The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal
Volume 23, Number 1, April 2023

Finding Space in Ibadan: The Linguistic Dilemma of Igbo Children in the City

Herbert Igboanusi
University of Ibadan

Oyetayo Bankale
University of Ibadan

ABSTRACT

Although the Igbo are one of the most widely travelled people in Nigeria, little is known about the sociolinguistic impact of migration (international or internal) on their language. Based on interview data collected from 24 Igbo youth in Ibadan, this study explores the space available for young Igbo migrants and the role of language in accessing the space. The Igbo youth learn Yoruba to enable them find space in Ibadan and its environs. The complexities of locating space compel some of them to sometimes disguise as Yoruba in order to gain acceptance and favourable perception. However, the need to maintain their Igbo identity and find space in Igboland whenever possible propels them to also learn to speak Igbo. As long as discriminatory citizenship is practised in the country, language and ethnicity will remain crucial in the search for space by settlers.

INTRODUCTION

The Igbo are one of the most travelled ethnic groups in Nigeria. In fact, it is jocularly said that wherever one goes to and does not find an Igbo person, one had better leave the place because it is likely to be uninhabitable. This saying stresses the extent of Igbo migration. They are involved in both internal and international migrations. International migration leads them to several parts of the world – Europe, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and to several parts of Africa. Internal migration takes them to various parts of the country – the North, the South-west, and the South-south.

As the Igbo travel around different parts of Nigeria, they are confronted with problems of space for living, shops, farming, schooling, jobs, etc. To enjoy access to some of these 'spaces', learning the languages of the host communities is sometimes considered crucial. However, the indigene-settler dichotomy, which encourages discriminatory citizenship, is a constant reminder to the indispensability of ethnic affiliations in the country. The Igbo youth therefore strive to learn Igbo in order to claim their Igbo identity and access the benefits associated with such an identity. The present investigation examines the linguistic dilemma of young Igbo migrants in their bid to find space in Ibadan and still maintain their Igbo identity.

IBADAN

Located in the Southwestern Nigeria, Ibadan is the largest metropolitan geographical area in sub-Saharan Africa. It is the capital city of Oyo State and has been

the political capital of the South-west since the days of the British colonial administration. The city is about 128 km from Lagos and 120 km east of the borders with Republic of Benin and it is a prominent transit point between the coastal region and the areas to the north.

Ibadan boasts of many educational institutions, including the University of Ibadan (the first university to be set up in Nigeria), Technical University, Ibadan (Oyo State-owned university), three privately owned universities, namely Lead City University, Kola Daisi University, and Dominican University. Other notable educational institutions in the city include: The Polytechnic Ibadan, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria, the National Horticultural Research Institute (NIHORT), the Institute for Agricultural Research and Training (IAR&T) and the Forest Research Institute of Nigeria.

The Yoruba are the principal inhabitants of the city. However, population movements have brought people from other parts of Nigeria to Ibadan in search of education, employment, business, farming and other activities. According to the latest revision of UN World Urbanization Prospects (2023), the current population of Ibadan is estimated at 5,873,808. In 1960, the population of Ibadan was 600,000 (Fourchard, 2003) – an indication that Ibadan is a fast-growing city when the current population estimate is taken into consideration.

Ibadan has witnessed massive *in-migration* over the past 50 years. As the former capital of the defunct Western Region, it remains an important city in Nigeria. Its proximity to Lagos (the economic capital of the country) and the peaceful disposition of the indigenous population to visitors make it a haven of some sort for *in-migrants*. The large presence of people from the north, the Southeast, the South-south, and the Yoruba-speaking people from different states, attests to the friendly disposition of the Ibadan people to visitors. As one of the major ethnic groups in the country, the Igbo make up a significant number of the inhabitants of the city. Ibadan attracts a large number of the Igbo because of its size, which makes it a fertile ground for trading (an endeavour for which the Igbo are known). In addition, the concentration of several higher institutions in the city is a contributory factor to the large presence of the Igbo youth there. Many Igbo people have lived there for a very long time. They have children who were born there and attend schools at different levels of education. A good number of the Igbo and their children have been integrated into the Yoruba culture and language. It is, therefore, expedient to investigate some of the sociolinguistic consequences of *in-migration* on the children of the Igbo resident in Ibadan since children and the young people are usually the most dislocated, both culturally and linguistically, in urban movements. Born and living outside their places of origin brings some challenges for the children – identity crisis, discrimination, exclusion and several other barriers.

Although Ibadan is one of the largest cities in Nigeria, ‘spaces’ are scarce for many who live in the city. Its high population, ethnic plurality, indigenes-settlers dichotomy, and the recent influx of people fleeing from acts of terrorism in different parts of Northern Nigeria, further restrict the availability of space. Dwindling economic fortunes and the competition for the available limited opportunities have compounded matters for the migrants or ‘non-indigenes’. Based on the data collected from some Igbo youth in Ibadan, this study explores the space available for the young Igbo migrants and the role of language in accessing the space.

THE POLITICS OF INDIGENESHIP IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, distinctions are frequently made between *indigenes* and non-*indigenes*. *Indigenes* refer to the natives or indigenous people of an area while the settlers or non-indigenes are the migrant groups even if they were born in such localities. This distinction is often manipulated for some socio-political gains for both the individuals and groups. A product of Nigeria's multilingual and multiethnic society, indigeneship confers special privileges on the natives over the non-natives. Although it has no overt provision in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, indigeneship is a political strategy aimed at protecting the interest of the natives against 'new-comers', 'strangers' or 'settlers'.

With dwindling employment opportunities and increasing migration to cities and areas considered more viable, the dichotomy between indigenes and non-indigenes becomes clearly marked. Tension generated by this dichotomy is often blamed for obvious conflicts in parts of Nigeria including Urhobo-Itsekiri-Ijaw in Delta State, Tiv-Jukun conflicts in Taraba and Benue States, Zango-Kataf in Plateau State, Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba clashes in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, and Kano States, Hausa/Fulani-Igbo clashes in Kano, Enugu and Ebonyi States, etc. Although economic and political interests are the major causes of these conflicts, ethnicity is often brought in. The dichotomy between indigenes and non-indigenes creates constant suspicion, feeling of marginalisation and injustice.

Ironically, there are usually no discriminations in terms of responsibilities or obligations to the state (e.g., in the payment of taxes, voting, duties, etc). However, non-indigenes are deprived from contesting elective positions. They are often discriminated against in terms of employment, admission into public schools and higher institutions, and are, in some cases, made to pay differential fees at higher educational institutions. Applications into certain kinds of jobs into the Federal Civil Service, the military, police, Customs, Immigration, etc. sometimes require the applicants to go to their states of origin to collect application forms (even if one has never been to such a state by virtue of one's parents settling outside of it). This practice certainly reinforces the dichotomy.

Indigeneship operates at various levels – the community, local government, state, and ethnic group. Belongingness accords some privileges while lack of it leads to discrimination. Such discriminations are, however, more pronounced at the level of ethnic group because here language is clearly used to discriminate against the otherness. By virtue of being settlers or migrants, one is permanently regarded as a 'stranger' and is excluded from certain rights and privileges.

An understanding of citizenship and indigeneship in Nigeria is necessary to appreciate the dilemma of the Igbo and other migrants in Ibadan and elsewhere in the country.

THE DATA

The data for this study were collected from interviews. 24 young Igbo persons (12 males and 12 females) were purposively selected and interviewed on a number of issues that are related to the role of language in finding space in Ibadan (see interview items in the analysis that follows). Their ages ranged between 13 and 25 years. 20 of the respondents were born in Ibadan while 4 were born in Igboland before coming to live in Ibadan. They were given the option of responding to questions in either English or Igbo or in both. The profile of the respondents shows that 5 of them were Secondary

School students, 7 were university undergraduates, 4 were postgraduate students, 1 was a school teacher and 7 were traders/salesgirls or boys. The results are analysed below each item.

Item 1: What difficulties did you encounter learning Igbo?

Given the effects of negative attitudes sometimes associated with indigenous Nigerian languages (see, e.g., Oyetade, 2001; Oyedokun-Alli, 2014; Olateyo, 2022) and the increasing preference for English as a medium of instruction in Nigerian schools (Igboanusi and Peter, 2016), the researchers wanted to find out if the children encountered any difficulties in learning the Igbo language. The four respondents who were born in Igboland had no difficulties learning Igbo because Igbo is the L1 environment. Five respondents were born in Ibadan but taken to Igboland at childhood for periods between 3 and 5 years to learn Igbo. That their parents took them to their Igbo homeland (in most cases to stay with their grandparents) to learn the language stresses the importance which some Igbo parents attach to learning their mother tongue. Many Igbo migrants in cities outside of Igboland sometimes adopt this practice as a language maintenance strategy.

Eight young persons, who claimed not to have difficulties learning Igbo, stated that their parents spoke Igbo to them in their childhood. Ironically, some of these adolescents, who claimed not to have difficulties learning Igbo, actually found it difficult speaking the language when prompted to do so during the interview. This shows that their proficiency in Igbo might be limited.

Five respondents agreed to have had problems learning Igbo in Ibadan because their parents did not speak Igbo with them in their childhood. Their parents conversed with them at home in English and so they grew up finding it difficult to speak Igbo. This fact underscores the role of parents in language shift and maintenance (see, e.g., Igboanusi and Wolf, 2009; Senayon 2018; Pauwels, 2005).

Item 2: Which did you learn first – Igbo or Yoruba?

Migrants are likely to be exposed to both the language of the host community and the language of their parents, and so we tried to find out if the children encountered any conflicts in deciding which language to learn first between Igbo and Yoruba. Fifteen respondents learnt Igbo first because it is their mother tongue, or according to Chidi (a Postgraduate student) ‘because it is my language’. As noted earlier on, 4 of them were born in Igboland and 5 were taken to Igbo homeland to learn Igbo and so the environment provided justifications for learning Igbo first. Gabriel (a 22-year-old trader) claimed to have learnt both Igbo and Yoruba simultaneously, and could not determine the one he learnt first. This was possible because his parents spoke both Igbo and Yoruba in the home and he was surrounded by Yoruba friends and neighbours. Eight remaining respondents learnt Yoruba before Igbo because their parents did not speak Igbo to them at home. In addition, they were surrounded by Yoruba persons and learnt the language in school. Therefore, the refusal of their parents to speak Igbo to them and the environment (living in the midst of Yoruba speakers) were key factors for those Igbo children who learnt Yoruba before Igbo. This trend confirms the indispensability of families and linguistic environment in language transmission (Schüpbach, 2009).

Item 3: Did you have problems passing Yoruba as a compulsory subject in school?

Since Igbo is not taught in several primary and secondary schools in Ibadan, many students of Igbo origin have had to take Yoruba as a compulsory subject given that Yoruba is the language of the immediate environment. This is in keeping with the language provisions of the National Policy on Education (1981). Five respondents had no problems passing Yoruba in schools. In fact, they claimed that they excelled in the subject. On the contrary, five respondents had problems passing Yoruba. They took it only because it was a compulsory subject. They also claimed that their poor performances in Yoruba had adverse effect on their overall performance in schools. Apart from those who completed secondary school education before coming to Ibadan, a few respondents were lucky to have found schools where Igbo was taught as one of the language-based subjects.

Item 4: Are there benefits derivable from speaking Igbo/Yoruba for an Igbo who is based in Ibadan? Mention them.

Many interviewees highlighted some of the reasons for learning Igbo in Ibadan to include the purposes of identity, to exclude Yoruba or other non-Igbo speakers in discourse, communication with the elderly and Igbo speakers who could understand neither English nor Yoruba, socialisation in the Igbo homeland, and for job opportunities in Igboland. Some of the benefits listed for speaking Yoruba in Ibadan include personal security, for integration and interaction with the Yoruba, employment opportunities, business transactions, securing accommodation and other favour. The proper contextualisation of the motivations for learning Igbo and/or Yoruba calls for the detailed discussion that follows.

(i) Personal security

It is significant to note that many interviewees identified personal safety as the major reason for learning to speak Yoruba in Ibadan. This is not surprising given the growing insecurity and ethnic/religious tension in the country following the worrisome terrorist activities of some Islamic militants (known as Boko Haram) in parts of Northern Nigeria as well as the growing activities of bandits, unknown gun men, kidnappers and the attacks by Fulani herdsmen across the country. Nigerians are getting more conscious of their security because of the fear that ethnic and religious conflicts could result from the seeming helplessness of the government to protect lives and properties of her citizens. Nnadi (a 21-year-old university undergraduate) captures the advantages of bilingualism for personal security in the following way:

> Learning any language is usually beneficial because one could be rescued in certain circumstances by virtue of speaking a particular language. It could be helpful particularly when people are plotting against you. Knowing what they are discussing against you could offer an escape route for one.

Adaeze (a 16-year-old Senior Secondary 2 student), Samson (a 22-year-old trader), Eberechi (a 24-year-old trader) and Orji (a 25-year-old schoolteacher) share Nnadi's safety concerns. While Adaeze felt that 'the ability to speak Yoruba helps you to know when your friends are insulting you', Samson thought that 'Yoruba language ability helps one to know when one is safe or unsafe in a particular situation. Not knowing it

could be disastrous in times of danger'. Apart from identifying the usefulness of Yoruba in times of emergency, Eberechi corroborated Adaeze's position that the ability to speak Yoruba helps one to know when one is being insulted. On his own part, Orji thought that speaking Yoruba helped him understand whatever his Yoruba neighbours were saying against him. Ethnic suspicion is mostly blamed for fear and insecurity which in-migrants often live with. Insecurity is the major reason why migrants from different ethnic groups prefer to live in settlements, i.e., rent or build houses close to people from the same ethnic group. For instance, people of Hausa/Fulani ethnic origin are largely found in Sabo in Makola, Ojoo and Sasa areas of Ibadan mainly for strategic reasons. The Igbo choose to live in houses owned by fellow Igbo persons or in areas with a huge Igbo presence. Apart from protecting group and ethnic interests, migrants form ethnic associations as a survival and coping strategy against ethnic victimisation and discrimination.

The frequent occurrence of ethnic riots and hostilities in Nigerian cites in the past 50 years, which usually leads to quick departure of migrants to their homelands, continues to engender ethnic consciousness and the need to learn one's ethnic language in addition to the host community's language. Residence in cities outside of one's ethnic base is often seen as transient.

(ii) As an instrument of exclusion

The use of language to exclude others in discourse is not in doubt. Some respondents disclosed that they resorted to speaking Igbo whenever they did not want their Yoruba friends or neighbours to understand the topic of discussion. According to Cynthia (a university undergraduate), 'What you don't want the Yoruba people to understand, you could easily express it in Igbo'. Similarly, Ngozi (a 19-year-old sales girl) said: 'Igbo helps me relate secrets to my siblings in the midst of Yoruba persons'. For Chikezie (a 13-year-old JSS 2 student): 'If my mother doesn't want other people to understand a particular topic, she discusses it with me in Igbo'.

(iii) To mark ethnic identity

Identity along ethnic lines has 'historical, geographical and political origins' (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005: 7) having evolved from the old regional structures of the Nigerian federation where identities were shaped by the dominant ethnic groups – Hausa/Fulani in the Northern region, Igbo in the Eastern region and Yoruba in the Western region. With the further division of the country into six geopolitical zones – Southeast, Southwest, South-south, Northeast, Northwest, and Northcentral – ethnic identities are strengthened through the recognition of more ethnic blocs. These divisions continue to provide the basis for exclusion and discrimination. The system of discriminatory citizenship is, therefore, commonplace all over Nigeria.

Nigeria's ethnic composition is extremely complex. It is estimated that over 250 ethnic groups speaking over 500 languages exist in Nigeria (see, e.g., USCIRF, 2016: 101). Each of these ethnic groups possesses unique cultural practices. Identity in Nigeria is conceived of in terms of specific ethnic groupings (de Kadt and Ige, 2005). Thus, individuals see themselves first as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, etc. before seeing themselves as Nigerians. Nigerian identity only becomes significant when the country is juxtaposed with another, e.g., in sports, in contests for international appointments (as in when Nigeria's former Minister of Finance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, contested the

position of World Bank presidency or the Director-General of the World Trade Organisation, or when Agbani Darego contested for Miss World).

Expectedly, most respondents learnt Igbo in order to mark their ethnic identity. For Cynthia (an interviewee), 'when you speak Igbo, you easily identify with the Igbo people'. Onyinye (a university undergraduate) provides further details: 'I learnt Igbo because it is my language. It helps to identify me as an Igbo, and it will be a shame to say that one is an Igbo and yet unable to speak the language'. Uche (a 22-year-old university undergraduate) agreed with Onyinye and noted: 'In some social gatherings involving the Igbo people, one is expected to speak Igbo fluently and it will be disgraceful if one is unable to speak it well. Speaking English in such occasions will be interpreted as disrespectful'. A similar view was expressed by Chisom (a university undergraduate): 'Speaking Igbo helps me to fit in properly each time I travel to my village. Not speaking it could be embarrassing in Igboland'. So, in serving to mark identity, ability to speak Igbo facilitates socialisation in the Igbo home base. Samson believed that 'Igbo facilitates Igbo identity both in Ibadan and Igboland'. The inability of Igbo persons to speak Igbo may be a barrier to full Igbo identity and the gains associated with it, such as getting employment in Igboland. It may also create relocation problem to an Igbo in the Igbo homeland in emergence situations. The Igbo language expresses the culture of the Igbo and is, therefore, an integral part of their identity. Although there may be strong correlation between language and ethnic distribution, it must, however, be pointed out that the social definition of an ethnic group has many aspects of which language is just one (Blench, 2003).

Nonetheless, some Igbo youth deny their Igbo identity or disguise as Yoruba for some gains. According to Gabriel (an interviewee):

> When Yoruba people know you are Igbo, they don't like it. Most of my customers are Yoruba, especially auto mechanics. Sometimes I deny my Igbo identity in order to enjoy patronage from them.

In a related experience, Ijeoma (a 23-year-old postgraduate student) claimed that a Yoruba landlord denied her accommodation because of her Igbo ethnic origin when she was an undergraduate. Consequently, when she returned for her postgraduate studies, she disguised as a Yoruba and was given accommodation by another Yoruba landlord. When asked why Yoruba landlords were reluctant to rent their houses to Igbo youngsters, she said that some of the landlords perceived Igbo teenagers as stubborn and arrogant. Such stereotypes are commonplace in Nigeria. Among the major ethnic groups, widely known stereotypes exist. For instance, the Igbo are said to be hardworking, uncompromising and can do anything for money. The Yoruba are considered well educated, crafty and fun loving. The Hausa are held to be domineering, honest, and highly religious and do not value human lives. These stereotypes are sometimes used as sources of discrimination.

(iv) Integration and interaction

Most Igbo youth in Ibadan learn Yoruba for the purposes of integration and interaction with the Yoruba. Chioma (a university undergraduate), Ikem (a 14-year-old JSS 3 student), Eze (an undergraduate), Joy (a 19-year-old salesgirl), and Dennis (a 23-year-old trader) felt strongly about the integrative role of Yoruba for the Igbo in Ibadan. According to Dennis, 'You relate better with the Yoruba when you are able to speak

their language'. Closely related to the integrative role of Yoruba is the need to facilitate communication particularly with the Yoruba who do not understand English.

(v) Instrumental value

Young Igbo people in Ibadan learn both Igbo and Yoruba for their instrumental value. Chisom (an interviewee) pointed out:

> As an Igbo speaker of Yoruba, one will not be cheated in market transactions. Ability to speak Yoruba could be helpful in securing employment in schools or rural areas where Yoruba knowledge is essential.

Chikezie (a respondent) revealed that his ability to speak both Igbo and Yoruba helped him to serve as an interpreter to his Yoruba neighbours who are traders. He occasionally got some little rewards for his services. Joy (a 19-year-old salesgirl) and Eberechi (another respondent) underscored the prospects of job opportunities for the Igbo youth who speak Yoruba. The efficacy of Yoruba language proficiency in facilitating business transactions was emphasised by Peace (a 21-year-old trader) and Gabriel (another respondent). As a teacher, the ability to speak Yoruba has enhanced Orji's professional performance as he could resort to making explanations in Yoruba whenever his students did not understand a particular topic in English. Ikem and Adaeze (interviewees) have also expressed reasons of instrumental value in respect of Igbo. While Ikem claimed that the ability to speak Igbo was a pre-condition for getting the recently introduced scholarships and bursaries in his State (Imo), Adaeze thought that the ability to speak Igbo would be beneficial if she decided to seek a job in Igboland.

Item 5: Have you suffered any discrimination in Ibadan because of your ethno-linguistic background?

Only a few respondents claimed to have suffered some form of discrimination in Ibadan based on their language and ethnic backgrounds. Nnadi (a respondent) claimed that a food attendant gave him a less attractive plate of food in a wedding ceremony when she realised that he was not Yoruba. Ijeoma claimed that a Yoruba landlord refused to rent his house to her because of her Igbo ethnic origin. Orji, who claimed to have suffered job-related discrimination, stated that he had always rented houses owned by non-Yoruba landlords because of the claimed refusal of Yoruba landlords to rent houses to young Igbo persons. Some house owners do not rent houses to people from certain ethnic groups because of some stereotypes about how people from such ethnic groups handle people's property. In certain communities, land is hardly leased or sold to non-natives or to specific ethnic groups. Confirming discriminations in leasing land spaces to non-indigenes, Fourchard (2003: 10-11) reveals in respect of Hausa migrants that:

> There is a real problem of land available for migrants. This is particularly the case for the latest wave of Hausa immigrants (probably from the late seventies), for whom access to land is difficult or almost impossible. On the one hand, there is obviously some discriminatory allocation of urban land. For community leaders, this factor is an important determinant in the transformation of the ward into slum (like Ojoo or Sasa). On the other hand, if Hausa traders become rich,

> it is unlikely that they will invest money in the area because the political situation is uncertain.

Access to land in Government Reserved Areas (GRAs) is almost impossible for migrants particularly when government allocates such lands. Rich migrants may, however, buy such lands from land speculators (those reselling their own allocation) at exorbitant prices. The same is also true for allocation of shops in major markets.

Doris (a postgraduate student) claimed that a lecturer who initially showed interest in assisting her with university admission suddenly backed out when he realised that she was Igbo. It should be noted that discrimination exists because of stiff competition among different ethnic and linguistic groups for a space in public schools and universities, job placements, land, accommodation, shops or stores, market allocation, public hospitals, etc. Declining job opportunities in the public sector have motivated governments and individuals to strive to reserve the limited spaces for indigenes of the state or members of a particular ethnic group.

At the national level, the struggle for the distribution of societal resources has generated a fierce battle for political space. Spaces in the federal civil service are, however, filled based on quota, which ensures the representation of every state in its appointments. This in itself is discriminatory because merit is sometimes sacrificed for equitable representation. At the state and local government levels, employment is strongly linked to ethnicity. The informal sector is also not spared by the grip of ethnicity. According to Blench (2003: 12), 'the informal economy of Nigeria is driven by ethnicity, with particular trades and jobs dominated by specific ethnic groups and access to credit being consequently restricted'. For instance, the Hausa are known to dominate in mechanised farming, currency exchange and cattle trading. The Igbo are said to dominate in auto spare parts and pharmaceutical businesses while the Yoruba are known to dominate in textile business, communications, and entertainment.

Item 6: What is the reaction of the Yoruba when you speak Igbo in their midst?

Most respondents indicated that the Yoruba in Ibadan appreciated the Igbo youth who spoke Yoruba in their midst better than those who spoke Igbo. In fact, it was claimed that speaking Igbo in the midst of Yoruba persons attracted disdain or suspicion. Chioma revealed: 'My Yoruba friends feel discriminated against when I speak Igbo, and would want to know what I'm talking about'. Onyinye observed that her Yoruba friends would prefer that she spoke either Yoruba or English and reacted negatively whenever she spoke Igbo. Uche (an undergraduate student) said: 'My friends don't want me to speak Igbo. They feel insecure whenever I speak Igbo with another Igbo person. They prefer that I speak Yoruba. But some of them show interest in learning Igbo when I speak it'. Oluchi (a 17-year-old SS 3 student), Peace, Eberechi and Adaeze (other respondents) who complained that their Yoruba friends and neighbours often felt they were gossiping about them or insulting them whenever they spoke Igbo corroborated the feeling of insecurity. However, Ruth (a postgraduate student) deliberately spoke Igbo in the midst of her Yoruba friends as her way of paying them back for always speaking Yoruba without considering her presence. She explained:

> My Yoruba friends don't like it when I speak Igbo. They tell me not to speak that language. So, deliberately I speak Igbo with my Igbo girlfriends to spite my Yoruba friends who always speak Yoruba in my presence.

As a safety measure, Doris and Gabriel avoided speaking Igbo in order not to offend Yoruba persons. According to Doris, 'I don't speak it [Igbo] because my neighbours don't like Igbo persons'. In the same vein, since his friends did not like it when he spoke Igbo, Gabriel preferred speaking Yoruba even with his Igbo friends. Chidi confirmed that in his postgraduate hostel, many students of Igbo origin did not feel free speaking Igbo. Instead, they preferred to speak Yoruba or English for fear of intimidation. Oha (2004: 285) had earlier made a similar observation with respect to minority language speakers:

> It should be noted that the tendency to speak the language of the large-population ethnic group may not always be as a result of the desire for inclusion in the large ethnic population, even though it may create that impression. Some speakers of the small-population languages sometimes speak the large-population languages as a way of pretending to deny their real ethno-linguistic identities and to obtain favour (as a desirable ethnic other) when, in reality, they would rather die than give up their cultural identities. In this case, the endangered small-population language speaker enters into the role of the trickster, much like the tortoise in Nigerian folktales.

Orji describes his dilemma in a Yoruba-dominated school:

> In our staff common room, there are two Igbo speakers out of 18 teachers. My colleagues become uncomfortable whenever we try to speak Igbo. But when they are discussing in their language, they don't even remember that there is somebody who is Igbo. In staff meetings, they mostly speak Yoruba and don't bother to explain it to us. One day, one of us lost his wife. So, they asked volunteers to attend her funeral. I didn't understand what was asked in Yoruba and I missed the burial. That is one of the things that made me to start learning Yoruba.

Orji's experiences perhaps encapsulate the dilemma of many Igbo youth in Ibadan.

CONCLUSION

The Igbo youth learn Yoruba to enable them find space in Ibadan and its environs. The complexities of locating space compel some of them to sometimes disguise as Yoruba in order to gain acceptance and favourable perception. The majority of the Igbo youth in Ibadan learn Igbo as a strategy to maintain their Igbo identity and find space in Igboland whenever the need arises. Since the indigene-settler relationship is based on the principle of exclusion (Adesoji & Alao, 2009; Mamdani, 2001), the young Igbo persons will continue to be regarded as non-indigenes and are likely to be facing restricted access to space no matter how long they live in the city. As long as discriminatory citizenship is practised in the country, language and ethnicity will remain crucial in the search for space by settlers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The earlier version of this paper was presented at the Urban Space Research Network (USRN 2012) in the University of Heidelberg, Germany, 4–6 October 2012. We thank the conference participants for their useful comments.

REFERENCES

Adesoji, A. O. and Alao, A. (2009) Indigeneship and citizenship in Nigeria: myth and reality. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 2(9), 151-165.

Blench, R. (2003) Position paper: The dimensions of ethnicity, language and culture in Nigeria. Final Report, prepared for DFID, Nigeria.

de Kadt, E. and Ige, B. O. (2005) Finding "space" in South Africa: Constructing identity as a Nigerian. In Finlayson, R. and Slabbert, S. (eds.) *Language and identities in a postcolony*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Fourchard, L. (2003) Urban Slums Report: The case of Ibadan, Nigeria. www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/Global_Reports/pdfs/Ibadan. Accessed 23-06-2012.

Igboanusi, H. and Wolf, H-G. (2009) The role of ethnically mixed marriages in language shift: A case study of Nigeria's minority languages. In Igboanusi, H. (ed.) Language shift in West Africa. A special issue of the *Sociolinguistic Studies* 3(3), 451-464.

Igboanusi, H. and Peter, L. (2016) Language-in-education politics in Nigeria. *International Journal of Bilingual education and bilingualism*. 19(5), 563-578.

Mamdani, M. (2001) Beyond settler and native as political identities: overcoming the political legacy of colonialism. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43(4), 651-664.

Oha, O. (2004) National politics and the deconstruction of linguistic subjectivity in Nigeria. In Segun Awonusi and E.A. Babalola (eds.) *The Domestication of English in Nigeria: A Festschrift for Abiodun Adetugbo at 65*, 280-297. Lagos: University of Lagos Press.

Olateyo, T. (2022) Attitudes of educated Nigerians towards varieties of English. *Language Matters*, 53(1), 81-102.

Osaghae, E. E. and Suberu, R.T. (2005) A history of identities, violence and stability in Nigeria. CRISE Working Paper No. 6.

Oyedokun-Alli, W. A. (2014) Language attitude among the political class in Nigeria: implications for national development. I*nternational Journal of English Linguistics*, 4(5), 52-58.

Oyetade, O. S. (2001) Attitude to foreign languages and indigenous language use in Nigeria. In Herbert Igboanusi (ed.) *Language Attitude and Language Conflict in West Africa,* 14-29. Ibadan: Enicrownfit.

Pauwels, A. (2005) Maintaining the community language in Australia: challenges and roles for families. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 8(2&3), 124-131.

Schüpbach, D. (2009) Language transmission revisited: family type, linguistic environment and language attitudes. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 12(1), 15-30.

Senayon, E. (2018) The language provisions of the national policy of on education

and the endangerment of Ogu in Southwestern Nigeria. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*.
doi: 10.1080/13670050.2018.1528205. Accessed 07/02/2023.

Tuominen, A. (1999) Who decides the home language? A look at multilingual families. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 140, 59-76.

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), *Annual Report 2015*(2016) http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf. Accessed 07/02/2023.

Herbert Igboanusi *is a professor of Sociolinguistics at Linguistics and African Languages Department of the University of Ibadan, where he has been teaching and researching since 1996. His research interests include bilingual education, varieties of English, and medical discourse.*
E-mail: higboanusi@yahoo.com

Oyetayo Bankale *is a Senior Lecturer at Linguistics and African Languages Department of the University of Ibadan, where she teaches courses on phonology. Her research interests include sociophonetics, phonology and Applied linguistics.*
Email: tayo18bankale@yahoo.com