THE DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNIZATION
OF THE IGBO LANGUAGE.

by

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ABSTRACT

This work is a study of the linguistic and non-linguistic factors that have any bearing on the development and modernization of the Igbo language to the extent that, as a standard language, it could be used effectively as a communicative medium in national and international affairs.

Igbo, spoken in the southeastern part of Nigeria, is one of about 400 distinct language/dialect groups according to Banjo (1982), in the country. Igbo speakers number about 16-21 million. It is one of the four official languages of Nigeria. The others are Hausa, Yoruba and, of course, the language of wider communication in Nigeria, namely, English.

The problem is that despite the official status accorded it, Igbo appears to lag behind the other two.

This study in attempt to address the issues involved, assessed the degree of standardization of Igbo as perceived by a cross-section of Igbo people including academicians and professionals. It summarized the evolution and present status of the language with regard to its structure - orthography, grammar, lexicon and style.

By a variety of techniques which included ethnographic surveys, questionnaire, interviews, literature search and linguistic analyses of the language, an important conclusion was drawn to the effect that Igbo lacks stability with respect to its orthography and lacks intellectualization with regards to its lexicon and style. Some non-linguistic factors that impinge on the growth of SI (Standard
Igbo) were noted.

Some recommendations were made to rectify the position and enhance the status of SI.

The recommendations include the updating of the orthography by incorporating into it some phonemic features like aspiration and nasalization that help to disambiguate words and the codification of all aspects of the language.

On the non-linguistic factors, there is a call for government support of SPILC—the standardizing agency of the language—and for all Igbo scholars to join hands to develop, modernize and popularize Igbo.

It is hoped that the recommendations, if implemented, will raise the stability and intellectualization status of Igbo for effective participatory function in a techno-scientific modern world.