

LANGUAGE FACTOR IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN IGBO LAND

Onyeka John Egwuonwu

*Department of Religion and Human Relations,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*

Abstract

The quest for economic enrichment, spreading of the good news of our Lord Jesus and the expansion of the kingdom necessitated the Christian missionary to Africa especially in Igbo for settlement. Looking at the activities of missionaries, it was the gospel that motivated them to Igbo land amongst many other benefits found therein. Thus, this paper aimed at investigating language factor in the nineteenth century Christian missionary enterprise in Igbo land. The paper made use of expo-factor research design to collect data and a review of literature in form of journal articles, textbooks and internet. Content analysis method was used to analyzed the contents of this paper. Thus, the finding of this paper shows that Igbo language was a vital instrument used in the spread of gospel messages in Igbo land during the nineteenth century Christian movements. The paper concludes that, through the Christian missionaries, school, churches, civilization, urbanization, development of standard Igbo language and impact of skill acquisition to people were achieved in Igbo land. Therefore, the paper recommends that Igbo language should be generally recognized as a language of preaching the gospel to people in Igbo land for better understanding of the gospel. Also, Igbo language should be made the language of commerce, school, and marketing religion in Igbo land and not only for the spread of gospel messages.

Keywords: Language, Christian, Missionary, Igbo land

Introduction

Igbo language is one of the official languages of Nigeria. It is the mother tongue of Igbo people. Igbo language is spoken among people Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Imo and Ebonyi as well as most people in the North East of the Delta state. Also, the language is spoken by people in South East of the Rivers state. After a great revival in the early church, Christians felt the need to preach the gospel to others as committed into their hands. They desired to take the gospel to other parts of the world where the gospel has not reached or places where the gospel has not dominated. This led to extensive evangelism by various Christian bodies to other parts of the globe. Igbo geographical territory which is part of

West Africa was among the chosen territory for the apostolic work. During the 19th century, various Christian missionary bodies trooped into Igbo land for evangelistic purposes. At the initial stage, language wanted to be a barrier in spreading the gospel to the indigenous people in various place in Igbo land. This is because most of the people did not understand English language. As a result, Igbo indigenes who were appointed by the missionaries became the interpreters, thus translating the gospel in Igbo language to the people. For example, Simon Jonas who was a member of Church Missionary Society (CMS) that came to proclaim the gospel in Igbo land during the 19th century was crucial in the evangelistic enterprise. According to Okpalaike and Nwadiakor (2015):

Simon Jonas a liberated slave from Sierra Leone of Igbo parentage was able to form alliance with the King of Aboh, Obi Ossai with Simon Jonas acting as an interpreter. Here the missionaries succeeded in preaching the gospel message to the king and his people. During the encounter with the king, Jonas was asked to translate the Beatitudes in Igbo language. As he translated the gospel, the king was said to have been so impressed with his eloquence and apparent erudition (p. 5).

So, the indigenous people of Igbo understood the gospel and many received it with their whole heart. Henceforth, one could understand that Igbo language was of paramount importance and served as a missionary tool in the 19th century Christian movements in Igbo land.

Concept of Social Change

Change is the replacement of an old thing with a new one or the alteration of something from one another. Change occurs in terms of character, size, form, appearance and composition of an entity. A change which results in or is evident in social life is termed social change. Thus, social change is defined as a continuous process in any given community or society. Humberg, Schrag and Larsen (2005), sees social change as the representation of any observable difference in any social phenomena over a period of time. Anele (1999) opined that social change is any significant alteration in social structures including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms, values, cultural products and symbols. Social change is a continuous process of variations in social behaviour which is present in all society as in other forms and modifications of life. The social change includes non-material aspects of things such as belief, language, knowledge and values. Akujobi and Jack (2017) opines that social change can also be seen as the alteration, rearrangement or total replacement of phenomena, activities, values or processes through time in a society in a succession of events. The alteration or rearrangement may involve simple or complex changes in the

structure, form or shape of the social phenomena. Thus, no matter what quarters social change is considered, it is any measurable or observable alternation or shift from existing or social approved and accepted pattern of life of an organized social group. Such a shift or alterations could be planned or unplanned and could either be totally or partially welcomed or frowned at.

Okpalaike and Nwadiolor (2015) agreed that the advent of Christian missionaries brought a lot of social change in Igbo societies and such social change include new way of marriages, marital rites, white wedding, new farming techniques, clothing styles, education, communication and new language learning. Akujobi and Jack (2017) supported this view when they said that the recent advent of information communication technology in Nigeria and Igbo land in particular has changed the nature of social interaction and pattern of social organization to a inform of telephone communication, internet dating, electronic banking, electronic commerce and virtual social media learning and information dissemination activities. The need to proffer solutions to social problems resulted to social change in Igbo society. This is true, when Christianity came to Igbo land, they change the culture, beliefs, dressing code, production techniques and replace them with Western styles which is detrimental to the dignity of Igbo people today.

Theoretical Framework

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Diffusion of innovation theory was developed by Everett Rogers in 1962. Diffusion according to Anele (1999) is the spread of cultural traits from group to group. It is also the process usually, but not necessarily gradual by which elements or systems of culture are spread and by which an invention or a new institution adopted in one place is adopted in neighboring areas, and in some cases, continues to be adopted in adjacent ones, until it may spread over the whole earth. Thus, the theory explains how, why and at what rate new ideas spread. It is the process by which an innovation or idea is communicated to people in a social system over a period of time (*Rogers and Everett, 1962*). According to Katz, Levin and Hamilton (1962), diffusion of innovation theory is the process of spreading in a given new practice over a time through social structures. Rogers proposed five main factors that influence the spread of a new idea in a social system. They include; the communication channels, adopters, innovation itself, time and social system itself. According to him, people as part of social system adopt a new practice, behaviour or idea introduced over a period of time. That is to say people do not willingly yield immediately to changes within a social system rather after a while, having confirmed the good and relevance of the new idea adopt it. Also, people who adopt the new idea or innovation early have various characteristics than those that adopted the idea later. Therefore, when

communicating an idea to people, it is necessary to understand the characteristics of the people that will aid or limit the adoption of the innovation. This process relies heavily on social capital. The innovation must be widely adopted in order to self-sustain. Within the rate of adoption, there is a point at which an innovation reaches critical mass.

In other word, diffusion innovation theory suggests that social change is as a result of diffusion of cultural patterns and practices of other societies which is a function of the spread of cultural practices from society to society. Ekpenyong (1993) opines that, great culture borrowers and likewise many cultures known to history have acquired its elements from other people. Akujobi and Jack (2017) observes that, diffusion theorists especially those from Britain propose that there were a few cultural centers from which inventions radiated to the non-inventive areas through cultural borrowing. For instance, in Ancient Near East, the Patriarchs of Israel borrowed from Nuzi and Mari culture practiced by other nations located in Ancient Near East. Also, the Jews and Romans borrowed some Hellenistic cultural practices. Many nations of the present world borrowed part of Jewish, Greek and Roman cultures such as Passover Feast, Pentecost, Western education, Athletics, Roman or Gregorian calendar, Christmas among others. Even in language, many nations borrowed from Greek and Roman languages. Examples include: Greek language was borrowed by the Jews to translate the Tanakh into Scripture (Septuagint, LXX), Jesus and his contemporaries spoke Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. New Testament despite being written by many Jews was documented mainly in Greek Language.

Afonja and Pearce (1984) made reference to Perry and Smith who identified Egypt as the source of archaic civilization from where philosophy, mathematics and other ancient arts circulated to the world. Also, writing and library service originated from Mesopotamia also known as the cradle of civilization. In affirmation to the above statement, Adamo and Al- Ansari (2020) agree that Mesopotamia were the first people in history to invent the cuneiform script which made the reporting of their achievements possible. Therefore, this had marked the beginning of written history.

In the modern society, the Western societies of Europe and America are seen as the cultural circles from which modern cultural traits diffuse into the third world countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America to change and develop they must adopt the cultural patterns and traits of the West. They supposed the need for the shift from traditionalism and diffusion of modernism in third world countries gave birth to the modernization theory of development and social change. This is true how many European nations came and colonized West Africa, introducing Africans to new religion in this context, Christian religion, foreign languages, western education, foreign mode of dressing, mechanized farming, modern banking system among others. The diffusion of innovation theory is criticized on the basis that much of the evidence for this theory, including the adopter

categories, did not originate in religion and it was not developed to explicitly apply to adoption of new behaviours or religious innovations. It does not foster a participatory approach to adoption of social change. It works better with adoption of behaviours rather than prevention of behaviours and it does not take into account an individual's resources or social support to adopt the new behaviour or innovation.

The diffusion of innovation theory is applicable to this paper. The diffusion innovation theory portrayed that social change comes through interaction and borrowing of cultural practices from and within nations that have boundaries with each other. The introduction of gospel by the missionaries in Igboland in ninth century was a new idea and belief to the people. The people in Igboland did not willingly embrace it immediately, as that belief was against the culture, custom and tradition of the people. Beside the Whiteman language used, there was a great barrier to the indigenous people of Igbo to understand what the White men were preaching. This barrier continued until when the Christian missionaries employed Simon Jonas and J.C Taylor the ex-slaves from Sierra Leone who understands the Whiteman language and translated the gospel to the people in Igbo language that people understood and became interested to learn more. So, the zeal of the Igbo people to learn more of the gospel and speak like the White man necessitated the Christian missionaries to establish schools, writing books in Igbo language, modernization of culture, tradition and belief of the Igbo people as well their language, dressing and way of life.

Brief History of Christianity in Igbo Territory

Christianity in Igbo land started in 1841 when Simon Jonas, an Igbo man who was sold into slavery to the Europeans and was rescued and dwelled in Sierra Leone and preached to children who came around him at Aboh. During 1853, a hundred Igbo men dwelling in Sierra Leone wrote to C.M.S demanding to send a group of missionaries to explore the possibilities of evangelical work in Igbo land and resettle there. In 1857, the full and permanent gospel mission began in Igboland when the C.M.S finally came to establish a permanent station in Igboland with their headquarters in Onitsha after making a brief stop-over at Aboh. Thus, the majority of missionaries sent by C.M.S were Igbo men. Isichei (1977) confirms this as he observes that "all the missionaries sent to Niger and Delta, the two frontiers of Igbo land most exposed to gospel mission were Africans from Sierra Leone although not all of them were Igbo indigenes" (p. 160). The headquarters in Onitsha was under the leadership of J.C. Taylor an Igbo man born in Sierra Leone who took over when Samuel Crowther went on to Rabba and the Onitsha mission was headed by J.C. Taylor. Taylor was accompanied with Simon Jonas who was a veteran of the 1841 and 1854 expeditions spread of the gospel in Onitsha. Also, the evangelical mission was

expanded in Onitsha with the help of Thomas Samuel who was an ex-slave Igbo man who was first recruited by the new trading post at Onitsha but later joined the mission which he served until his death in 1878. Furthermore, a Baptist deacon named Augustine Radillo who was another Igbo Christian ex-slave employed at the trading post helped in spreading the gospel. He was the prototype of the generations of Igbo Christians who would drop a meaningless foreign name to replace it with deep religious significance in his own case, Chukwuma. The gospel mission continued at Onitsha, until middle 1880s, when the C.M.S. had succeeded in reaching the whole Igbo land with missionary activities.

However, changes occurred in the evangelical work in Igboland during 1885 when other Christian associations like the Roman Catholic Missionaries (RCM) led by Reverend Fathers Lutz arrived at Igbo land in 1885. Few years later, a Northern Irish missionary body called Qua Iboe mission landed in 1887, the Primitive Methodists in 1920 came and opened permanent stations in Uzuakoli and Umuahia respectively. Catholic association, the Society of African Missions and Holy Ghost Fathers came to Igbo land. The Society of African Missions situated at Asaba, the Catholic association and Holy Ghost Fathers had its headquarters at Onitsha. It was during the 19th century that various Christian missionary bodies in Igbo land advancing the gospel enterprise with new opportunities both for individuals and for the Igbo nation. According to Afigbo (1999), the missionaries transformed the Igbo society much more radically than either the government or the traders did. This they did by insisting that the Igbo people and their neighbours could not actually become good Christians or attain salvation unless they modify their societies drastically along western lines. They offered western education, highly attractive bait which indigenous religion could not offer. Since the Igbo people were anxious to acquire the Whiteman's irresistible religion and knew this could only be done through going to school, they in time sent their children to the schools. The political, economic, religious and social life came to be dominated by the natives who had acquired the Whiteman's magic. In retrospect, all these could be seen as the birth pangs of the new society in Igbo land.

Missionaries and Social Change in Igbo Tradition

Before, the coming of Christian missionaries in Igboland in the 19th century, Igbo society was a nation in which their culture, tradition, custom and religion were closely bounded together. Achunike (2002) asserts the Igbo “political, social and economic lives were underpinned by a religion centered on the worship of a pantheon of deities and the veneration of the ancestors” (p. 30). In the process of changing the fundamental basis of Igbo society and the emergence of the new Igbo social system, the mission schools played an important role (Afigbo, 1981). Afigbo maintained that “the gospel was an instrument

for mobilization and acceptance for Christianity and by the same token a withdrawing from the old social order” (p. 340). This role was all the more crucial because those recruited by Christian missionaries through the school were children, that is the younger generation who had not yet been fully inducted into the culture and lured into the primitive and occult life.

Thus, the missionaries made serious changes in Igboland, many younger people of Igbo were indoctrinated against the evil practices inherent in the Igbo tradition and custom. The young people being transformed by the gospel desired to withdraw from involving in those celebrations and social process by which the values of Igbo society were transmitted from generation to generation. So, while time and death thinned down the ranks of the defenders of the old order, the ranks of the Christians were progressively being augmented. Therefore, slowly but steadily the new life in gospel became observable and gained dominance over the traditional way of life of the people. So, at the same time many children that were first sent to school and church such as slaves, outcasts and disabilities became grieved against traditional Igbo culture and society that had subdued them. They saw the new Christian order which was formed as an alternative to the Igbo society as good and could alleviate them from the entanglement of the bond of Igbo tradition and they were happy to escape.

Social Change Mechanisms Adopted by Christian Missionaries in Igboland

The Gospel

Before the missionaries arrived in Igbo territory, they have already formulated a policy that will guide their apostolic mission. First was to preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the host communities. For this policy to be successfully executed there was need to preach the Gospel in the language that would be well understood by the indigenous people. This was made possible by the use of freed slaves or ex-slaves as interpreters and subsequent introduction of Western education. As many indigenous people gladly received the Gospel, other good tidings followed suit. Moreover, the Gospel transformed and changed their lives to better. For instance, those who involved in slave trade stopped it since they have been taught that God hate such act, and that all are equal in the sight of God. Thus, the Gospel brought change to the social stratification and dichotomy between *Ohu* (slave), *Osu* (an outcaste) and *nwadiala* (free born) in traditional Igbo society.

Western Education

Education is a veritable agent of social change; it changes people from being ignorant to being literate. It comes to enlighten people and help them to know things that they would do to benefit the society. Western education brought to Igbo land by the European

Christian missionaries, helped to raise better standard of living among the indigenous people as it provided employment also.

Abolition of Slave Trade and Other Cultural Practices

Abolition of slave trade and other certain cultural practices considered detrimental to the dignity of the human person was another tool utilized to bring social change in Igbo land. At the arrival of the missionaries, they began to observe the cultural practices of the indigenous people. They found out that there were certain cultural practices that were detrimental to human person and biblically disapproved. These cultures include: such as slave trade, human sacrifice, killing of twins, burial of titled men or kings with human head and so forth. The missionaries played crucial role in abolition of slave trade in 1807 and stopped these cultural practices mentioned above. This made many indigenous people especially *ohu* (slave), *osu* (an outcaste) and women to join the new found faith that offered freedom and liberation to them.

Modern Commerce and Mechanical Agriculture

Having abolished slave trade, the missionaries made efforts to introduce modern commerce and mechanized agriculture. They brought exotic crops to the people which yielded much produce and were of high economic value. Thus, the indigenous people participated actively in these financially rewarding ventures which in turn brought socio-economic development to Igbo society.

Contribution of Christian Missionaries in Dignifying the Igbo Societal Status

Skill Acquisition

The movement of Christian missionaries in nineteenth century has taught Igbo people skills to manufacture a lot of things. Ayandele (1999) is of view that “Christian missionaries believed that making the Igbo people acquire skills was a greater power to raise and strengthened the people and as such they educate the Igbo children so as to fit to take high places in the advancement of the society the future” (p. 375). In the “Bible and the Plough” slogan as the basis of the mission in Igboland, the plough represents agriculture and industry. The missionaries' interest to foster the two among the Igbo people cannot be doubted. Samuel Ajayi Crowther in 1860 said that, a missionary should be a jack of all trade and master of all; one ready to put his hand to work and to do so in a legitimate way, anything that might lead to advance the cause of Christ” (Mgbemene, 1996). Basden (1983) also notes that in the Igbo territory, missions founded the first school of carpentry in the eighties and nineties centuries.

Although, when C.M.S came to Onitsha, they set up an Industrial Mission (O.I.M.) in 1900-1903 to train and educate young people mostly capable Christian youths in deferent

occupations such as trading, sewing, brick-layer, carpentry and tailoring. The purpose of training the Igbo indigenes in handicraft and other occupations was enabled them to take their position in the world as good and profitable citizens. Some Igbo young men underwent O.I.M's training and came out as carpenters, tailors and sawyers. Thus the ministry of the O.I.M not only demonstrated the dignity of working with one's hands but also opened the eyes of people that were not-well-educated to the possibility of using their hands and becoming self-reliant and successful Christian citizens. Also, the Christian missionaries developed the Igbo people on agricultural skill by including rural science as a subject on the primary school curriculum. They introduced mechanized agriculture with the aim of uplifting the able young Igbo people from primitive subsistence, and ignorant scratching of the soil to higher, more enlightened and modern ways of farming practices.

Economic Enrichment

The overseas slave trade stoppage contributed immensely in raising the economic status of Igbo people during nineteenth century. The abolition of slave trade brought about signing of treaties between Christian missionaries and local chiefs. Also, this strengthened the relationship between the missionaries the traditional rulers. The stoppage of slave trade led to the emergence of legitimate trade on palm oil in Igbo land. According to Alagoa (1999) the stoppage of slave trade and increase in Christian missionaries' presence were the most dramatic factors for a change of the economic status of the Igboland. The change in the economic practices eliminated the old trading practices, their controllers and opportunities for transacting with the White men. The palm oil trade attracted a lot young men and it required little capital and no elaborate organization like the oracle systems associated with the earlier trade. This new economic system which entails free participation by all and sundry was the foundation for the free enterprising nature of the Igbo.

However, Afigbo (1981) added that Igbo land was quite far reaching with varieties of raw cash and oil palm tries which are extracted and sold to White men. In fact the Igbo people made money and accumulated wealth in order to marry wives, raise large yam barns, and buy admission to titles and secret societies since it was from these that prestige and status derived. But with the new development money came to have value for its own sake and to convey status even when not invested in the purchase of status in the traditional manner. Initially the rulers of Igbo states always welcomed the missionaries for economic purposes. To this, Achunike (2002) notes that "the 1841 missionary expedition arrived at Aboh and they were well received by Obi Ossai, the king of course not perhaps without motives for economic gains" (p. 43). Onitsha in 1857 was a poor state and welcomed the missionaries in hope of increased prosperity. Onitsha's rapid rise to affluence in subsequent years seemed to justify this expectation and provided an object of lesson for

the rulers of other Igbo communities. A part from Onitsha, other parts of Igboland witnessed significant development during 19th century as a result of Christian missionaries' activities.

Civilization and Development

Civilization and development in Igbo land started with missionaries. Before, the coming of Christian missionaries, most all Igbo indigenes were living in rural areas or villages. The work of missionaries after they arrived in Igbo land yielded to urban development among the Igbo people. The most place that were developed as urban centers started as mission centers and later transformed to cities with various economic activities, ministries and parastatals. The missionaries being strangers in Igbo land depended on the rural people for their livelihood. They made use of rural labour to build their houses and maintain their surroundings. Thus, their coming and going led to development between the rural villages and the mission houses as people came to sell their goods to the missionaries or answer the clarion call of the gospel and its accompanying material benefits.

However, with the selling of goods by rural Igbo indigenes to Christian missionaries, this necessitated some of the Igbo people to come and settle close to the mission centres in order to be able to harness the economic advantages available for them. So, that was how urbanization started in Igbo land. For example, the mission house at Onitsha, the Christian village at Aguleri and the leprosarium at Uzuakoli were overshadowed by urbanization. As time went, urbanization became a strong catalyst among the Igbo people, the missionaries used formal education as a means of enlightening the people. Most indigenes that could afford to go to school left their villages and dwell in urban centres where they might be giving one menial job or the other. It was these men who started the movement for the formation of town and village unions.

Development of Standard Igbo Language

There was increasing relations existing between Christian missionaries and the Igbo indigenes through buying and selling, occupational engagements, amongst others. However, the presence of language barriers in exchange of communication and spread of the gospel made the missionaries devoted their attention and time to study and learn Igbo language. This development started in early nineteenth century in missionary circles in Sierra Leone where knowledge of African languages especially Igbo language was seen as very important instrument in a bid to evangelize the people (Westerman, 1929). Tasie (1999) added that "the study of Igbo language, as far as available evidence shows that it started by John F. Schon, the German linguist and missionary, who for his linguistic achievements was in 1884 to receive the Doctorate Degree of Oxford. Also, he reduced

Igbo to writing in 1841 for the use of the famous expedition of that year. When Schon retired from West Africa, Samuel Ajayi Crowther continued the investigation from 1857 in Sierra Leone and with the help of his Igbo assistants Simon Johnas, Crowther discovered what came to be regarded as the standard Igbo.

Meanwhile, on Taylor joining the Niger mission in 1857 Crowther encouraged him in the study of the Igbo language for which he probably must have noticed that Taylor had considerable interest, and he delivered his manuscript to Taylor to be improved upon. There might have also been at Taylor's mind that his Igbo constituency needed a *lingua franca* in the scheme for realizing a solid Igbo nationalist consciousness. The bulk of Taylor's work in Igbo sometimes show traces of some sort of an amalgamation of the major dialects of the Igbo especially the Onitsha, Isuama, and the Igbo spoken in the Niger Delta (also known as Mbammiri Igbo). The presence of the Mbammiri Igbo might however, suggest that the traces of amalgamated Igbo as his translations were not by accident but a conscious attempt by Taylor to produce a more widely acceptable Igbo. Taylor thus was the first known scholar who attempted the evolution of a more widely acceptable Igbo. There is no gain saying that as perhaps best illustrated by his many translations, Taylor certainly was the most remarkable single contributor in the 19th century to the literature and study of the Igbo language, a position which he held without rival until the work of T.J. Dennis appeared in the first decade of the 20th century.

In the middle of nineteenth century their interest in Igbo language became deeper and between 1852 and 1900, a lot of books were written in standard Igbo and published by Christian missionaries. According to Afigbo (1981) most of books were primers and grammars, a few were word list and collections of proverbs, while the remainders were translations of sections of the Bible into various dialects of the language. Thus, an assignment of marrying a multiplicity of Igbo dialects to produce a national literary dialect was given to T.J. Dennis, whose linguistic efforts resulted to the formation of the "Igbo Esperanto" known as the Union Igbo. The really staggering aspect of the assignment was that the dialect was going to be created in the process of translating the entire Bible from English into it. The work began in 1905 and was completed in 1912, the Bible being issued in 1913. For that, or in fact for anytime, this was a great achievement, an everlasting monument to T.J. Dennis as a linguistic scholar, a theologian and a missionary. Obviously, an amazement and admiration of the union Igbo is preserved in the words of Green (1936) in the following lines "The making of union Ibo was a difficult and delicate task involving questions of inter-group jealousy and prestige as well as purely linguistic considerations, and as such it certainly commands respect" (p. 510). Westermann (1929) added that "what Dennis did is not essentially different from what

happened in the European languages, where out of a number of dialects, one written language evolved, which bore and bears features of more than one dialect” (p. 340).

Role of Igbo Language in the Promotion of Gospel in Igbo Society

At the early stage of the Christian missionary enterprise in Igbo land, there was a language barrier between the Christian missionaries who were mostly foreigners and the indigenous people. This made it difficult for the gospel messages preached by the Christian missionaries to be understood by the host communities. There was need for the Christian missionaries to work together with the natives who understand English language and could translate it to the people in order to overcome the problem posed by language barrier. Clarke (1986) opined that the Christian missionary bodies did not hesitate to work hand in glove with the subordinates or agents to start translating the gospel messages with Igbo language to the indigenous people but it was from among the ex-slaves that the missionary societies chose the agents to assist in spreading the gospel. For example, Simon Jonas was a liberated slave from Sierra Leone of Igbo parentage who was able to forge a personal link with the King of Aboh, Obi Ossai with Simon Jonas acting as an interpreter (Okpalike and Nwadiolor, 2015). Here the missionaries succeeded in preaching the gospel message to the king and his people. During the encounter with the king, Jonas was asked to translate the Beatitudes into Igbo. As he translated the gospel, the king was said to have been so impressed with his eloquence and apparent erudition. The incidence was further documented by Ekechi (1972) as thus “Obi Ossai exclaimed, you must stop with me, you must teach me and my people. The white people can go up the river without you, they may leave you here until they return or until other people come” (p. 2).

This incidence and the success recorded by the interpreting role of Simon Jonas at Aboh was an eye opener to the CMS. This collaboration between the Christian missionaries and the freed slaves did not only solve the problem of language barrier but made the indigenous people to receive and accept the Gospel wholeheartedly. Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2015) observe that when Taylor preached in Igbo without an interpreter, the psychological effect was magical. More and more people were attracted to the missionary circle. The indigenous people were no longer hostile to the missionaries as they were at initial stage, since their kinsmen were part and parcel of missionary bodies. This was the same in other places in Igbo land where the missionaries visited with the freed slaves as interpreters who taught the gospel to the people in their mother tongue. As Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2015) observe that during Simon Jonas' short stay at Aboh, he made a remarkable progress in forming a Christian group among the people. This encounter between Obi Ossai and his people with Simon Jonas one of the members of CMS was essential to the spread of Christianity in the area. Hence, the likes of Simon Jonas, J.C

Taylor among others from Igbo ethnic group who served as interpreters to the Christian missionaries were significant in spreading the Gospel in Igbo nation.

With the ex-slaves serving as interpreters, and teaching the gospel and catechism in Igbo language, this attracted many Igbo people to the gospel. The use of Igbo language in teaching the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ gave the host communities a sense of belonging. Thus, they were receptive to the gospel and many among them joyfully became Christians.

Language as a Motivator to Establishment of Schools

As the missionaries came to Igbo land with some ex-slaves such as Simon Jonas and J.C Taylor who could understand and speak the Whiteman's language, this motivated many indigenous people to make efforts to learn the Whiteman's language. It could be observed that the Whiteman's language became highly attractive bait. For instance, after Simon Jonas interpreted the Beatitudes to King Obi Ossai and his people, the king never wanted to let Simon Jonas go without learning to speak like the European Christian missionaries. The missionaries saw this as an opportunity to establish schools and they opened schools in various mission stations. Ekechi (1972) observe that the Igbo people are very emulative, willing to learn and this will be in book learning. Other towns will not rest satisfied until they have also learned the mystery of reading and writing by which their neighbours may surpass or put them in the shade. Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) further observes that, since the Igbo people were anxious to acquire the Whiteman's irresistible magic and knew this could only be done through going to school, they in time sent flocks of their children to the schools. In many churches, half of the members were school children. Igwe (1977) reported that Roman Catholic Mission laid greater emphasis on the teaching of English in its schools which had earlier won it many converts at Onitsha and this strategy paid off as many more people went to its schools. This was in the quest to learn the Whiteman's language.

It could be observed that schools were not only established to learn the Whiteman's language and gain mastery of the Whiteman's magic but for the conversion of the indigenous people. So, the major objective of establishing schools by the Christian missionaries was evangelization by which the gospel of Christ was spread to the indigenous people. Uruakpa (1996) states that the missionaries believed in the philosophy of education as a sharpest instrument for effective and result oriented evangelism. Nwadior (2016) opines that the missionaries considered it easier to achieve their aim of conversion using the schools. Okochi (2008) points that Father Shanahan (Later Bishop Shanahan) made decision to concentrate on education as a means of evangelization. Shanahan appreciated education for the purposes of evangelization. He made sure that

people were not discriminated against on any grounds when it came to education. This was the same mindset by other Christian missionaries in Igbo land. Hence, mission schools flooded all over Igbo territory.

Moreover, ability to understand and speak the Whiteman's language which could be possible through acquiring Western education was an added advantage to be in prominent positions in various spheres of the society. Hence, Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) enunciate that soon, political, economic, religious and social life came to be dominated by the natives who had acquired the Whiteman's magic. For example, for an indigenous person to secure a white-collar job, he/she must learn to speak the Whiteman's language invariably, must have acquired Western education. Western education was considered by many indigenous people as an escape route out of poverty. This was true because, those who acquired Western education were either employed in various colonial administrative offices and vacant posts in mission offices. Or those who have learnt one skill or the other became self-employed and therefore earned a decent living out of it. Thus, there was the quest to access Western education by many Igbo people to become affluent in the society. To this end, Alagoa (1999) asserts that "Western education had been identified as probably the most important motive for the acceptance of Christian missions" (p. 250). Therefore, the need to learn the Whiteman's language and mastery of the Whiteman's magic led many Igbo people into Christianity.

Translation of the Bible and Other Christian Books into Igbo Language

During the 19th Christian missionary enterprise in Igbo society, the missionaries found out that, despite the indigenous peoples' desire to learn the Whiteman's language, due to the various advantages associated with it; they paid heed or listened attentively to the gospel message when preached and interpreted in Igbo. The missionaries however, found out that studying the bible and reading other Christian books in the Igbo language would be another way to make the gospel more appealing to the people. Thus, this gave rise to translation of the bible and other Christian books into Igbo language. According to Ajayi (1965), the driving force behind the work on the Igbo languages was to teach the converts in the better way that they would understand and to read the Bible in their mother tongue. This was the aim especially for much emphasis placed on translation of the Bible into the vernaculars; the ability to commit some indigenous languages to writing led to the translation of the Bible into the vernacular of many indigenous Igbo people.

The translation of the Bible into Igbo language was carried out first by CMS. Westerman (1929) asserts that the scientific interest in the study of the Igbo language began quite early in the 19th century in missionary circles in Sierra Leone where knowledge of African languages was seen as a necessary tool in the bid to evangelize the continent. For Tasie

(1996), the study of Igbo language as far as available evidence shows, was begun by John F. Schon, the German linguist and missionary, who for his linguistic achievements was in 1884 to receive the D.D of Oxford. He had reduced Igbo to writing in 1841 for the use of the famous expedition of that year. When Schon retired from West Africa, Samuel Ajayi Crowther continued the investigation from 1857 in Sierra Leone, and with the help of his Igbo assistants, Crowther discovered what came to be regarded as the standard Igbo. Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) point that between 1852 and 1900 over ten works had been published in the language, mainly by missionaries and their aides.

Okpalaike and Nwadiakor (2015) enunciate that, by the first decade of the 20th century when Nigeria was thrown open to the missionaries and scholars, various primers and grammars and word lists had been published in the peripheral dialects of the various languages and thus, the languages began to acquire new prestige. It is worthy of note that, the missionaries rendered remarkable services to the development of some indigenous languages through reducing them to writing, through their numerous catechetical tracks in the vernacular and, through the translation of the Bible into them. This made the people to appreciate reading the gospel and other Christian tracts in vernacular.

Conclusion

This research is set to investigate Igbo language as a missionary tool in the nineteenth century Christian movements in Igbo land. This research has tried to discussed most of concepts involved such as Igbo language, social change, tools used by Christian missionary for social change in Igbo land such as the gospel, western education, abolition of slave trade and other cultural practices, modern commerce and mechanical agriculture. The study anchored on diffusion innovation theory developed by Everett Rogers (1962) which stated that innovation or idea is communicated to people in a social system over a period of time. The theory also, beliefs that social change is as a result of diffusion of cultural patterns and practices of other societies which is a function of spread of cultural practices from society to society.

In this study secondary data was collected through the review of literatures in journal articles, textbooks and internet. The data collected was analyzed using content analysis. Thus, the study observed that Igbo language was a vital instrument in dissemination of the Christian message in Igbo nation. It was through it that the missionaries communicated to the indigenous people about the risen Christ and his redemptive work in the cross of cavalry, which brought salvation to mankind. During the 19th century Christian missionary movement in Igbo area, the European Christian missionaries found out that the indigenous people could not understand nor speak their own language. Thus, there was language barrier hence; they could not fully communicate the gospel to them. For the gospel to be

fully disseminated in Igbo land, they included some of the ex-slaves who served as interpreters bridging the gap between European Christian missionaries and the indigenous people. Hence, the study concluded that no matter what the Christian missionaries benefited in Igbo land could not be compared with what indigenes of Igbo land gained from the missionary work. This is because the missionaries abolished slavery and usher in freedom from outcast, fear, slavery, poverty, ignorance, salvation, right to life and education. In line with this, Ekechi (1972) has said, “there is no question that as a result of the C.M.S insistence on the use of the vernacular, graduates from Anglican schools were far better grounded in the Igbo language than their counterparts from the Catholic schools” (p. 192).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Igbo language should be generally recognized as a language of preaching the gospel to people especially in Igbo land for better understanding of the gospel.
- ii. Igbo language should be made the language of commerce, school, and marketing religion in Igboland and not only for the spread of gospel messages.
- iii. The gospel should also be used in various religious activities in the Church, this will make the people to have sense of belonging and be more receptive to the gospel.
- iv. The future missionary enterprise in the host communities must involve the ex-slaves who would serve as both interpreters and preachers of the gospel.
- v. The missionaries should endeavour to Igbo dictionary that explain the Igbo vocabularies.

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