

LINGUISTIC TABOOS IN THE IGBO SOCIETY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION

Gbenga FAKUADE,

Ngozi KEMDIRIM,

Ikechukwu NNAJI,

Florence NWOSU

University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

gbengusfakus@yahoo.com

Abstract

This article investigates linguistic taboos in the Igbo society in terms of their classification and socio-cultural factors affecting their usage. The article classifies linguistic taboos in the Igbo society into five categories: morality-related linguistic taboos, veneration-related linguistic taboos, decorum-related linguistic taboos, religion-related linguistic taboos and fear-related linguistic taboos. The article argues that while religion and decorum-related linguistic taboos are unmentioned and have no permissible alternatives because they are closely tied to different Igbo deities, morality, veneration and fear-related ones have euphemisms. It notes also that taboo expressions are hardly taught in schools and advocates the teaching of linguistic taboos to learners of Igbo as a second language. It advocates further the inclusion of this aspect of the Igbo language in the school curriculum and Igbo textbooks. Two principal methods were used to collect data for this study: questionnaire and oral interview. The data collected were presented in tabular form, using descriptive statistics.

Keywords: Linguistic taboo, Igbo, second language education, school curricula

1. Introduction

Language is used to serve a variety of needs which are either negative or positive in every society. Therefore, in linguistics, language is seen as a double-edged sword that should be used tactfully as it could be used to soothe, mend, sway or destroy. As a result of the negative consequences of language use, the Igbos have put in place certain linguistic norms which guide their use of words and expressions at different occasions and to people of different sexes, ages

and classes. This is in consonance with Holme's (2001) observation that individuals in a community share criteria for language use, such as rules of speaking, attitudes and values as well as socio-cultural understanding with regard to speech. This is because language is one of the ways by which the moral conduct of a society is determined. Thus, every Igbo native speaker is always cautious in his use of words so as not to breach the linguistic rules of his community, because if this happens, it is seen as taboo in his use of words.

Linguistic taboos are words or expressions to be avoided because using them directly in public is seen as violation of certain moral codes. Put in other words, linguistic taboos have their usage controlled by certain circumstances or reasons such as religion, culture or norms. In an attempt not to violate Igbo culture, linguistic taboos are expressed in the forms of euphemism: proverbs, idioms, metaphors, paraphrases, etc. This aspect of the Igbo language is not being taught in schools. Igbo language teachers avoid using taboo words; neither do they draw their students' attention to their usage. There is no doubt that the non-teaching of these Igbo words or expressions has created a gap in the teaching and learning of the language. Thus, this study investigates the linguistic prejudice towards taboo expressions in the Igbo society and its implications for teaching the Igbo language both as a first and second language.

2. The Sociolinguistic Setting

Igbo is one of the three major Nigerian languages spoken in eastern Nigeria. The other two are Hausa and Yoruba. The speakers of the language are also referred to as Igbo people. The early missionaries by default called them "Ibo" due to their inability to pronounce the diagraph /gb/. By a similar default they were also variously referred to in history as "Iboe" or Eboe. Igbo is the dominant tribe in Eastern Nigeria and the only tribe in the present South-East region of the country. Igbo people are also found in the south south region in states such as Rivers, Delta and Akwa Ibom. The core Igbo States are: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States.

There are many accounts on the origin of the Igbo people. The first is that the Igbo tribe descended from Israel and /or Egypt. The premise upon which the belief was built was the similarity in the culture of circumcision, how the people care for lactating mothers and the industriousness of the people among the culture areas. Basden (1983) observed that the judicial system of the Igbo people resembled that of the Jews. The second account of the origin of the people holds that the people originated somewhere at the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers and moved to their present abode with time. This account seems to be in consonance

with the linguistic belief that the “proto-kwa” originated from about that spot. The third version holds that the Igbo people were originally located in their present abode by the creator and located in Nri in the present Anambra State.

The Igbo society is an egalitarian and republican society. The kind of traditional hegemony found among the Hausa in the North and the Yoruba in the Western region is lacking among the Igbo people. The society is also highly segmented into small towns and villages. Each being close-knit, independent and exclusive – a situation that might be responsible for the high number of dialects in the language. The above nature of the society rendered the British Indirect Rule unworkable among the people. The society was governed along the axis of clan (with, usually, the oldest man having the last say). The Igbo population is presently put at over 25 million in Nigeria – a figure that is highly contested. Research has shown that Igbo is the most widespread ethnic group in all of Africa, if not the entire world. They are found in all continents of the world and in fairly large numbers.

3. What is Linguistic Taboo?

Linguistic taboos are words that many people consider offensive or shocking. Apte (1994) was of the view that linguistic taboos are words that are avoided because they are deemed unfit for normal linguistic usage and by a community's consensus, are banned in everyday language in the public domain. Diez (nd) said that taboo words are those words that are considered in bad taste by some people or that are better avoided because they mention realities that are stark or vulgar. He claimed further that they are words that refer to sex, religion, necessities such as the act of emptying the bladder or bowels and so on.

In their own views, Akmajian, Dermers, Farmers and Harnish (2004) considered taboo words as those words that are to be avoided entirely or at least avoided in mixed company. For Trudgill (1974), linguistic taboo is anything that is associated with things that are not said, particularly in words and expressions in a given society. Mbaya (2002) defines linguistic taboos as those words or expressions in a language which are avoided as a result of their indecency, shocking character or immorality and in order not to hurt the other members of the society. Troike (2003) pointed out that attitude towards language considered taboo in a speech community is extremely strong and taboo violation may be sanctioned by imputation of immorality, illness or death.

Linguistic taboos are not only words referring to obscenity alone. Sacred language can also be tabooed, that is language to be avoided outside the context of sacred rituals. In Igbo society,

it is a taboo to use the language for a different occasion in a context that it is not meant for. For instance, to use the language for the blessing of Kolanut in places other than in its religious situational context; or to use words for marriage activity in burial occasions (Kemdirim, 2009).

Despite the similarities or some uniformity of taboo words among societies, they vary also from culture to culture, because what is taboo in one culture may be a norm in another. Le and Le (2006) asserted that the degree of avoidance of taboo words in language are culture specific, such that what is tabooed in one society may be the norm in another, as taboo is based on the cultural values and beliefs of the linguistic community towards certain topic; Trudgill (1986) posited that taboo language is just a matter of convention where the normal use of an item in a language is inhibited due to a particular social value and beliefs.

Akmajian et. al (2004) stated that what counts as taboo is defined by culture and not by anything inherent in the language itself. In the same vein, Farb (1974) had observed earlier that any word is an innocent collection of sounds until a community surrounds it with connotations and decrees that it cannot be used in certain speech situations. He stated further that it is the symbolic value the specific culture attaches to the words and expressions that makes them become taboo.

Linguistic taboos are expressed in different ways by different societies. They are obliquely expressed in the form of paraphrases, synonyms, euphemisms, antonyms and other coded words. Wardhaugh (2000), in an attempt to explain this, stated that certain things are not said, not because they cannot be said, but because people do not talk about them or if they are talked about, they are discussed in very roundabout ways. He further stated that euphemistic words and expressions allow us to talk about unpleasant things to disguise or neutralize the unpleasantness. This is applicable to the Igbo language where, instead of taboo expressions, certain euphemistic expressions such as proverbs, idioms, metaphors, satire, synonyms and antonyms are used.

4. Theoretical Model

Recent models in the study of linguistic taboo strive to classify taboos according to tradition and norm of the concerned community, this notwithstanding, the different classifications share certain characteristics. Taboo words have different forms which vary from society to society. In western society, the most severe taboos are those associated with excretion, sex and Christian religion. According to Trudgill (1986), the strongest taboo words in the English-speaking world

are still associated with sex, followed by those associated with excretion. In Norway, they are mostly expressions connected with the devil and in Roman Catholic culture, they are words essentially associated with religion. What exactly constitutes the taboo words of a society is largely determined by the codes of that society.

Hongxu et al (1990), analyzing linguistic taboos in Chinese, viewed taboos as a socio-cultural phenomenon associated with superstition, custom, and hierarchical power. For them, taboos fall under two categories: macrolinguistic and microlinguistic. By macrolinguistic, it is meant that certain words are perceived by almost all speakers in a speech community to be despicable and filthy such as sex and death. By microlinguistic taboos, it is meant that certain words are perceived as taboos in relation to a specific context. For the analysis of the Chinese taboos, Hongxu et al (1990) proposed a framework which includes a "macrocontext", which includes situational factors such as register and interlocutors. This results in several varieties of taboo: absolute taboo, a quasi-taboo and non-taboo (Qanbar, 2011).

According to Apte (1994), the linguistic taboos can be grouped into four types: (i) Swear or curse words, i.e. words which when uttered involve damnation, misfortune, or disrespect of the targeted object or person; (ii) obscene words, i.e. words referring to sexual organs and acts; (iii) four-lettered words, which are only acceptable in English, with example of acceptable English obscenities being words such as "cunt", "fuck", "shit", and "cock", such words only having four letters in their spellings; and (iv) dirty words, i.e. words that refer to sexual organs, acts and scatological substances (menstruation, urine, faeces, spittle). Jay (1996) categorized linguistic taboos into eight types:

- (i) Taboo or obscene language – these are expressions restricted from public use, such as "fuck" and "bitch";
- (ii) Blasphemy – the use of religious terminology to denigrate God and religious institutions, icons and so on;
- (iii) Profanity – the use of religious expressions and terminology in an unrespectable manner. The intention of the speaker is not to denigrate God or anything associated with religion but may be rather to express emotional reactions towards certain stimuli;
- (iv) Insults and radical slurs – verbal attacks on other people by denoting the physical, mental or psychological qualities of the victims, e.g. coconut head (for unintelligent person), monkey (for ugly person);
- (v) Expletives – emotional words that are in the form of interjections, and that are not directed to anyone specifically, but are used by speakers to release frustration and emotion;

- (vi) Vulgarisms – crude or raw expressions which are regarded as distasteful and offensive. They are used to devalue the thing or individual referred to or described;
- (vii) Cursing; and
- (viii) Slang – this is usually developed by social groups to identify and solidify in-group members.

Steiner (1975) categorized verbal taboos into six groups: (i) personal names, (ii) names of gods, (iii) names of kings and other sacred persons, (iv) names of the dead, (v) names of relations, and (vi) common words – these include taboos placed on names of objects and things that are associated with different professions, names of dangerous animals, etc. Omamor (1981)⁶ classified linguistic taboos into five categories: (i) cleansing – effect type, (ii) fear-related type, (iii) royal-related, (iv) fear-related type, and (v) family-relationship type.

Oyetade's (1994) classification of taboo expressions in the Yoruba language mirrors Omamor's: even though he classifies them into four types: (i) propriety-related taboos, which are those that enable the society members to conform with the acceptable moral standard with regard to decorum; (ii) taboo for averting ominous consequences which emanate from people's belief system; (iii) veneration type which is used to give honour to a specific class of people such as kings, elders etc.; and (iv) fear-centred taboos which centre on the belief in the existence of supernatural forces that have been claimed to have control over human beings.

Qanbar (2011) proposed a general classification of taboo words and expressions in the Yemeni society into two broad categories: (i) context-specific and (ii) general. These two categories, according to him, also branch out into other subcategories.

The words under context-specific category are neutral and non-taboo but they get tabooed in particular contexts. Context-specific taboos are divided into two subcategories: non-taboo words, and words related to the hearer's physical or social defects; while the subcategories under the category general include the unmentionable (the words under this subcategory should be euphemized in polite speech), and mentionable with minimizers which include words that are to be mentioned along with other fixed conventional expressions which Qanbar (2011) called minimizers. According to him, non-taboo words are neutral in meaning in everyday speech such as pig, dog, aew, etc., but become taboos in certain contexts when used as swear words. He claimed further that religion has played a role in tabooing these words. The animals mentioned above are associated with impurity and uncleanness (dog and pig). Qanbar (2011) claimed further that Jews are associated with treachery and meanness due to the nature of the relationship between the Muslims and the Jews throughout history.

Qanbar (2011) further divided taboo words under general into two subcategories: (i) absolutely forbidden words which are referred to as the unmentionable and (ii) permissible or mentionable with minimizers. The unmentionable are the absolute forbidden words and they are divided into five subcategories:

- (i) Words or terms referring to the private organs of the human body and their functions, and body effluvia (snot, faeces, menstrual fluid, etc.);
- (ii) Words or terms referring to religion (blasphemy) or words against religious figures and symbols;
- (iii) Words or terms referring to national or historical or the present political figures or political system;
- (iv) The first names of one's female members of the family mentioned in public or before an outsider;
- (v) Words referring to things that you give away to the poor and the needy, or friends on social occasions.

According to Qanbar (2011), the first three subcategories are known in the literature as the triad of taboos, which almost could be found in most of the cultures across the world, i.e., the triangle of sex, religion and politics, though the degree of the tabooeness varies.

The mentionable with minimizers category is unique to Yemeni culture, and includes words and phrases that are considered taboos and shocking if mentioned unaccompanied with certain fixed conventional phrases. The function of these phrases is to mitigate and minimize the illocutionary force of the tabooed item and make it acceptable. This category is divided into three subcategories according to Qanbar (2011):

- (i) Words or phrases referring to unclean places or objects (for example sewages, bathrooms, footwear, etc.);
- (ii) Words or phrases referring to metaphysical things that go beyond the control of the human being (for example: supernatural creatures like jennies, ghosts; certain diseases, accidents resulting in the deformation of human body the, such as getting burned);
- (iii) Words or phrases referring to the expressions of admiration for things or objects we admire and like.

From the various classifications of linguistic taboos as enunciated above, it is clear that linguistic taboos are not only culture-dependent, there are also socio-cultural factors which determine the use of taboo words or their euphemistic equivalents. Therefore all the models discussed above will form the basis for our classification of linguistic taboos in the Igbo society.

5. Method

Two principal methods were used to collect data for this study: questionnaire and oral interview. Two types of questionnaire were used, one for native Igbo speakers and the other for teachers of the Igbo language. Fifty (50) copies of questionnaire were administered among native speakers of the Igbo language, while one hundred and sixty six (166) of another set of questionnaires were administered among teachers of the Igbo language. The same figures were completed and returned for analysis. This was made possible because the researchers and research assistants monitored and supervised the completion of the questionnaires by the respondents.

In addition, forty (40) Igbo native speakers who were 40 years of age and above were interviewed about taboo words and expressions in the language. People within this age bracket are conversant with the customs, tradition and values of Igbo people. The language consultants were chosen across different groups: the Ezes, the Nzes, the Ichies and the Ozos. During the interview, the language consultants were asked to define/explain linguistic taboos, the circumstances surrounding their usage, the types, etc. Besides the traditional title holders, a total of about 50 persons, representing different social classes, provided us with verbal information on linguistic taboos in Igbo society. The data collected were presented in tables, using descriptive statistics.

6. Analysis and Discussion of Data

6.1 Types of Linguistic Taboo in the Igbo Society

Table 1: Morality-related linguistic taboos

Taboo	Euphemism	Gloss	Translation
Amụ	Ihe o jiri buru nwoke	What makes him male	Penis
Otu	Ihe o jiri buru nwanyi	What makes her female	Vagina
Onu nsị	Ojọ		Anus
Ara	Obi/Nkeiru	Chest/The front	Breast
Ike	Ukwu	Hip	Buttock
Akpa amụ	Ogodo	Loin cloth	Scrotum
Aji ike	Abụba	Feather	Pubic hairs
Imu nwa	Irịda	To come down	Delivery of a baby
Nso	Ihu Onwa	Seeing the moon	Menstruation
Ime	Ahu mgbawwe	Body change	Pregnancy
Ira	Inwe mmeko	Having relationship	Sexing
Inyu nsị	inọ n'azu ụlọ	Going or staying behind the house	To defecate

Table 1 contains Igbo words that are tabooed on moral grounds. The table contains the taboo words, the euphemisms, the glosses and the English translations. These words are hardly used in public and to conform with the acceptable moral standard of the Igbo society, there are permissible alternatives for these words to neutralize their unpleasantness. In fact the tabooeness of this category and stigmatized status of these words are usually instilled from early childhood, and it forms a part of childhood language socialization (Qanbar, 2011).

Table 2: Veneration-related taboo words

Taboo words	Euphemisms	English translation
Personal name of a king	Eze	His Royal Highness
King's Wife's personal name	Lọlọ	Her Royal Highness
Personal name of other titled persons	Chief, Nze, Ozo, Ichie	Chief, Nze, Ozo, Elder
Personal name of married/unmarried man	Maazi	Mr.
Personal name of married woman	Oriaku/Odoziaku	Mrs.
Personal name of unmarried woman	Nwaada	Miss
Personal name of one's mother	Mama/Nne	Mother
Personal name of one's father	Papa/Nna	Father
Personal name of one's male elder	Dede/Ndaa	Elder brother, uncle, Kinsmen
Personal name of one's female elder	Danne/Ndaa	Elder sister, Aunt, Kinswomen

Personal name of one's grandmother	Nne ochie	Grand mother
Personal name of one's grandfather	Nna ochie	Grand father
Personal name of one's husband	Nna ukwu	Master
Personal name of one's wife	Oriaku/ Odoziaku	Wealth eater/preserver
Personal name of one's In-law	Ogo	In-law

Table 2 presents 15 veneration-related taboo words. These taboo expressions in the Igbo society are meant to give respect to a certain class of people. These are kings, title holders, married and unmarried grown-ups, relations and the elderly.

The Igbo people value respect for elders and this is so because it is their belief that the higher one's status, the higher the honour and respect. Just as the elderly and important people are venerated, they can otherwise be vilified if they are people of questionable characters. Thus witches, wizards, thieves, kidnappers, ritualists and wicked people are not so respected, regardless of their age.

Table 3: Decorum – related linguistic taboos

Taboo words	English Equivalent	Literal translation	When used
Akwuna	Flirt	Harlot	Promiscuous person
Ofogiri	Loafer	Soup made with bad spice	Person of no ambition
Onye iberibe	Worthless person	Worthless person	Worthless person
Ewu	Stupid person	Goat	Foolish person
Aturu	Senseless person	Sheep	Unexpected behaviour
Isiaku	Unintelligent person	Coconut head	Unintelligent person
Mma ihu abuq	Unreliable person	Double edged knife	Untrustworthy person
Mbe	Trickster	Tortoise	Tricky person
Onye ara	Mentally deranged person	Mad person	A person who behaves abnormally
Ezi	Dirty person	Pig	A dirty person
Nkita ara	Quarrelsome person	Mad dog	A quarrelsome person
Onye isi ike	Stubborn person	Head Strong	A disobedient person
Taata	Child	Baby	Behaviour below one's standard
Onye ire abuq	Liar	Two tongued person	An untruthful person
Enwe/mkpi	Monster	Monkey/he goat	An ugly person
Eri	Lanky	Rope	A skinny person
Onye oshi	Dupe	Thief	A dubious person
Nne/Nna gi	Mother fucker	Your mother/father	An offender that did something that pained one severely.

In table 3, we have decorum-related linguistic taboos. These are taboo words that hurt people's feelings because they devalue the thing being referred to. They are sometimes used to condemn or disapprove of people's unbecoming acts which are frowned at by the Igbos. They are also used to ridicule people that engage in unruly behaviour so as to make them turn over a new leaf. It is

important to note that the respondents did not provide a euphemism for this type of linguistic taboo.

Table 4: Religion-related linguistic taboos

Taboo words	English Translations
Qnwu gbuo gi	May death strike you
Afo tookwa gi	May your stomach be swollen
Mmiri rie gi	May you drown in water
Nkita rachaa gi anya	May a dog lick your eyes.
Kitika gbagbuo gi	May leprosy strike you to death
Egbe eluigwe gbagbuo gi	May thunder strike you to death
Husikwaa anya	May you suffer severely in life
Chukwu kpoo gi oku	May God strike you with fire/roast you to ashes
Tagbuokwa onwe gi n'ahuhu	May you suffer untold hardship
Ala kugbuo gi	May the god of the earth kill you
Agwu tagbuokwaa gi	May lion bite you to death
Eke lookwaa gi	May a python swallow you
Nne na nna gi nwuokwa	May your mother & father die
Ama gi chikwaa	May your kindred be wiped out.

The taboo expressions in table 4 represent religion-related linguistic taboos. The examples here have their roots in the belief system of the people. The Igbos believe that there are powers behind every word that has to do with the Igbo religion. Therefore, these types of taboo expressions that bring evil consequences are expressly forbidden or unmentionable, because in situations where any of these ominous consequences occur, it is believed that there is a force (spirit) behind them.

Table 5: Fear-related linguistic taboos

Taboo words	Euphemism	English interpretation
Name of the dead	O/o	She/he/it
Name of a person in mask	Mmanwu	Masquerade
Ghost	kpokpoitiri/Mmuo	Thick darkness
No kola to offer a visitor	Oji ejula ulo	Kola has filled the house
Agwu	Eriri	Rope
Osu/oru	Ndi aka ikpa/ekpe	The left- handed people

Table 5 provides examples of fear-related linguistic taboos. These types of taboo words are related to religion-related taboo. They are hardly freely uttered in Igbo society. For example, it is tabooed to call the dead by name, and also the person inside the mask. Similarly, when there is no kolanut in the house to offer a visitor, the host is forbidden from saying so. Rather, he will ironically say "there is excess kola nut in the house" (Oji ejula ulo). If it is in the night he will say "night has taken kola" (abali ewerela oji). It is the belief among the Igbo people that if a person says he has

no kola, the person is said to be cursing his household and it is believed that the blessing associated with kola nut will elude such a household.

From our discussion above, linguistic taboos in Igbo society can be classified into five types; (i) morality-related, (ii) decorum-related, (iii) veneration-related, (iv) religion-related and (v) fear-related. These five can be broadly re-grouped into two: euphemized and non-euphemized taboos. It is important to indicate therefore, that morality – related, venerated-related, and fear-related taboo expressions have permissible alternatives or euphemisms, while religion-related and decorum-related do not seem to have such permissible alternatives or euphemisms. Linguistic taboos that have to do with the Igbo deities, or totems, or objects that have connection with the deities are not only dreaded, they are treated with fear. And since fear-related taboos are connected to religion-related ones, they are outrightly unmentionable so as not to invite or incur the wrath of the gods, thus they have no permissible alternatives. One undeniable belief is the magical power of the spoken word. It is as if uttering these words may bring about the occurrence of the object, action, or phenomenon it refers to (Qanbar 2011). It is as if the tabooed object were like a radioactive fuel rod, which will have dire effects on anyone who comes into direct contact with it unless they know how to defend themselves (Allau and Burr ridge 2006).

Apparent in our tables above are different styles of avoiding or replacing taboo words in Igbo society. The styles range from using euphemisms, proverbs, creating antonyms, metaphoric expressions and whole constructions. Figure 1 below captures the types of linguistic taboos in Igbo society.

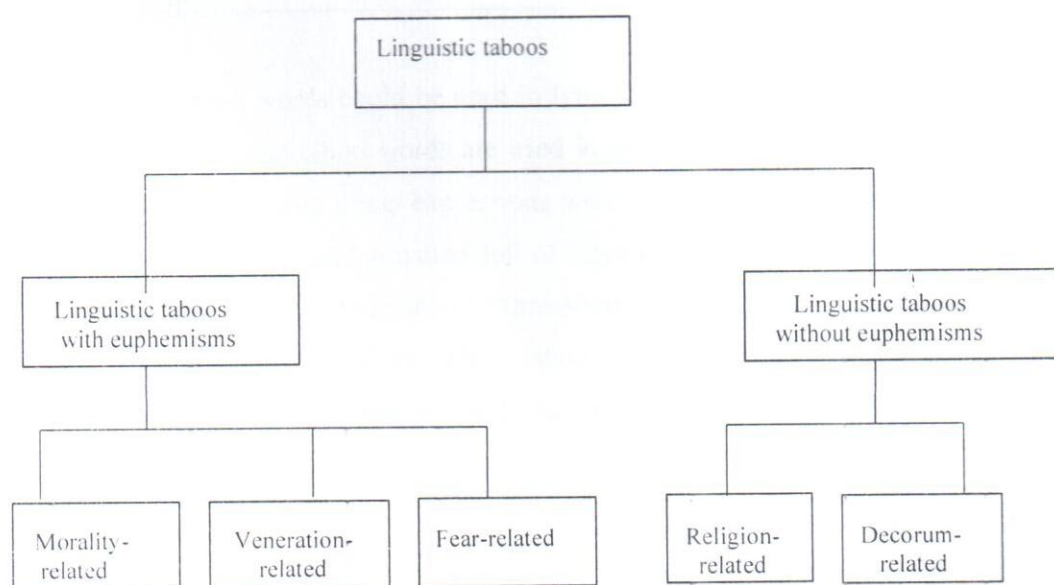


Fig. 1: Linguistic Taboos in the Igbo Society

6.2 Occasional usage of linguistic taboos in the Igbo society

Responses from the language consultants during the oral interview and to questionnaire questions indicate that there are occasions when some of these taboo expressions are used. Tables 6 and 7 below give the highlights of such occasions.

Table 6: Reasons for infringement on taboo expressions by Native Igbo speakers

Occasions	No of Respondents	Percentage
To express anger	18	36%
To express frustration	11	22%
To express surprise	5	10%
To express jocular insults	9	18%
To express hatred	7	14%

Table 6 shows that 36% of the respondents were of the view that taboo words were used to express anger in Igbo society; 22%, 10%, 18% and 14% claimed that taboo words were used to show frustration, surprise, jocular insults and hatred, respectively.

Table 7: Occasions in which taboo words are used in Igbo society

Occasions	No of Respondents	Percentage
Jocular occasion	13	26%
During libation to gods	3	6%
Adverse situation	4	8%
Aggressive situation	16	32%
Situation full of surprise	14	28%

Table 7 shows that taboo words could be used in Igbo society on different occasions. 26% of the respondents claimed that taboo words are used in jocular occasions; while 6%, 8%, 32% and 28% were of the view that taboo expressions were used during libation to gods, adverse occasion, aggressive situation and situation full of surprises, respectively. Table 6 & 7 have shown that there are occasions when taboo expressions are used in the Igbo society. Having discussed these exceptional situations when taboo expressions are used, the paper now considers the implications of linguistic taboos for second language (L2) learning.

7. Implications for Second Language (L2) Learning

The declared official policy on languages in Nigeria is as contained in sections 55 and 97 of the 1999 constitution and in the various language provisions to be found in some places in the National Policy on Education (NPE). The policy makes provisions in effect for three national languages, namely, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Under this policy, the school child is required to acquire or learn at least three different languages in the course of his formal education, namely, his mother tongue, one national language selected from among Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Thus, the Igbo language is supposed to be taught as a second language in secondary school in the Western and Northern part of Nigeria, where Yoruba and Hausa is the predominant language respectively.

The question that arises is: Are learners of Igbo language as L2 supposed to be taught taboo expressions, since these expressions are forbidden or unmentionable? Our findings show that teachers of the Igbo language are in support of teaching taboo expressions to L2 learners. Out of 166 respondents, 122 are in support of teaching taboo words to learners of Igbo as L2. They were of the view that both the raw taboo expressions and their euphemisms or permissible alternatives should be introduced to the learners. They claimed further that the teaching will not only make the learners linguistically competent in the language, it will improve the learners' skill in being able to write effectively in the language and will also help them to have a firm background in the underpinnings of speaking competency in the language. In fact, taboo words in the Igbo language are an aspect of the linguistic item that gives insight into the culture and world-view of the society. For the teaching of the Igbo language to second language learners to be effective, teachers of the Igbo language need to teach taboo expressions in their natural and euphemistic forms. This is to make learners understand the constituents of linguistic taboos in Igbo society and their usage.

Curriculum is the broadest context in which planning for language teaching takes place either at the national or community level. Therefore, when focusing on conversational Igbo, Igbo curriculum planners should introduce a new module such as linguistic taboo. Therefore, linguistic taboos should be reflected as well as incorporated into pedagogical texts to ensure that this aspect of the language is addressed.

8. Conclusion

We have established in this paper that linguistic taboos exist in the Igbo language. We have also shown that linguistic taboos in the Igbo society can be classified into five; morality-related, veneration-related, decorum-related, religion-related and fear-related linguistic taboos, which can be broadly grouped into linguistic taboos with euphemisms and linguistic taboos without euphemism.

The article has shown that while religion-related and decorum-related linguistic taboos do not have permissible alternatives because they are related to different deities, morality, veneration and fear-related ones have permissible alternatives. The implications of linguistic taboos for Igbo as a second language have been considered in this paper. The paper has argued that linguistic taboos should be included in the curriculum of the Igbo language at secondary school level and above.

For effective and meaningful teaching of the Igbo language as a second language (L2) to take place, we have argued in this paper that teachers of Igbo language need to teach linguistic taboos in their natural and permissible alternative forms, where applicable. By extension, linguistic taboos should be incorporated into pedagogical texts to ensure that this aspect of the language is addressed and well taught to second language learners. This opinion re-echoes Oyetade's (1944) view that since adequate knowledge of a language goes beyond grammatical ability to include knowing how to use the facilities available in the language appropriately, one would like to suggest that when we teach foreigners African languages, it should not be the study of grammar, vocabulary and the phonological pattern of these languages alone. It should also include aspects of the people's culture. This will be of immense benefit to them in using the languages appropriately in specific communicative situations.

References

- Akmajian, A., R. Demers, Farner, A., & Harnish R. (2004). *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication*. New Delhi: Prentice Hall.
- Allan, K. & Burridge, K. (2006). *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge, CUP.

- Apte, M.L. (1994). *Taboo Word*. In: The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics, 9, 4512-4514. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Brasden, G.T. (1983). *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*. Lagos: University Publishing Co.
- Diez, M. (n.d.). Taboo Words, Euphemisms and Dysphemisms. Retrieved from www.poiseyura.com/collaboration/english/bentitimfebruary7,2008
- Farb, P. (1974). *Word Play: What Happens when People Talk*. New York
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999). *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Abuja, National Orientation Agency (NOA).
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981). *National Policy on Education Revised*. Lagos, Federal Ministry of Informaton.
- Holmes, J. (2001). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London: Pearson.
- Hongxu, H., & Guisen, T. (1990). 'A Sociolinguistic View of Linguistic Taboo in Chinese'. *International Journal of Society and Language*, 81, 63-81.
- Jay, T. (2000). *Why we Curse: A Neuro-Psycho-Social Theory of Speech*. Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company.
- Kemderim, M.N. (2009). Linguistic Taboo in Igbo Language and Its Implication for Second Language Teaching. (Unpublished M.A. Thesis), Federal University of Technology, Yola.
- Le, T. & Le, O. (2006). Taboo and Euphemism. *The International Journal of Language Society and Culture*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.utas.edu.au/users/He/journal/articles5May,2008>.
- Mbaya, N. (2002). Linguistic Taboo in African Marriage Context: A Study of Oromo Laguu. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*. 11(2), 224-235.
- Omamor, A.P. (1981). Some Taboo Expressions in Western Delta of Nigeria. In: African Notes x, 125-37.
- Oyetade, S.O. (1994). *Taboo Expressions in Yoruba Africa and Ubersee*, (Band 77).
- Qanbar, N. (2011). A Sociolinguistic Study of the Linguistic Taboos in the Yemeni Society MJAL 3,2 Summer.
- Steiner, F. (1975). *Taboo*. London: Cohem and West.
- Troike, S. (2003). *The Ethnicity of Communication*. UK: Blackwell
- Trudgill, P. (1974). *Dialect in Context*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- Trudgill, P. (1986). *Dialects in Contact*., Oxford, Uk: Blackwell.
- Wardhaugh, R. (2000). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.