

# PROMOTING THE IGBO LANGUAGE ON TELEVISION: AN APPRAISAL OF NTA ENUGU

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## Abstract

*Language is vital in human communication and national development. It comprises anything that matter to self-definition, group identity, culture and values, hence, if a language is lost, the people are lost as well. There has been a speculation that Igbo language is gradually fading away, to the extent that the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Advisory Committee, on Language Pluralism and Multi-language Education, predicts that Igbo language and its culture may go into extinction and subsumed by other stronger Nigerian languages by 2025, if nothing is done. This study therefore is an attempt to examine the extent to which Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Enugu, a major television broadcasting station east of the Niger, is involved in promoting Igbo language to her diverse audience through her programmes. The survey research method, using questionnaire and interview as instruments of data collection was used in gathering data from a sample of 150 respondents in Enugu metropolis. The findings show that a number of factors, including lack of sponsorship and creativity, account for the ineffectiveness of the station in Igbo language promotion. The study recommends, among other things, that government in Igbo speaking states should not only sponsor Igbo programmes in the media, but also use the language as medium of communicating official matters like in passing of bills and law making (as done in some northern Nigeria states).*

## BACKGROUND

Language is widely regarded as a mark of ethnic identity: any society that loses her language, have as well lost her identity. Nwadike (2003, p.23), concurred by saying that: “language (mother-tongue) is key to the heart of a people. If we lose the key, we lose the people. If we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to untold riches which cannot be guessed at from the other side of the door”. Also Ocho (2005, p.11) cited in Didiugwu (2008), asserts that

“language is a culture because it expresses, preserves, and transmits the whole set of behavior patterns, beliefs, tradition, customs and models of thinking that make one group of people different from another”. However, since the introduction of English language by the colonial masters, many African indigenous languages are being suppressed.

Igbo language is recognized as one of the three major languages in Nigeria. It is the mode of communication by which all the people of Igbo extraction especially those inhabiting the geo-political areas of Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi, Abia and Imo states interact by way of exchange of ideas, information, opinion and attitude (Didiugwu 2008,p.179). This language seems to have been worst hit by colonization, resulting in cultural imperialism. Indeed, Igbo people have gradually relegated their norms and values to the background in their increasing quest for those of the whites. Many Igbo parents do not want their children to speak Igbo. This colonial mentality has eaten so deep into the speakers of this language that most of them who live in cities or abroad do not understand or speak the Igbo language. In fact, Ifejirika (2014, p.336) observed that in some Nigerian secondary schools class prefects and hostel spies are usually nominated to write down the names of students who speak the Igbo language either in the classrooms or dormitories. Defaulters usually faced punishment in the form flogging, hard labour or payment of fine. Similarly, students who opt for the Igbo language as a core undergraduate course are openly discouraged on the grounds that the subject has no academic prestige. Some of these unwholesome attitudes probably informed UNESCO to predict that the language will go into extinction UNESCO in the next 50 years (2003, p.7). The above issues necessitated the transmission of some programmes in indigenous languages, especially the host indigenous language by the communication media (television and radio stations) across Nigeria, be they privately or publicly owned.

The mass media is seen as a ready help in the development of culture because they awaken and stimulate the imagination of individuals. In this regard, they can be appropriated to boost people’s appreciation of their language. According to Okunna (1999), the mass media disseminate cultural and artistic products for the purpose of preserving the past heritage of the people. They transmit various societal norms and values from one generation to another. Associating

a language with any media is the powerful way of enhancing the vitality of such a language, promoting its use and ensuring positive attitudes towards it.

Studies on media and the promotion of African indigenous language show that the media can promote Nigeria's indigenous languages through their contents. A survey research carried out by Oyero (2007) in Alimosho Local Government Area of Lagos State to ascertain the extent to which Radio Lagos 107.5FM helped in the promotion of Yoruba Language revealed that the station gives the lion share of the radio airtime to Yoruba programmes. Seventy two percent (72%) of the respondents of the 200 sampled prefer 107.5 FM to other stations due to its presentation of programmes in their Yoruba language, as opposed to 28% of the respondents who do not. The Radio station is fondly called 'Tiwantiwa', literally meaning, it is ours, because it broadcasts only in two indigenous languages, Ogu and Yoruba, spoken in Lagos State. Similar findings were made by Harrison and Raphael (2006) in their study of the media and the promotion of Yoruba language and culture in African Independent Television (AIT) and Lagos Television (LTV) using questionnaire and direct observation. The result showed that 80% of the 120 respondents watch or listen to Yoruba programmes on AIT and LTV. They noted that almost all the informants watch Yoruba programmes like, *Nnkan n'be'* (a documentary programme that recounts mysterious happenings around), *Sokoyokoto* (a life programme that educates viewers on how to prepare different recipes for cooking), *Iroyin Agbaye* (world news) and *Oga ju* (it is superfluous) on both stations. While 92% of the respondents see the value of these programmes in the preservation of Yoruba language, 8% of them do not seem to care so long as there are alternatives found in English.

Furthermore, Oguji (2012) who used indepth interviews and questionnaire to study the Anambra Broadcasting Service television Channel 24 Awka and Channel 27 Awada and their effort to promote Igbo language and culture, found that the stations run Igbo programmes like; *Ka anyi si e bi* ( a discussion programme that reveals different lifestyles and happenings in various Igbo villages), *Egwu ala anyi* (a musical programme that shows different local musical groups in Igbo land), *Olu ugbo ga adi* (a programme that teaches Igbo people

how to cultivate and maintain the normal farming culture), *Nkuzi Igbo* (a programme that teaches both the writing and speaking of Igbo language), *Anokoo amuta*, *Akuko uwa* (world news), *Ka oha malu* (let the world know), *Nnoko umuaka* (children's programme) and *Ndubuisi* (health programme). The research findings showed that 57% and 40% of the respondents, respectively watched Igbo programmes on ABS television Channels 24 and 27 occasionally and regularly, but 3% of them never did. Furthermore, 58% of them agreed that these programmes were meant specifically to promote Igbo language and culture, while 42% disagreed. Twenty nine percent (29%) of the respondents further noted that they gained knowledge from the programmes, 21% claimed to have improved their spoken Igbo, 14% their mode of dressing and only 11% their knowledge of Igbo customs and tradition. The field survey carried out revealed that 80% of the respondents said that Igbo programmes on ABS television Channels 24 and 27 suit their cultural needs. Ninety one percent (91%) of the respondents said that the Igbo programmes influenced them positively. This findings revealed that the television is an effective instrument for the promotion of Igbo language and culture. It is therefore evident that the media engenders consciousness towards the appreciation of own language and as Abdkareem (2014) opines, television serves to promote development, patriotism and cultural awareness among audience. Consequently, the role played by television in the promotion of the Igbo language cannot be over emphasized.

This study therefore examine the role of television in promoting the Igbo language, using Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Enugu as a case study. The study seeks to answer the under-listed questions. (1) How is NTA Enugu promoting Igbo language? (2) Does the station give appropriate airtime to Igbo programmes? (3) How effective are the Igbo programmes in promoting Igbo language? (4) What are the challenges faced by the station in promoting Igbo language?

## **THEORETICAL ANCHOR**

This study is anchored on agenda setting theory and development media theory. Agenda setting theory is anchored on the premise that the media help to “put pictures in our heads” (Lippmann

1922 in Ojobor 2002). In other words, they have the power to set the agenda and raise issues of public importance. McCombs and Shaw (1972) as cited in Wogu (2008) wrote that members of the “audience not only learn about public issues through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the mass media place upon it.” Ndolo (2005, p.320) states that the theory explains the effects of mass communication on culture and society. It describes a very powerful influence of the media in the ability to tell us what issues are important.

Development media theory posits that the media contribute to the socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural development of any society. As Asemah (2012) rightly puts it “the theory is all about positive usage of the mass media in national development for the autonomy and cultural identity of the particular nation”. Under the development theory, the mass media are expected to carry out positive development programmes, accepting restrictions and instructions from the state. The media need to subordinate themselves to political, economic, social and cultural needs, hence, the stress on development journalism.

These two theories are invaluable to this research paper. While the former creates awareness on the need to promote and sustain Igbo language in the mind of the viewers (the speakers of the language) through the prominence and frequency of airing Igbo programmes, the latter sees the media as a fundamental part of society whose role is inevitable in ensuring the continued existence of the Igbo language. NTA Enugu can therefore help to preserve and promote Igbo language by airing, and frequently too, different Igbo programmes ranging from talk shows and drama to songs, etc.

## **METHODOLOGY**

**Research design:** The study used a survey research design, and the associated instrument of the questionnaire to obtain information from the respondents. This was supported by oral interview, which was guided by an interview schedule.

**Population for study:** The study population comprises all adult television viewers, namely civil servants, traders, students, and teachers within Enugu metropolis. Based on the National Population

Census figure of 2006, there are 244,852 people living in Enugu metropolis.

**Sample size and sampling technique:** In order to make generalization that could represent the view of the members of the stated population, a sample size of 150 respondents were chosen for this study, using the Macorr sample size calculator with a confidence level of 95% and confidence interval of 8%.

A multi-stage sampling technique was used in the study. This entailed involving more than one sampling technique at different stages. First, Enugu metropolis was split into 25 clusters representing Enugu East, Enugu North and Enugu South. Secondly, the quota sampling technique was used by dividing the sample size of 150 with the number of the clusters (25) within Enugu metropolis. This gave the quota of six to each of the clusters. Finally, the accidental sampling technique was used to administer the questionnaire. Hence, cluster, quota and accidental sampling techniques were used for this study.

**Methods of data collection and analysis:** The researchers used both the qualitative and quantitative methods. While the questionnaire was used in gathering quantitative data, the interview served as qualitative method used to gather relevant information from persons working at NTA Enugu. The results were presented using frequency distribution tables and analyzed using simple percentages.

## **RESULTS**

This section is presented in four divides. The first shows how NTA promotes the Igbo language in her programmes. The second examines the airtime allocated, how appropriate and adequate they are. The third discusses the effectiveness of NTA, Enugu Igbo programmes, while the last x-rays the factors that impede NTA, Enugu in their efforts to promote the Igbo language programmes.

### **Research question one: NTA Enugu and the promotion of Igbo Language**

Information collected through interviews of NTA staff as well as an observation of their schedules revealed that NTA, Enugu designed and run a number of programmes aimed at promoting not just the Igbo language, but also to give current information, educate and creates awareness on the happenstances in their area of domicile. The

programmes include *Ahũike* (health programme), *Akũkọ ụwa* (Igbo news), *Ejije* (Igbo drama), *Ezi na ụlọ* (discussion programme on family matters), *Ihe dị n' ikuku*, (Current affairs programme), *Ka I ma nke a* (Question and answer programme with invited guests and audience), *Kwere nke m* (Igbo debate), *Nke onye* (societal issues), *Nrũrita ụka* (Argument and discussion programme), *Oge ụmụaka* (children's programme) and *Omenka* (programme showcasing arts and crafts).

Furthermore, we sought to know from the respondents whether or not they are aware of such programmes and also watch them, using yes and no answers. The findings are presented in table 2 below:

**Table 2: Respondents awareness and utilization of Igbo programmes on NTA, Enugu**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Awareness of Igbo programmes on NTA Enugu</b>		
Yes	15	100
No	0	0
<b>Respondents that watch Igbo programmes on NTA Enugu</b>		
Yes	124	82.66
No	26	17.33

The result in table 2 shows that all of the respondents are indeed aware of some Igbo programmes aired on NTA, Enugu, but not all of them watch such programmes. While 82.66% of the respondents watch the programmes, the remaining 17.33% do not. A breakdown of the specific programmes that respondents are aware of and also watch is shown in table 3.

**Table 3: Respondents that watch the under listed Igbo programmes on NTA Enugu**

Igbo programmes on NTA you are aware of and also watch	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Omenka</b>		
Yes	84	56%
No	66	44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Nke Onye</b>		
Yes	95	63.33%
No	55	36.66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Ihe dị n' ikuku</b>		
Yes	51	34%
No	99	66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Ahụike</b>		
Yes	108	72%
No	42	28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Kwere nke m</b>		
Yes	87	58%
No	63	42%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Kọta nke a</b>		
Yes	99	66%
No	51	34%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Ka I ma nke a</b>		
Yes	56	37.33%
No	94	62.66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Ikwana nka</b>		
Yes	76	50.66%
No	74	49.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Ezi na ụlọ</b>		
Yes	139	92.66%
No	11	7.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Akụkọ ụwa</b>		
Yes	143	95.33%
No	7	4.66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Ejije</b>		
Yes	74	49.33%
No	76	50.66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

<b>Nrurita uka</b>	Yes	65	43.33%
	No	85	56.66%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Oge umuaka</b>	Yes	27	18%
	No	123	82%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Nnoko ezi na ulo</b>	Yes	98	65.33%
	No	52	34.66%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 shows that of the Igbo programmes aired on NTA Enugu, *Akuko uwa* is the most prominent (95.33%) among the respondents. This is followed by *Ezi na ulo* (92.66%), *Ahike* (72%), *Kota nke a* (66%), *Nnoko ezi na ulo* (65.33%) and *Nke onye* (63.33%). Other findings in descending order of magnitude are *Kwere nke m* (58%), *Omenka* (56%), *Ikwa nka* (50.66%), *Ejije* (49.33%), *Nrurita uka* (43.33%), *Ka I ma nke a* (37.33%), *Ihe di n' ikuku* (34%) and *Oge umuaka* (18%).

#### **Research question two: Adequacy and allocation of airtime to Igbo programmes on NTA Enugu**

**Table 4:** Response on the regularity of Igbo programmes on NTA Enugu

<b>Regularity of Igbo programmes on NTA Enugu</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Regularly	39	26%
Sometimes	96	64%
Rarely	15	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4 shows that 64% of the respondents believe that the Igbo programmes are aired only occasionally by NTA, while 26% are of the opinion that Igbo programmes aired regularly. A few of them (10%), however, see the Igbo programmes as being rarely aired by the station.

**Table 5:** Respondents' views on the adequacy of the number, duration and time allotted to the Igbo programmes.

Variable	Frequency n=150	Percentage
<b>Viewers' opinion on the adequacy of the number of Igbo programmes on NTA in promoting Igbo language</b>		
Very adequate	12	8
Adequate	39	26
Inadequate	99	66
<b>Viewers opinion on whether the duration and time given to Igbo Programmes on NTA are adequate in promoting Igbo language</b>		
Very adequate	19	12.66
Adequate	47	31.33
Inadequate	84	56

Findings on table 5 indicate that majority of the respondents (66%) are of the view that the number of Igbo programmes aired on NTA Enugu are not adequate, 26% opined that they are adequate, while 8% see them as being very adequate for the promotion of the Igbo language in Nigeria. A follow-up question on the duration and time allotted to the programmes revealed that majority of the respondents (56%), opined that the duration of the programmes is inadequate, 31.33% see it as being adequate, while 12.66% indicate that it is very adequate for the promotion of Igbo language in Nigeria.

**Research question three: Effectiveness of the NTA Enugu Igbo Programmes in Promoting Igbo Language**

**Table 7**

Variable	Frequency n=150	Percentage
<b>Viewers' are motivated to speak Igbo language due to Igbo programmes on NTA Enugu</b>		
Strongly Agree	9	6
Agree	41	27.33
Disagree	80	53.33
Strongly Disagree	20	13.33
<b>Igbo programmes aired on NTA rouse viewers' interest</b>		
Strongly Agree	9	6
Agree	56	37.33
Disagree	71	47.33
Strongly Disagree	14	9.33

<b>Igbo programmes on NTA increase viewers knowledge and use of Igbo language</b>	21	14
Strongly Agree	74	49.33
Agree	47	31.33
Disagree	8	5.33
Strongly Disagree		
<b>Effectiveness of Igbo programmes on NTA in promoting Igbo language</b>	4	2.66
Very effective	51	34
Effective	95	63.33
Ineffective		

Results from the above table show that 53.33% of the respondents disagree that Igbo programmes aired on NTA Enugu motivate the viewers to speak Igbo language, while 27.33% agree. Furthermore, 13.33% and 6% of the respondents strongly disagree and strongly agree respectively, that such programmes motivate the viewers to speak Igbo language. The highlights of table also show that 47.33% of the respondents disagree that the programmes rouse viewers' interest in the language, even though (37.33%) of them agree that they do. Results with respect to knowledge derived and use of the programmes reveal the following: agree-49.33%, disagree-31.33%, strongly agree-14% and strongly disagree-5.33%. The result presented in table further shows that 63.33% of the respondents believe (agree) that the Igbo programmes are ineffective in promoting Igbo language, 34% are of the view that they are indeed effective, 2.66% opined that they are very effective.

**Research question four: Challenges faced by NTA Enugu in promoting Igbo language through their programmes**

**Table 8:** Responses on hindrances to Igbo programmes shown on NTA in promoting Igbo language

<b>Challenges/Hindrances to Igbo Programmes on NTA</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Lack of sponsors for the programmes</b>		
Yes	111	74%
No	39	26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Dearth of competent presenter/staff</b>		
Yes	73	48.66%
No	77	51.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Lack of creativity</b>		
Yes	120	80%
No	30	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Viewers negative attitude/preference for English programmes</b>		
Yes	119	79.33%
No	31	20.66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Short time allocated to Igbo Programmes</b>		
Yes	96	64%
No	54	36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table shows that lack of creativity by producers of programmes (80%), viewers’ negative attitude/preference for English programmes (79.33%) and lack of sponsors (74%) are the major factors that challenge the effectiveness of Igbo programmes on NTA, Enugu. These are closely followed by short time allocated to the programmes (64%) and dearth of competent presenters/staff (48.66%). It must be noted here that the interviewees were instructed to give as many options they deem possible, that they feel hinder Igbo programmes on NTA.

**Discussion**

An examination of the findings show that although NTA, Enugu has a good number of Igbo programmes in their schedule, majority of the

NTA viewers do not subscribe to or watch them. One of the reasons that account for this attitude is that the programmes are not regularly aired. In actual fact, information collected through interviews of NTA staff (2015) revealed that years back NTA produced and aired so many Igbo programmes, but many of them, except ‘*Omenka, Nke onye and Akukọ ụwa*’ can only be remembered in history.

This explains why more than half (56%) of the respondents believe that inadequate air time and the timing of Igbo programmes do not provide the enabling platforms for the promotion of Igbo language by the station. The 2015 annual programme schedule of the station tellingly portrays the above claim. Here, *Omenka*, an Igbo programme that teaches viewers how to make crafts like broom making, pot making etc. was scheduled to be aired by 1.00- 1.30pm every Monday. In the researchers’ opinion, this programme is not well timed considering that the target audience (youths), who are mostly students and workers, would generally be in their class rooms or work places. Also, interview conducted with a Head of Department at NTA revealed that these Igbo programmes scheduled for 30 minutes are aired for 25 minutes. The duration is therefore nothing compared to the air time allotted to some of the English programmes like ‘*Mountain Top Entertainment Extra, Nigerian Idol*’ etc which run for one hour respectively. This approach to Igbo programmes runs counter to one of the theories of communication, Agenda setting theory, which states that the media not only tell us what to think but what to think about. Through prominence and frequency of presentation, the need to sustain Igbo language and its love will be created in the minds of Igbo people. Furthermore, collated responses from research question three indicated that NTA is not effective in promoting Igbo language in Nigeria. Most of the respondents see Igbo programmes aired on NTA Enugu as inadequate and ineffective. This does not lend credence to development media theory which supports positive the use of the mass media in promoting the cultural identity of a particular group.

The factors that militate against the promotion of Igbo language by NTA, Enugu were finally elicited. Interview conducted with NTA personnel point majorly to lack of sponsors. According to an interviewee, (2015)

NTA Enugu produces so many Igbo programmes, but due to lack of sponsors, the programmes are lying in the pipeline. Many of the sponsors would rather sponsor English

programmes, which they believe attract more viewers. However, it got to a point where the station managed on its own to air some salient Igbo programmes like Koota nkea (a secondary schools' debate). But due to paucity of financial support and the fact that the station is commercialized, the programmes were later kept in view hoping that sponsors will come one day.

Furthermore, an interviewee informed us that the viewers' preference for English programmes is also to blame for the poor patronage of Igbo programmes by sponsors and consequently the manner they are promoted by the broadcast station. We were also informed that some viewers call NTA officials to complain that they (NTA Enugu) are becoming too local for their liking, just because they aired Igbo programmes. This attitude is worrisome and as Didiugwu (2008) averred, "the development, growth, survival or death of any language depends to a large extent on a number of factors, among which two stand out clearly; the attitude portrayed towards the language by its users, and the role assigned to it in the performance of tasks within the community of its users." If Igbo language users complain that a station is becoming local for airing the Igbo language, then we have a long way to go.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study is predicated on the assumption that NTA Enugu can do more than they have done so far in their effort to promote the Igbo language through her programmes. While we chastise the attitude of some of the viewers towards Igbo programmes, we wish to acknowledge their complaints that some of the programmes are not well packaged and therefore, not enjoyable. A situation where the owners of this language (the Igbos), in a bid to become more English than the England, show nonchalant attitude towards Igbo programmes is very disturbing. This attitude account in part, for the dearth of sponsors for Igbo programmes.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

They are as follow:

1. The media should not only train competent staff, but should be more creative while producing Igbo programmes. Adequate airtime

should be allotted to every Igbo programme even as they endeavour to schedule to suit the target audience.

2. There is no doubt that the English language is the language of wider communication in a multilingual country such as Nigeria. Nevertheless, government especially all levels of government in the Southeast should encourage the use of Igbo language as a means of communication in official matters. The government should not only sponsor Igbo programmes on the media but should also fund movements like 'Otu *subakwa* Igbo' in order to create awareness on the need to promote and sustain Igbo language.
3. The Nigerian movie industry should produce more movies in Igbo language as is the case with Yoruba and Hausa movies, but with subtitles in English language. Additionally, the English and Chinese cartoons watched by our children and adults can be produced in Igbo language. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should stand up to her role of directing the media stations to promote the indigenous culture and language.
4. Igbo parents should help to promote and sustain Igbo language before it goes into extinction by speaking the language to their children at home. They should instill Igbo cultural pride in their children by also dressing them in Igbo attire, serving them Igbo dishes, buying for them books written in Igbo language.
5. Corporate organizations, traditional rulers in Igbo land should endeavor to sponsor Igbo programmes in the media.

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