TOWARDS ENHANCING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN NIGERIAN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES THROUGH THE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH: A FOCUS ON THE IGBO IN THE DIASPORA

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Abstract

The focus of this paper was on enhancing the communicative competence of speakers of Nigerian indigenous languages in a non-native speaking environment especially the Igbo language. The primary object was to arrest the erosion of competence in the Igbo language among the Igbo in the diaspora. The paper advanced its thesis using the analytical method and library research methods, focusing mainly on reviews and analysis of relevant examples of possible real life activities. The theoretical framework of analysis of data was the communicative/functional theory. The paper concluded that applying the communicative language teaching strategies in teaching the Igbo in diaspora would address the deficiency of the learners in their ability to actually perform in the language in real-life situations. The paper recommended the training and re-training of Igbo language teachers both in the home and foreign lands to be facilitators rather than transmitters of learning, among other recommendations.

Keyword: Communicative Competence, Language, Diaspora And Communicative Language Teaching Strategies.

Introduction

Over the years, Nigerians in diaspora have grappled with the problem of keeping their native languages alive in foreign lands, especially Nigerians of the Igbo extraction. This is evidenced by the efforts of the Igbo to introduce the teaching of the Igbo language in some countries such as the United States of America, South Africa and a few other countries of the world.

To state the obvious, there are a number of consequences for individuals and groups who migrate to areas outside their homeland where another language serves as official and dominant language of communication. Such languages such as English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Chinese remain a threat to minority cultures and their language. Hence Oke (2013) observed that individuals and groups who are affected tend to lose their native tongue unnoticed in history.

Quoting the online Encarta Dictionary, Oke (2013:62) defined diaspora as "a dispersion of a people, language or culture that was formerly concentrated in one place". In other words, any dispersion of an originally homogenous entity such as language or culture defines diaspora. The Nigerian indigenous languages in diaspora are first and foremost encapsulated in African diaspora occasioned by

slave trade and then the deliberate migrations of Nigerians to foreign lands in search of better economic conditions, the need for labour, and security.

Generally speaking, language enables man to engage in self expressions from which he makes himself explicitly understood as language is not only an instrument of communication but also related to a set of values – values of which one's identity is constructed. Ogundare (2005) cited in Akudo (2013) averred that language is a facilitator and an index of a people's capacity to conquer nature and civilize their environment and is capable of carrying the burden of a society's value, experiences and ideologies. To Akudo, languages are much like living creatures that become endangered when their members dwindle. "When indigenous people lose their land, they lose their language" (Akudo,2013;30). Akudo (2013) identified a type of language which he called heritage language. A heritage language as explained by Akudo is the language typically acquired before a dominant language especially in a conglomeration of different ethnic groups and cultures but it is not completely acquired because of the individual's switch in that language. This incompletely acquired version of a home language then is what is known as heritage language. Children of Igbo origin who make use of heritage language may understand but cannot communicate and converse in Igbo as a result of (i) the influence of the official language and language of the environment (ii) failure of the Igbo parents to handover their ancestral language to their children but rather taking pride in their children's ability to speak English or other dominant languages of the environment more fluently than they do their native language. This, of course, constitutes the surest way to endangerment and extinction (iii) minimal formal training received in the language and the struggle with literacy skills using it in broader settings outside of the home, and (iv) the teaching methods employed by institutions where the language is taught, especially outside the home land.

This paper is centered on the teaching of the Igbo language, a major ethnic group in Nigeria whose ancestral home is located in the Eastern part of Nigeria and whose people and language were dispersed with those of other African people.
The major problem confronting this enquiry is the increasing decline of competence in the Igbo language among the Igbo population in the diaspora. The primary objective of this paper is to highlight the need to safeguard the linguistic heritage of the Igbo from erosion among the Igbo in the diaspora. Consequently, the Communicative Language Teaching strategies are recommended as the ideal approach that if used in teaching the Igbo in the diaspora would help them to gain appreciable competence in the language and keep the language afloat in the face of threats of endangerment and ultimate extinction. This paper covers reviews, theoretical description and analysis of data, presenting examples of simulations (scenarios of real life activities) that do confront the learner of the Igbo language from time to time. It is hoped that this paper will encourage the use of the right approach in teaching the language to learners in the diaspora in order to enhance the competence levels of learners in the language. This research will hopefully trigger off workshops, seminars, conferences and retraining of teachers of the Igbo language on language teaching methods and approaches.

The theoretical framework that informed and framed this study is the communicative/functional approach to language teaching .Developed by Dell Hyme in 1972, the central concern of this theory is the concept of communicative competence which emphasizes language as meaningful communication including the appropriate use of language in particular social contexts.

Language teaching, the language teacher and language teaching methods: An overview

As a concept, teaching has been variedly defined. Abolade in Ugwu and Okoronkwo (2013) defined teaching as a process of imparting knowledge or encoding information so that the decoder may be able to modify his behavior. To Ominyi (2008), teaching is an interactive session which involves the teacher and the learner .Corroborated by Aggraval in Ugwu (2013) teaching is an interactive process which involves four components: the teacher, the student, learning process and learning situation. In other words, teaching encapsulates the teacher, the learner, the process of imparting knowledge and the environment in which teaching and learning take place. Teaching therefore involves the wide body of knowledge about the subject taught and another set of knowledge about the most effective ways to teach that subject to different kinds of learners. Eneh-Onyegeli (2006) in her own definition saw teaching as transcending mere interaction between the teacher and the student. To her, the teacher's role of creating appropriate learning situations with the right methods is paramount for effective transfer of knowledge.

In relation to language teaching, teachers need the right methods to effectively plan learning activities to motivate and aid learners in achieving the set objectives. Abolade (2000) perceived teaching methods as professional competencies which a teacher applies to facilitate and enhance learning. Thus, they are the already tested and proven teaching skills that can help a teacher to achieve his lesson objectives if applied conscientiously.

Results of research findings carried out at various times by Igbo scholars on the status of the Igbo language, showed the inability of most Igbo children in the diaspora to speak the language competently. Effective strategies for transferring the knowledge of the language should therefore be found as a matter of necessity in order to preserve the language and shield it from the looming death and extinction as predicted by UNESCO. To accomplish the above, the teacher wields the greatest power as an initiator, facilitator and assessor of the learning efficiency. Invariably, it falls on the teacher to decide the skills the learner must acquire as well as the process by which such behavior modification takes place. Sekiziyivu & Mugimu (2017:9) therefore asserted that "the major task of the teacher is to create a learning environment or a setting for learners to acquire language using it through activities in class." The teacher, as submitted by William in Ugwu & Okoronkwo (2013), should be stimulated to think of alternative ways of planning the classroom in order to, not only be a worthy model of the linguistic skill he seeks to impart but also have a clear idea of the best methods to achieve his goals. To achieve this, the language teacher has got a variety of language teaching

methods to select from since as reported by Olajide (2000) the revolution that has occurred in linguistic science and language teaching over the years has produced a number of methods.

Okonkwo (2005), Oguntonade (1989) cited in Ugwu and Okoronkwo (2013) identified two theoretical language teaching methods: the formalists view which advocates deductive teaching (teaching of the rules of language) and the activists view which teaches that learners should be made to hear and use language. The deductive and inductive methods were further described by Oguntonade as expository or simple lecture method and inquiry method respectively. The inductive approach presumes that the learner knows nothing about the lesson ab-initio, the inductive approach on the other hand, assumes that the learner should find out the facts himself and so he is presented with leading questions, examples, rules to the required facts, definitions or generalizations that would enable him find the facts. The integration and realism approaches are two main approaches to language identified by William (1989). Integration approach associates practice with the theory and explains it while concept of realism connects to the actual condition in the classroom where the teacher is expected to accept the conditions and adopt a pragmatic approach that goes with the conditions. William further explained that every other method draws from these approaches. It is deducible therefore that language teaching methods though varied, are based on either the deductive or inductive approaches. Some approaches are actually a combination of these two main approaches.

Okonkwo (2005) listed out the various teaching methods to include: The Grammar translation method (GTM), Direct Method (DM),Audio Lingual Method (AL'M), Cognitive-code Learning (CLM), Cognitive Method (CM), the Functional Notional Approach (FNA), and the Eclectic method (EM) this list though is far from being exhaustive as there are many more methods.

Enhancing the communicative competence of the learner of the Igbo language through the communicative language teaching strategies
The communicative language teaching method (CLT) is recent in language teaching and learning. Developed as a replacement of earlier methods, this method is aimed at developing creative outlets among learners. The communicative teaching method was originally developed in the early 1970s by Dell Hymes and further built upon by Canale and Swan. Canale and Swan (1980) cited by Sreelari (2012) refer to communicative competence as the underlying system of knowledge and skill required for communication. Hence Lindsay and knight (2006) commented that the supportive teaching learning environment for enhancing the acquisition of communicative competence in the classroom should actually feature
(i)   Activities that require frequent interaction among learners or with other interlocutors to exchange information and solve problems.
(ii)   Use of authentic (non-pedagogic) texts and communication activities linked to real world contexts, often emphasizing links across written and spoken modes and channels

(iii)   Learner centered approaches which take into consideration learners' backgrounds, language needs and goals and generally allow learners some creativity and role in instructional decisions. Sreelari (2012) contributed that a communicative language features a wide range of activities such as role plays, interviews, discussions, information, gap activities, language games, language learning simulations, problem solving tasks, quizzes and survey.Given the forgoing, learners of the Igbo language in a non-native speaking environment can sharpen their competence if they are taught using communicative language teaching strategies.

The major task of the teacher in a communicative learning classroom will be to create a learning environment or a setting for learners to acquire language by using it through activities in class. In the classroom, he plays the role of an adviser and monitor of students' performance. In the CLT- classroom therefore, the teachers' role changes from a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of knowledge/ learning. Jin, Singh and Li (2005) suggested that he (the teacher) might make notes of students' errors to be corrected at a later time. The CLT approach is basically a learner centred approach where the teacher's role is less dominant. The students interact with one another in various configurations such as in pairs, triads, small groups and whole groups. As observed by Snow (1996) learners learn effectively about language when they take part actively in the communication of the language rather than only passively accepting what the teacher said. Based on that, Sekiyivu and Mugimu (2017:9) added:

> It is therefore expected that in an ideal classroom learners are not mere recipients of the language produced by the teacher but they are active participants in the actual language production. This further implies that the teacher is no longer a mere instructor but a facilitator in the process of language production.

Consequent upon the above, the teacher should "set up the communication situation and encourage learners to participate in such activities as role plays, simulations and social interactions in a near natural-linguistic and social environment in order to use language for communication" (Lin2011:20); as over-emphasis on the learning of grammatical structures would prevent the learners from developing the basic communicative competence. Hence Ogwude (2007) in Okafor (2013) advised that the language teacher must be desirous of improving teaching learning performances in the class at all times, especially through innovative teaching methods as there is a need to depart from old methods of teaching.

Below are a few examples of activities that can feature in a communicative language class while teaching the learner of the Igbo language in English language dominated environment.

N'ahia

Onye nzuta ahia:	Ego ole ka ina-ere akpukpo ukwu a?
Onye na-ere ahia:	O bu puku naira abuo
Onye nzuta ahia:	Ahia gi di onu. O buna I gaghi ere ya otu puku naira?

Onye na-ere ahia: Ee Agaghim ereputa isi ego m ma m ree ya etu ahu
Onye nzuta ahia: Gini bu ezigbo onu ya?
Onye na-ere ahia: Ngwa nye m puku naira na okara. Nke a bu ezigbo onu ya
One na-azu ahia: O di mma. Kechiere m ya

Translation
market Place
Buyer: How much is this pair of shoes sold?
Seller: It is sold for two thousand naira
Buyer: It is costly! Won't you sell it for one thousand naira?
Seller: No. I won't realize the cost price if I sell it for that amount
Buyer: What is the bottom price then?
Seller: Give me one thousand five hundred naira. That's the bottom price
Buyer: Alright. Package it for me

N'oba akwukwo
Oguu: Onwere akwukwo m na-acho igu
Onye nlekota oba akwukwo: Kedu isi okwu ya?
Oguu: Isi okwu ya bu "Udeeze" nke Nnenne Okafor deputara
Onye nlekota oba akwukwo: I nwere mpempe akwukwo ga-enye gi ohere I were na igu akwukwo n'oba akwukwo anyi a?
Oguu: Eee, e jim ya n'ebe a
Onye nlekota oba akwukwo: O di mma, jee n'igbe di gi n'ihu, were kwa isi okwu akwukwo nke I na-acho ma obu aha onye dere ya chota akara ya

Oguu: A hula m ya
Onye nlekota oba akwukwo: O di mma. Lee anya n'ahiri akwukwo di n'aka nri gi, I ga-achota ya n'ebe ahu.

Translation
In the library
Reader: There is a book I want to read
Library attendant: What is the title of the book?
Reader: The title is "Udeeze" authored by Nnenne Okafor
Library attendant: Do you have your own library card?

Reader: Yes, I have it here with me

Library attendant: Alright. Proceed to the index box and search out the title using the title of the book or the name of the author.

Reader: I have seen it

Library attendant: Alright.   Look at the books arranged on the shelf by your right handside, you will find it there.

Ekele ututu

Nne Njoku: Nne Okorie unu aboolachi?

Nne Okorie: Ee, nwanyi oma, unu eteela?

Nne Njoku: Nnanyiukwu na umuaka gi, ha eteela?

Nne Okorie: Ee. Ndi nkegi kwanu?

Nne Njoku: Anyi aboolachi

Nne Okorie: Ekele diri Chukwu oo

Translation

Greeting (in the morning)

Njoku's mother: Good morning, Okorie's mother. Hope you woke up well

Okorie's mother: Good morning, good lady

Njoku's mother: I hope your husband and children woke up well.

Okorie's mother: Certainly. How about your own people?

Njoku's mother: We have all woken up well

Okorie's mother: May God be praised!

Irio mgbaghara

Chima (n'iwe) Obu onye dokara akwukwo m a

Dike: Biko e wela iwe, o si n'elu oche dapu n'ala. Mgbe m na-acho ka m welite ya amaghi m mgbe m seere azu

    ya o wee dokaa.

Chima: Aka m zuru akwukwo n'unyaahu. E tu akwukwo a siri

    dokaa na-ewe m iwe n'obi nke ukwu.

Dike: Biko ewala iwe Ghaghara. Akpachaghi m anya dokaa

    ya.

Translation

Rendering apology

Chima (angry): Who is it that tore my book?

Dike: Don't be offended, please. It fell from the table. And

    in an attempt to pick it up, I mistakenly held it by the cover and it tore.

Chima: I bought this book just yesterday and I am upset by the

    fact that it has already torn.

Dike: Don't be angry, please I didn't tear it intentionally.

N'ulo ogwu

Onye Oria: Dibia bekee, ahu adichaghim

Dibia bekee: Kedu ka o si eme gi?

Onye oria: Isi na-awa m, ahu na-ere m oku, afo na achighari

    kwa m

Dibia bekee: Kedu mgbe obidoro?

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Onye oria:	Obidoro ka mgbe abali abuo gara aga.
Dibia bekee:	O nweela ogwu inuru
Onye oria:	Mba
Dibia bekee:	I na-erikwa nri nke oma
Onye oria:	Mba. Odigh ekwe m rie nri.
Dibia bekee:	Ngwa jee n'ebe ana-enye ogwu ka ha nye gi ogwu ndia m deputara. Nuo ogwu ndi ahu dika a ga-akowara gi. I ga-abiaghachi n'ulo ogwu n'abali ato na-abia.
Onye oria:	O di mma, Dibia bekee. Ndeewo

Translation
In the hospital

Patient:	Doctor I am not feeling well.
Doctor:	How do you feel?
Patient:	I feel a severe headache, and feverish, my stomach is also churning.
Doctor:	When did that start?
Patient:	It started since two days ago.
Doctor:	Have you taken any medication?
Patient	No
Doctor:	Do you eat well?
Patient:	No. I don't have appetite for food.
Doctor:	Now go to the pharmacy and take these drugs which I have prescribed. Take the drugs according to prescription and see me in three days time.
Patient:	Alright, Doctor. Thank you

The above dialogues on the different subjects could be practiced in the classroom by learners. Activities like debates, short plays and other interactive activities that provide opportunities for active participation can be of help in facilitating language teaching and learning and also encouraging communicative competence in the learner.

Conclusion
The teaching method, approach or strategy used by the teacher in building the competence of the learner in any language is the bedrock to achieving the objective of the teacher. Sekiyivu and Mugimu (2017) concurred by stating that the root of the problem of learners' deficiency in their ability to actually use the target language lies in the teaching strategy itself. This implies that teaching strategies or approaches are extremely vital to learners' acquisition of communicative competences.

This paper strongly advocates the use of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) strategies as an ideal approach to teaching the Igbo language to learners in the diaspora. This approach aims to help the learner revitalize the use of their dormant grammatical skills by encouraging inter-personal communication. This

involves real life situations in which speech arts such as playing games, greeting, requesting, rendering apology, etc, are employed. This paper highlighted the role of the teacher as a facilitator of language production and not merely an instructor. With the CLT strategies the dwindling competence in the Igbo language among the Igbo population in the diaspora will be arrested to a very great and appreciable extent.

Recommendations
Based on the above conclusions, this paper recommends the need for the teacher of Igbo language in the diaspora to be trained on the successful use of the CLT strategies as well as other methods which encourage learners' communicative use of the language. Consequently, refresher and retraining programmes should be conducted periodically to retrain and refresh teachers on the use of the CLT strategies.

Benefits of the CLT approach especially in terms of promoting language communicative competence in existing contexts in the Igbo in the diaspora should be emphasized.

Teachers need to provide language expressions that could be of use to students in their day to day life as well as emphasize the use of authentic materials and language learning simulations. Implementation of these recommendations will in no small measure arrest the looming endangerment, death and extinction of the Igbo language.

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