16. Immigration Geographies, Multilingual Immigrants, and the Transmission of Minority Languages: Evidence from the Igbo Brain Drain

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THIS CHAPTER OUTLINES the linguistic repertoire of one migration network to the United States and the six sites in which the repertoire is partially reproduced. An outline of the repertoire and the contexts or sites under which that repertoire is reproduced represent a first step toward trying to take account of the new and changing sociogeographical settlement patterns of multilingual immigrants, such as many African immigrants, to analyze the process of transmission of minority languages to future generations.

The group of Nigerian Igbo-speaking immigrants described here and with whom I conducted ethnography of communication fieldwork for six years in the late 1990s are members of the "New Ethnics" (Saran and Eames 1980; Sridnar and Sridnar 2000). Such new ethnics are post-1965 immigrants who are largely professional, arriving in the United States already with advanced degrees or with student visas to obtain postsecondary training.[1] Many also begin the processes of obtaining citizenship by starting off as H1B visa immigrants—that is, highly skilled people whose immigration status is linked to their professional positions in corporations, schools, and nonprofits. Nigerians in Chicago typically work as electrical engineers, accountants, venture capitalists, social workers, pharmacists, professional salespeople, administrators, college professors, and paraprofessionals. Despite the fact that all of the informants in my network were college graduates, several with foreign diplomas had difficulty getting U.S. institutions to accept the validity of their degrees or had problems finding employment. In these cases, most people underwent paraprofessional training in the United States in fields such as respiratory therapy or radiology to facilitate quick and steady employment. Besides their educational and workplace experiences, it also is important to note that many new ethnics in the United States speak English with native or near-native fluency, usually because they came from former Anglophone colonies. Likewise, their political affiliations often fall in line with global political movements, ranging from behind-the-scenes work to influence world

trade policy to international human rights work. Some of my informants engage in political work abroad designed to influence events in their home country.

The association of immigration status with employment means that group members frequently settle near places of work or places of status associated with their professional work—rather than, for example, settling in one of Chicago's many ethnic enclave areas. Igbo speakers of the elite migratory class tend to settle along the byways of what they explicitly refer to as a "route" along the path to success. They live in Chicago neighborhoods with easy access to the financial and global economic district known as the Loop, near the universities, near the hospitals, near the suburban corporations where many work, and among their American native-born customers and constituents. For example, in the group with which I worked, in 1999 there were 175 member families living in 67 different zip codes in four states and distributed across all five counties of the Chicago area.

This widespread distribution of members of this group means that they must actively seek reasons and structures to come together. They do so through a group called ONI, the "Organization for *Ndi Igbo*/Igbo People" (a pseudonym), which is a registered Illinois nonprofit cultural association. The group meets monthly to discuss political events; to plan cultural programs including ethnic festivals sponsored by ONI; and, in general, as a means to bring together far-flung group members to socialize and stay up-to-date with other Igbo speakers in the area.

Linguistic Repertoire of ONI Group

Members of this immigrant group, as is typical of elite Nigerians from the southern part of that country, are multilingual and multidialectal. Moreover, African contexts—on the continent or elsewhere—usually are considerably more multifarious than the situations on which most studies of first-language maintenance have been based. With the deep and long-running politicization of ethnic identities, indexed directly through multiple linguistic codes in places such as Nigeria where conservative estimates delineate about 240 ethnic groups—each understood as speaking a distinct ethnic language—it is difficult for Westerners to grasp such linguistic behavior (Williamson and Blench 2000). As such, the binary concept of diglossia also has limited utility because so many codes are constantly in use and they index so many interrelated culture groups and streams of power and prestige. Code-switching, lexical borrowing, and convergence among or between linguistic codes also are normative (Eze 1998; for an overview, see Myers-Scotton 1993).

Entering the field, I was surprised that the professional status of this migratory elite predicated that they were all native speakers of something like Received Pronunciation or British Received Pronunciation and usually a Nigerian pidgin English (i.e., nearly all ONI group members spoke at least one variety of English in the home in early childhood, as well as an Igbo dialect). Until the 1970s this generational cohort, born between the late 1940s and the early 1970s, was raised by parents in the upper levels of education, government, and the private sector in either colonial or postcolonial Nigeria, who stressed British-English alphabetic and cultural literacy as the key to success. Igbo speakers from the southeast portion of the country were missionized earlier than other groups, and during the colonial period many obtained

Western education and employment within the colonial enterprise. Moreover, many Igbo speakers come from migratory families within Nigeria. Elite families in particular may have moved outside Igbo-speaking areas to work as clerks, educators, and traders beginning in the 1920s and continuing today. Because of this mobility, most of my informants speak at least one other major Nigerian language, learned from playmates while their families lived outside of Igboland; many learned Nigerian languages from classmates in boarding school. In sum, the members of my fieldwork group in particular grew up speaking in their daily lives a minimum of three genetically distinct languages—Igbo, English, and usually Yoruba, Hausa, or another Nigerian language. In interviews about linguistic background, most of the respondents said that they attained competence in such languages before adolescence and that they developed near-native proficiency in them. (I also have frequently witnessed conversations in Yoruba in this network, for example.) Table 16.1 outlines the rich linguistic repertoire of my informants.

Add Nigerian multilingualism to transnational (or globalizing) contexts, and the task of describing and analyzing the patterns of deployment of African linguistic repertoires becomes considerably more difficult. Such complexity defies descriptive models of immigrant language use, which tend to rely on a place-bound concept of domain.

Conceptualizations such as domain often develop data from institutional categories such as the schoolhouse, the home, the church or synagogue, the courthouse or

Table 16.1
Languages spoken by Igbo immigrants in ONI group

Language(s)	Varieties
Igbo	• Home village (father's), home village (mother's), other village (place of residence) • "Central" Igbo • Market Igbo
English	• Pidgin English (a distinct Nigerian creole), which informants also call "Broken English" • Nigerian Standard English (similar to British R.P.)
Other Nigerian languages genetically distinct from Igbo (Northern)	• Hausa (for those who grew up in the North) • Other northern language like Born
Other Nigerian languages genetically similar to Igbo (Southern)	• Dialects of Yoruba (especially in high schools in Lagos, etc.) • Other southeastern languages (Itsekiri, Urhobo)
Other African languages	• Swahili, Akan, KwaZulu (learned while living outside Nigeria)
Other European languages	• French, German, Spanish (usually for international business)

Sources: Field notes and linguistic background questionnaires.

post office, the ethnic neighborhood, and possibly the ethnic workplace in determining who speaks what to whom and where and why. The problem of dispersed geographical settlement of new ethnics and highly mobile professional immigrants means that a researcher cannot find informants speaking a language such as Igbo at the post office, at the church, or in the ethnic neighborhood. In such cases, the concept of domain has limited utility in describing language planning efforts, as well as analyses of linguistic maintenance among the second generation within professional immigrant communities. Therefore, the difficulty at hand is to find the right analytical term to determine the nature of linguistic code choice among speakers—a term that is more appropriate to the sort of immigrant geographical settlement patterns caused by recent effects of globalization. Such a term, importantly, also must be able to encompass the striking mobility and use of contemporary communications technologies among such immigrant groups (Reynolds 2004).

To find a term for domain that can methodologically encompass Igbo immigrants' engagement with space and time compression, I have drawn on work by Susan Philips, linking my analysis of language to the notion of "key sites." The value of the term is that key sites are not necessarily places—although they can be—but conceptual moments and locations in which community is pointedly imagined (Stuart Hall, cited in Philips 2000, 232–33). In other words, one can use this term to determine when, where, and how community is created, as well as how community is sustained and maintained, by focusing on the interactivity of language and symbols rather than focusing on the physical place where language is used. Through key sites, we can see how language use joins with the way informants' linguistic performances are a process of multi-sited experiments of linguistic reproduction and verbal representation. Such verbal pratice should be analyzed because it runs directly along the fluctuating economic and geographic dimensions of new ethnic communities.

For example, the ability to capture the influence of newspapers in print and online as contributing to linguistic shift in this community is important. Because much of the oral discourse in ONI immigrant group meetings is both deeply intertextual and professional, understanding a conversation may require that everyone has read the morning's *Guardian* newspaper out of Lagos (http://www.ngrguardiannews.com) and the *Chicago Sun Times*, both of which are in English. Nearly all of the political and social aspects of literacy in Igbo speakers' lives anywhere in the world outside of Igboland (and often within it) occur in English; this fact explains why informants switch codes to English when they speak overtly about politics or the problems of being a global professional. This factor, combined with the personal linguistic history of Anglophone elite Nigerians of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, as outlined above, and the groups' immense personal stake in contemporary development politics compels my informants toward using standardized English such as Standard American, British R.P., or Nigerian Standard English (Banjo 1997).

Examination of key sites—in this case, the key site of print and media cultures of the Anglophone Nigerian diaspora—can help a researcher move the level of data collection and analysis to sites where ideology is associated with the code. Moreover,

such key sites, like the domains concept they are intended to replace, are empirically verifiable entities of utility in conducting fieldwork.

Through coding and analysis of recordings, a collection of written artifacts, and field notes collected over the six years of my ethnography of communication fieldwork, I have designated six key sites—primary sites in which Igbo speakers came together to reproduce African varieties or codes, usually varieties of English or Igbo. These key sites were as follows: (1) ONI immigrant group meetings, which are official immigrant association gatherings; (2) social ritual gatherings such as wakes, funerals, and harvest festivals; (3) ethnic establishments, especially Nigerian commercial establishments;[2] (4) Igbo and Nigerian print media and culture, which is vast, complex, and keenly lived by my informants; (5) the Igbo home; and (6) the return from diaspora. I was able to witness the first four of these key sites first-hand; I was less able to witness the other two sites first-hand.

Table 16.2 roughly outlines the four key sites I was able to witness by taping community meetings or through field notes. Each category or key site enumerated has an estimate of percentage of time that a specific linguistic code is used in oral or written discourse among community members. The fieldwork took place between 1996 and 2002; it generated more than 2,340 minutes of taped immigrant association meetings.

Estimates under key site 1 (immigrant association meetings) are based on five ninety-minute tapes I transcribed and coded for topic of discourse, language, and speaker. Because meeting formats are formulaic, following Roberts' Rules of Order and lasting always about 1½ to 2 hours, estimates are very accurate. The same assessment of accuracy applies to my collection of print materials (key site 4). The other two key sites, ethnic establishments and social ritual gatherings, were nearly impossible (or very impolite) to audiotape. To gather this data, I attended nightclub events, street festivals, and social service gatherings and spent many hours chatting with people at commercial establishments such as restaurants, nightclubs, and stores that were owned or frequented by Igbo speakers (and other West Africans). The category of key site 2—social ritual gatherings—included wakes, funerals, christenings, house-blessings, and Biafra-Nigeria war memorial services. In all cases, I wrote field notes within two or three hours of leaving a site, with particular attention to literacy and orality practices (which was the fieldwork focus for my dissertation). Therefore, for both of these key sites I provide field note–based estimates for how frequently various codes are deployed.

Unfortunately, I was not able to well document the fifth key site, Igbo homes, because of limited access. The sixth key site, "return from diaspora," is an ideology that backs up linguistic practices among certain parents. For example, my informants sometimes send their preteen children to Nigeria for summers or for schooling in the hope that their children will absorb both Igbo language and desired cultural values. Likewise, Igbo ritual requires that one is versed in the language of the ancestors, so parents who wish to foster cultural pride and the necessity to fulfill ritual obligations teach their children that the Igbo language is to be highly valued. The fact that arranged marriages can occur even among second-generation children also has a direct impact on the continued acquisition of Igbo language proficiency in the Igbo diaspora; the few adult children of my informants raised in the United States who have

Table 16.2
Key sites for bringing together Igbo communities among ONI immigrants, arranged by use of language varieties

	Key Sites (% of time)			
Language variety	(1) Official Immigrant Association Gatherings	(2) Social Ritual Gatherings	(3) Ethnic Establishments	(4) Print Media and Culture
Standard or Nigerian English	70	20	10	95
Central Igbo	20	40	50[c]	2.5[a]
Village Igbo	5[a]	20[b]	Rarely	Never
Other African languages	Never	5	30[c]	Never
"Broken English"	5[a]	15	30[c]	2.5[a]
Code-mixing[d]	Frequent/ normative	Frequent/ normative/	Frequent/ normative sometimes metaphorical	Frequent use of particles and proverbs; highly metaphorical

Sources: From coded transcripts of taped audio discourse (site 1), a collection of print materials (site 4), and estimates derived from field notes (sites 2 and 3).
[a] Use of code is highly marked where language code is deeply connected to verbal arts and performance. For example, Igbo village code choices index relationships between people in the room who are of differing villages of origin. Likewise, performances in Broken English index city life, working-class consciousness, and a Nigerian group identity under which Igbo identity is subsumed.
[b] Between individuals from the same village.
[c] Depends on the function and the individuals present. It is only at these commercial establishments, however, that Igbo speakers from a wide range of homelands might come together—for example, to see a popular West African high-life singer on tour. Likewise, such social events are the sorts of situations where speakers of Yoruba, Urhobo, or other languages might be in attendance. Usually, Yoruba and Broken English were the languages other than Igbo I heard.
[d] Code mixing is *de rigueur* among Nigerians; it occurs at the intrasentential level and can even vary at the grammatical or lexical level. Highly marked metaphorical code switching, however, is employed performatively to index in-group and out-group relationships.

become old enough to get married and have assented to arranged marriage do indeed speak Igbo with native or near-native proficiency.[3] Finally, also included in the "return from diaspora" category is the tendency to engage in extended periodic phone conversations. These long talks among relatives who are "back home" reportedly are always in a village dialect, and children absorb the gravity and importance of these all-day special conversations, even if the acquisition of a home dialect is not feasible through phone conversations.

Conclusion: On Multilingualism, New Ethnics, and Language Planning

What do tables 16.1 and 16.2 and my use of key sites tell us about language ideologies and language transmission, multilingualism, and language planning in general?

Ideologies and Language Transmission

Analyzing ideologies associated with specific Igbo linguistic codes and key sites leads to interesting patterns of linguistic socialization—or the lack thereof. Because of the far-flung geography among ONI immigrants, language code choice becomes linked especially to key sites where adults come together in moments of heightened performances of identity—for social ritual gatherings, at official immigrant group meetings, or in important phone calls from back home. In these cases, children generally are not exposed to enough Igbo to learn it with any fluency, yet through exposure to the gravity of language associated with key sites they are socialized into a deep cultural respect for the language and for the elders who speak something they know is an Igbo language. Many such "Igbo-born" monolingual American English-speaking children become heritage language learners in college, and although my research did not include formal interviews with children, I never encountered even vaguely negative or stigmatized attitudes toward the Igbo language among the several dozen Igbo children I know. Most, in fact, seem to have strongly internalized a positive attachment to the Igbo language, even if they only vaguely understand it. Coming into or exploring an Igbo "identity" for these second-generation children often entails learning Igbo as a second language.

Multilingualism

The use of multiple linguistic codes militates against children's acquisition of Igbo. Igbo speakers abroad lack enough fellow villagers to replicate an Igbo village dialect *in toto*; however, village dialects are deployed in performances about familial-village ritual and in verbal arts that highlight political-regional conflict in Nigeria. The result is that no single "default" Igbo dialect comes to the fore in any key site. Instead, village dialects often are used at moments of formally rigid religious performance or at moments of breakthrough to performance (Hymes 1981) in verbal art when dialect is associated with politics (as in Nigeria, the choice of specific dialects in public talk is deeply politicized within communities abroad).[4] One exception should be noted. In a few Igbo families there are parents who work assiduously to impart to their children their local village dialect. In such cases, either both parents are from the same village and therefore use the same code constantly around children or they are language practitioners like linguists or teachers.[5]

There is a second consequence to the problem of multiple codes in this immigrant community. Because the habitus of multilingual language use—and the African audiences appropriate to sustaining multilingualism—cannot be replicated in the United States, and because of these immigrants' status as Anglophone elites in diaspora, a functional shift toward English is occurring abroad among ONI group members. Such examples show that in multilingual immigrant groups, the transmission of language and cultural habitus to the second generation will take a different shape than it will among first-generation monolingual or bilingual immigrant groups.

Language Planning

A final reason for examining key sites for language use in immigrant communities is that they may earmark when and how codification and institutionalization of a single

code will come about. Geography and language transmission are important among Igbo speakers in that in a generation or two, much will depend on this new and growing diaspora in terms of Igbo language codification (textbooks) and maintenance (regularized language courses). I propose that it would be valuable to pay attention to the mechanisms by which certain dialects of Igbo gain international prominence along the lines of middle-class migratory groups and the ways they become active in language politics; such middle-class immigrants, after all, are likely to attend universities where formal language programs emerge.

For example, for the first time in many years the University of Pennsylvania has had sufficient demand to offer Igbo courses in a regular and consistent yearly curriculum to undergraduate learners. Although a few universities advertise that they will teach Igbo as courses on demand or that they offer intensive Igbo through summer programs or scholarships in the federally funded program in foreign language area studies, the University of Pennsylvania appears to be the only institution offering the language consistently. Demand may rise as the children of the growing waves of Igbo immigration reach maturity and matriculate at American universities. The instructor's region of origin therefore is quite important because it will affect which Igbo dialects are made paramount in the minds of the instructor's largely heritage learner students. Even among immigrants, if this new elite finds the means by which to recast the value of either multiple Igbo codes or a single standardized Igbo code (for example, by creating a market for textbooks that will inevitably privilege one Igbo dialect over another), the children of this same elite will be preserving and promoting such codes into the future.

The foregoing discussion has attempted to raise two important issues for the methodologies by which linguists study minority language acquisition. The first is that with important studies in the role of language ideologies in language maintenance and transition, we would do well to examine and try to understand the key sites in which minority languages are valorized by new migrants. With populations that are highly mobile and tend to live outside ethnic enclaves, key sites are an important concept for understanding language transmission and are of potentially greater utility than the place-bound concept of domain. The second issue is that immigrant groups with extraordinary levels of multilingualism/multidialectism in the societies where they were socialized to language are potentially less likely than merely bilingual/diglossic immigrants to successfully reproduce the richness of linguistic repertoires among their young language learners. In such situations, it is important to keep track of the second generation's experiences with language learning, language socialization, and the absorption of attitudes toward their parents' languages, especially with an eye to understanding how such children may come to experience and possibly influence new heritage language programs in Western schools' language curricula.

NOTES

1. See also the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies (2001) report on immigrants in Philadelphia, which estimates that more than half of the area's African immigrants have baccalaureate degrees. My sense of this picture, however, is that as of 2003 the level of educational attainment among African immigrants is beginning to change. For example, there is a growing influx of refugees from Africa,

especially from Sudan, and an increase in low-skilled traders migrating (but not necessarily immigrating) from Francophone countries.

2. Ethnic establishments often are sites of intraethnic discourse among a broad array of members of different Nigerian ethnolinguistic groups. Examples of such ethnic sites include nightclub performances by high-life artists or midday conversations at the African restaurants where men socialize.
3. Sridnar and Sridnar (2000, 377) note that, following Gumperz and Wilson, "ethnic separateness of home life, separation between the public and private (intrakin) spheres of activity are the central variable" in how language or other cultural attributes are maintained into a second generation. Sridnar and Sridnar are speaking explicitly about assimilation and South Asian immigrants. There is a strong tendency among Igbo speakers abroad and in Nigeria, however, to press their daughters to marry into Igbo families (successfully), whereas the expectation for sons to marry endogamously is not as stringent. Women, not surprisingly, are charged most directly with imparting "traditional values" to young offspring, and in that sense they are referred to as guardians of Igbo culture. Both men and women in my network assert that this is the case, although they emphasize, of course, that fathers also have important roles; among younger couples, the father often has a prominent role in childrearing.
4. Elaboration and codification of a single Igbo variety in Nigeria is thwarted by numerous factors. Not only is the orthography of this tonal language difficult to manage, but the use of any given dialect is, in various contexts, a political issue (see Van den Bersselaar 1998). The principal reason is that village codes are deeply connected to ritual and to political-social identity linked to the land. Giving up one's village code is like giving up one's family. Other reasons for the continued presence of a wide variety of spoken Igbo and other Nigerian indigenous codes is that English steps in to serve, in a sense, as a "neutral" language. As Chinua Achebe put it, "English is the thing that makes the idea of Nigeria possible" (quoted in an interview by Egejuru 1978, 101).
5. Interestingly, however, in ritual contexts my youngest informants do learn some "social" Igbo. I am designing a questionnaire for heritage learners of Igbo to find out if these social-ritual contexts influence their decisions to study Igbo as adults.

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