the language dies, the people’s culture goes into extinction, while that race ceases to be recognized as such upon the globe. When language is punctured, culture is punctured. Likewise, since culture is expressed through language, when culture is neglected and abandoned, the aspects of language used to express the culture becomes affected and the language continues to diminish. The last point is the crux of this paper. Westernization and Christianity Westernization can be viewed as adherence to Western way of life, that is, imbibing the culture of the West, including: education, belief system, dressing, technology and language. Before the European incursion into Africa, including Nigeria, the different nationalities had their belief system and systems of education by which knowledge about way of life of that society was passed on from generation to generation. For the Igbo people, Ezeanya (2010)notes that prior to the contact with the West, Igbo society was not in a confused state but rather had a well constituted and organized systems that made up the complex whole. When the British arrived Nigeria and subdued her, they controlled and subjected Nigerians to Western ideology and thoughts; everything Nigeria was regarded as bad and inferior, while everything West was presented as good and ideal. Nigerian cultures we reconsidered primitive and should be discarded. Where the traditional institution suited their purpose and intention for invading Africa, they maintained it, like the Obaship and Emirship institutions in Western and Northern Nigeria respectively; but where the traditional institution is alien to them, they fashioned it to suit their purpose and intention, like the Warrant Chiefs established in Igbo land in South-eastern Nigeria. The West introduced Western education and made our people to believe that English is the model language that leads to development. Kalu (1987:153) presents the situation thus, “… how the powerful countries of Western Europe took advantage of their high level of technological development for eroding the territoriality of less developed nation.” The Western Europe had no good intention for the less developed nations of Africa. Rodney (1972:125) aptly captures this, thus:4

With this relationship, the West were busy advancing themselves without any intention of move ideas and technology that could engender change and bring about Africa’s development. The kind of change the Europeans brought to Africa was that of negative one. When Africans made demand for a development-induced technology, it was ignored or rejected by the capitalists since their interest would not have been to develop Africa In the opinion of Rodney (1972), white collaborators and trade partners were engulfed by their role and preoccupation at that time and never thought of how to advance Africa. He, therefore, warns that any society that for whatever reason trails behind others technologically would not so much catch up by dependent inventions but by borrowing. It is for this reason that Orjiakor and Obiakor (2010) suggest that the way forward for Africa is to get liberated from the shackles of imperialism and really control her affair without external interference. The Western Europe used the missionary to weaken the minds of the Igbo people towards accepting the superiority of Western culture. Prior to that time, the Igbo people had their traditional way of worship, but the missionary introduced Christianity and condemned the Igbo traditional religion as paganism, evil and diabolic. The missionaries made a lot of converts and before long, majority of the Igbo people imbibed Christianity and discarded Igbo values and norms. For example, in the early days of Christianity in Igboland, during traditional festivals, the churches would normally find a way of discouraging/preventing the new converts who are mainly children and youths from participating in the festivals. This trend is even more prominent in this modern time especially with the Pentecostal churches. The churches would rather organize crusade or camp retreats for the children and youths, and confine them to a secluded place throughout the period of the festival. The early missionaries saw the use of palm frond which serves many purposes in Igboland as fetish and banned or discourage it. Even the use of palm frond to build canopy for shades during burial/funeral ceremonies was considered fetish. Okere (2009:50) succinctly captures the impact of Christianity on the Igbo people, thus: Christianity has deeply affected not only the world view of the Igbos – that is, in what they believe but also deeply affected them in what they regard as right or wrong, good or bad behaviour. It has now infected and invaded the Igbo conscience. To worsen the situation, the Nigerian Government adopted English as the official language of Nigeria to be used for education, trade and commerce, and official government business. With this arrangement, the English language became a compulsory subject in schools and back at home in Igbo land, the teachers frown at the use of Igbo in school; the pupils and students who communicated in vernacular are fished out and severely punished.5

Okediadi (2009) paints the picture clearly. She described the Igbo people as having also been confronted with a voracious language, English, which gobbles up everything in its way. English is regarded as a civilized language and in order to be seen as civilized, one has to speak it and behave like the West. This has far reaching implication to the survival of the Igbo language. Okediadi (2009) considers this situation as the greatest challenge Igbo people must find a way of reducing. At the end of the Nigeria/Biafra civil war, despite the ‘No victor, no vanquished’statement of Gowon administration, properties of the Igbo people in different parts of the country, especially in Port Harcourt, were declared ‘abandoned properties’ and were never returned to their owners. Every Igbo person was given only £20 to start life afresh irrespective of the amount declared by the person. The Igbo man started struggling for survival and there was a great migration of Igbo youths to the cities in search of greener pasture. Of course, an average Igbo man must find a way to survive or triumph in business even if it means dropping his language and picking up English or the language of his host community; the Igbos scattered to different parts of the country and abroad struggling to eke a living. There is no town in different parts of Nigeria you do not find an Igbo man, even at remotest town. The church did not relent preaching against most Igbo cultural practices, value system and norms. They preach against masquerading and consider whoever indulges in that a shaving been doomed for hell fire. How then can the Igbo cultural practices and the Igbo language be sustained? This is what this paper strives to finds solution to. Ezeanya (2010) discloses that when formidable factors force the Igbo people to imbibe Christianity and forget their past, the values that united them for progress and success also faded away and died away in them. Continuing, he considers modern Igbo society as being in a confused state and neither reflects Christianity nor traditionality. Some moribund Igbo cultural practices. The Igbo people have a lot of cultures which are no longer promoted. Some of these cultures are identified in this section; and they include: i. Traditional festivals – The Igbo people are known to celebrate a lot of festivals. Each festival celebrated in Igbo land has its significance.

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