Youth Language, Social Media Identity, and Their Implication to the Cultural Norms of Youth Speakers of the Igbo Language.

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ABSTRACT: The twenty first century era has witnessed a great deal of youth language related issues, mostly involving borrowing and new inventions at both lexical and semantic levels to create individual, group and perhaps in-group identities, thereby forming a sort of binding and alienating mechanisms through norm deviation. Hence, with the rise of interactive media technology, the youths have created a different language for easy and effective communication. Using a contextualization cues and context collapse, the paper examines how the direct lines of contact that are provided by these social media platforms like whatsapp and facebook has already had a great deal of impact and implication on the cultural norms of youth speakers of the Igbo language.
Keywords: Youth, language, social media, identity, culture, Igbo

I. INTRODUCTION

The Igbo language which is widely spoken in south-eastern part of Nigeria and beyond has been predicted by scholars to be seriously endangered. Effort to revive the language has been in futility. To worsen it, the youths who would have inherited this language to keep it safe for the other generation and possible death have rather found solace in the use of the social media. Towards the end of 2006, a report of UNESCO had it that Igbo language, among other minor languages in Africa will be extinct by the year 2050.This is to say that in the next thirty – one years there will be nothing like Igbo language again in the committee of languages if the UNESCO prediction is to be taken seriously. With all the effort the Igbo people have made to develop their language and the struggles that accompanied the establishment of Igbo language, it is surprising to hear that the language is listed among the dying languages of the world. This threat could be attributed to the language attitude of the speaker of the Igbo language. According to [1], language attitude is the positive or negative evaluation of an object with anything, tangible, capable of being the object of an attitude. "In that regard, community language attitude denotes the positive-negative evaluations of individual languages or group of languages, with regard to such dimensions as loyalty, prestige, utility, or aesthetics [2].

Greater percentage of the Igbo people, cutting across the educated and uneducated, adults and youths, men and women shy away from speaking the Igbo language, especially in public and in the presence of other languages speakers. As [3] rightly points, a language is known to be the index of culture and a mark of people's identity; it is a core aspect of every culture. Without language, there is no heart to heart connection between species of any land. The death of a language amounts to the death of a people's identity and culture, as such people do not fold their hands and watch their identity get eroded.

Social media technology has so powerfully penetrated the global social, economic, religious, political spheres of the 21st century that any one not found within the technological trend is adjudged an old-school, ill-fashioned and echaic. This new trend is now also a determining factor to judge a language ability to withstand the others. Much as it is true that Igbo people show negative attitude towards Igbo language, some have attributed this to certain factors which include the introduction of western education, government policies on language and globalization. The present study will look at how the social media platform has contributed to the eroding of the Igbo language usage, especially among youth.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF THE IGBO LANGUAGE

The Igbo language having gone through the rigorous days of early survival, has come to be as a language of standard status with its multiplicity of dialects. As language is a dynamic organism which continues to grow, Igbo has gone past the stage of orthography controversy to the stage of efforts geared towards orthography development. Igbo at the earlier developmental stage was faced with a whole lot of problems ranging from multiplicity of dialects with no standard form, orthography controversy, poor attitude of the people towards their language, lack of government assistance, to inadequate human and material resources [4]. The Igbo language is widely spoken today in the five south-eastern states of Nigeria and parts of Rivers State, Delta State, Akwa Ibom State, Cross River State and Kogi State with a population of over 30 million people [5]. Igbo

is also spoken in the Diaspora and all parts of the world where Igbo people are found in clusters. Igbo language is not only spoken by the Igbo, many people who are not find a lot of pleasure trying to speak the language. It is also taught at all levels of formal education as a school subject. But the big question is how come, a language as prestigious as this is under threat of. With regards to social networks usage by the youths of the paper will look at how the social media contributes to this decline in usage, why it has gained so much currency among the youth and how the social media can be effectively used to improve the standard of the Igbo language usage, thereby reviving it so as to save it from extinction.

III.   LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

[6] sees social media as a result of advances in modern technology which greatly impacts changes in both spoken and written communication. Although all generations use social media, the youth are the predominant instigators of linguistics changes. Younger generations have built their identity by employing various linguistic forms such as slangs and abbreviations originating mostly from their mother-tongue. Through social media, the main role in creating such specific forms has now been assumed by English, a language used by an increasing number of young people in their day-to-day online communication. Similarly, [7] says that the recent upsurge and indiscriminate development in ICT technology has precipitated the use of language via the electronic based gadgets specifically the computer and the mobile phones. The technology –based trend has further led to the emergence of electronically induced context i.e. language use via the context of computer technology akin to the previously flourished technology of fax. This newly emerged speech forms which is a deviation from the cultural norms of language created by the youths have not only led to the promotion of creativity in terms of manufacturing new words in English, but also has contributed to the decline in the use of the Igbo language. This newly created language use by the youth is vividly captured by [8] as, "computer mediated communication or Discourse or Netspeak," which comes with some peculiarities inherently special applications and features that aid the manifestation of a deviant style of spellings, different from the norms. Such inherent associated features include the use of self-styled invented spelling, choppy and fragmented sentence structures and unusual self-created abbreviations and acronyms [9].

With the advent of the internet, the world wide web, facebook, twitter, naijapals, blogs, short message service (sms), naija pings, badoo, pin book, pin share, youtube, 2go, whatsapp, smoothie etc. youths have been able to communicate only in English as the social media has changed the world, ensuring interactivity among friends and relations. Thus, the paper adopts "uses and gratification and media system dependency" approaches as a framework for the study. Media theorists want the audience to believe that media serve a number of needs such as communication, social control, cohesion and cultural continuity in a society. Considering the individual, the media provide the audience with the needs of surveillance, identity formation, personal relationships, personal learning/guidance as well as diversion/entertainment. The underpinning proposition of the functional view of the media is that the uses and gratifications needs and therefore appropriately seek the media to fulfill them. Media do not do things to people; people do things with media. [10] submits that the uses and gratifications study is "a psychological communication perspective" that stresses individual use and choice".

[11] also argues that "as new technologies present people with more and more media choices, motivation and satisfaction becomes even more crucial components of audience analysis". Identified gratifications include surveillance, escape, arousal, sociability, instrumentality, diversion, reassurance and companionship. Thinking of motivations, gratifications seem to lead to both ritualized (passive) and instrumental (active) use of the media [8].

[5] posit that society, media and its audience develop a relationship and that the more the society depends on the media to operate, the more the media influences it (society). The degree at which the society/audience rely on the media would definitely serve as a barometer for measuring and forecasting media effects. Heavily depending on media often leads to the conferment of authority that media have over such particular audience. [2], affirms that media dependency proposes that: the relationship between the larger society system, the media's role in that system and audience relationships to the media; the level of dependence on media and their content helps in understanding when and why media messages can alter beliefs, feelings and behaviours and lastly societies are increasingly dependent on media to understand the social world and act meaningfully and efficiently.

The strength of the theories have been their explanatory power. They are relatively simple to apply and multi-dimensional. They will nonetheless, certainly help in the course of evaluating the links between youth language, social media identity and the cultural norms of the Igbo speaker.

Objective of the study
The following objectives are set to guide the study:
1.   To examine the peculiar linguistics features of the social media languages created and used by the youths.

2. To ascertain how the new media platform signifies the emergence of a new variety of language different from the cultural norm.
3. To examine how this social media language erodes the use and survival of the Igbo language.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Two methods were used in the collection of data for this study. 'Group chats' of many youth groups were examined to ascertain the new linguistic forms being used by them. Secondly, the survey research method was used in the study. Questionnaire was administered to many youth and adult speakers of the language under survey in Ebonyi and Enugu States to effectively ascertain how the social media platform has impeded the growth and development of the Igbo language. The population of the study was 1,136 youths and adult speakers and users of the new media platforms drawn from the pool of; students, civil service, menial job workers, corps members, unemployed graduates and even house wives. The data were analyzed using simple percentage and frequency count.

V. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The common linguistics forms identified by the present study are presented below in the following sub headings
a. orthography
This involves deliberate, informal and contraction of spelling, speed writing style, used in the social media platform.
i.   Using a single alphabet to represent one syllabic word

Syllable	Alphabet	Examples	Normal forms
Okay	k	k, I will b there	Ok I will be there
See	C	See u sn	See you soon
Why	Y	Y ask me	Why asking me
Be	B	B right back	I will be right back
Are	R	R u there?	Are you there?
And	N	N u z	And you too

ii.   Using a single digit (number) to replace an entire word

Word	Number	Examples	Normal forms
Great	8	U r gr8	You are great
Too, to , two	2	2 hapi 2 c u 2	Too happy to see you
Four, for, fore	4	Dis is 4 u	This is for you
Ate	8	Ur luv 8 my hrt	Your love ate my heart

iii.   Using a combination of i and ii to replace a word

Word	Example	Normal form
Forgive	I 4gv u	I forgive you
Nice	U luk 9s/9c	You look nice
Some one	Sum/gr8	Someone great
For you	This is 4 u	This is for you
Wonderful	Idfl person	Wonderful person

In addition to the above forms of spelling conventions used by the youths, Hassan (2016) provides three additional forms of the media abbreviation;
iv.   Phonic form of abbreviation
Examples; when (wen), photo (foto), colour (Kolo), happy (hapi), come (kom),
v.   Self-invented Acronyms
Examples (lul) love you lots, (cul) see you later , (@hm) at home, (jk) just kidding, (HAND) have a nice day, (cul8) call you later, (ih8u) I hate you.
vi.   Use of Emojies
The new media orthography form employs the use of certain abbreviation by using pictographic representations and single alphabeths or numbers to represent whole words. This emoticons and smiley are used to convey or communicate paralinguistic or emotional aspects of life.
Examples; "1 ♡ "meaning 'I love you
    "I ☺ meaning 'I am normal"
    My ◯◯ eaning 'my heart is broken'
    I ♡ meaning is hate you'

vii.   Vocabulary

The vocabulary of the new media platforms is characterized by the deliberate use of informal abbreviations and expression. These informal abbreviation are used in a word-like manner. For example ROFL – "Rolling on the floor laughing"

IMHO - "In my humble home"

LOL   - 'laugh out loud'

Response Rate

Responses from the sampled questionnaire are recorded and presented in the table below. It present the distribution and return rate of usable questionnaire administered to the sampled respondents.

Table 4 Response Rate

S/N	Occupation of respondent	No of questionnaire administered	No of usable returned questionnaire	Percentage returned %
1	Students	450	387	25.8
2	Civil servant	150	106	7.06
3	Menial job	150	61	4.06
4	Corps member	350	309	20.6
5	Unemployed	300	192	12.8
6	House wife	100	81	5.4
	Total	**1500**	**1136**	**75.8%**

Table 4 presents a total number of one thousand five hundred (1500) copies of questionnaire that were administered to the sample. Out of which 1136 copies (representing 75.8%) were filled and returned and 24.2% were not returned. Considering the percentage of the filled and returned questionnaire, it is regarded adequate for valid analysis and interpretation and finally drawing conclusions. The table also presents the respondents response on rate based on personal observation as the researcher visited schools, local government head quarters, shops and even family houses and distributed the questionnaire.

5.2.2 Perception of the respondents on youth languages, social media identity and their implications to the cultural norms of youths speakers of Igbo languages.

The opinion of the respondents on the implication of the social network platform to the sustenance and use of the Igbo language were ascertained and presented as follows:

Table 5

	Items	Rating scale				Total score	Mean score	Decision
		4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD			
1.	The use of social media by the youth weakens the use of the Igbo language	2408	1203	206	30	3847	3.4	Accepted
2	Make people to acquire and learn the language easily.	28	156	1052	551	1787	1.8	Rejected
3	Has lead to loss of interest in the language	2364	1506	56	15	3941	3.46	Accepted
4	It is making the Igbo people to lose their identity	2684	1179	50	47	3960	3.48	Accepted
5	It is good because, it makes the Igbo people to understand their language better	132	69	974	593	1708	1.55	Rejected
6	It has made the non Igbo to use the language easily	284	147	826	605	1862	1.63	Rejected
7	It is mainly noticed among young people .	2292	1497	84	22	3895	3.42	Accepted
8	Will lead to the endangerment of the language	2448	1161	118	78	3805	3.34	Accepted
9	Will encourage people to trade	12	285	454	811	1562	1.37	Rejected

	and communicate with the language							
10	Will lead to revival of the Igbo language	232	153	800	627	1817	1.59	Rejected
11	It is mainly noticed moan old people	36	51	930	800	1817	1.59	Rejected
12	It is mainly noticed among the educated	3196	768	134	14	4112	3.61	Accepted
13	It is mainly noticed among the unemployed youths	2532	1143	160	42	3877	3.41	accepted
14	It is mainly noticed among the uneducated	164	276	864	571	1875	1.65	Rejected
15	Will lead to the lose of the language	1984	1563	138	50	3735	3.28	Accepted

Note: This were calculated by multiplying the number of respondents according to the rating scale for instance item (1)

From the table above, the response for each item was calculated using the Likert's four point rating scale of strongly Agree (SA) 4 point, Agree (A) 3 point, Disagree (D) 2 point , strongly Disagree (SD) 1 point. The decision rule was that if the average response was less than 2.5, it implied negative response which was rejected ®, while values above 2.5 signified positive response which was accepted (A). however, the respondents gave negative response to the statements that youth language, social media identify;

i.   make people to acquire and learn the language easily.
ii.   Make the Igbo people to understand their language better.
iii. Will make the non-Igbo speakers to use the language easily
iv.   Will encourage people to trade and communicate with the language.
v.   Will lead to revival of the Igbo language.
vi.   Mainly noticed among old people.
vii. Mainly noticed among the educated.

These was because; the average response for these items was less than 2.5, which signified negative response.
      Moreso, the respondents gave positive response to the statements that youth language, social media identity;

i.   Weakens the use of the Igbo language
ii.   Has lead to loss of interest in the language
iii. Is making the Igbo people to lose their identity
iv.   Is mainly noticed among young people.
v.   Will lead to the endangerment of the language
vi.   Is mainly noticed among the unemployed youths.
vii. Will lead to the lose of the language

   This was because the average response to these items had values above 2.5 which signified positive response.

Percentage responses showing the ways solutions can be proffered to the negative implications of the social media usage by the youths on Igbo language.

The views of the respondents on the possible solutions to arrest youth language, social media identity among Igbo speakers were ascertained. The result is presented in the following table and figure.

Table 6

S/n	Items	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	What do you think can be done to curb the negative implications of the above mentioned phenomenon on the growth and sustenance of the Igbo language	Regard Igbo language as equal to other languages	278	25% 24.5
		Make Igbo compulsory in schools	223	205 19.6
		We should regard Igbo language as prestigious and complete	311	27 27.4
		We should teach our children the Igbo language at home	207	18% 18.22
		We should use the Igbo language on line	117	10% 10. 29
		TOTAL	**1136**	**100%**

The table above reveals that 25% of the respondents agree that Igbo language should be regarded as equal to other languages, while 20% were of the opinion that the Igbo language should be made compulsory in schools. Then, 27% of the respondents opined that the Igbo languages should be regarded as prestigious and complete, while 18% agree that the language be taught to our children at home. Furthermore, agree that the Igbo language should be used on line for our communication on the social media platform.

Social Media language as an emerging linguistics form.

Though there exists diverse opinion on the social media platform as an emerging discourse having distinctive linguistic features, but the major thing that cannot be overlooked is the fact that the youth languages employed in the new media technology has a distinct linguistics features that are gradually transferred or used beyond the context of the cultural norm system, as the studies reviewed significantly affirms. In addition, the continuous emerging trend of using language through the social media platform which has been indiscriminately getting momentum is a signifier to the future dominance of the new technological order.

VI.   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The main objective of this research work is to examine the implication of the youth language, social media identity on the use and sustenance of the Igbo language. Relevant theoretical studies related to the research topic were reviewed. The research population was drawn from people living with Enugu and Abakaliki metropolis and the variables include males, females, youths and adults. Questionnaire served as the major instrument for data collection and the data collected were analysed using frequency, percentage and Linkert's four points, rating scale. From the result of the analysis, it was discovered that the social media platform as used by youths for their day-to-day communication has in no small measure hidden their identity as 'ndi Igbo', brought another linguistic feature different from the cultural and conventional norms as well as further projecting the already endangered language for death.

Thus, one obvious conclusion that can be rationally made on the basis of the discussion is that the social media is an emerging linguistic feature that is posing a serious challenge to the Igbo language development, use, sustenance and revival because of the wider popularity and the usage of the media language /linguistic forms.

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