The Ukwuani language/dialect question: Linguistic and socio-political perspectives

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Abstract
One of the challenges facing Nigeria today as a multilingual nation is language-dialect classification controversy. The controversy is encouraged by the application of both political and linguistic criteria in the classification of linguistic varieties with none dominating the other. Many Nigerian languages today are endangered as a result of non-identification or wrong classification. Ukwuani is a linguistic variety spoken, mainly, by people of Ukwuani Local Government Area of Delta State, south-south Nigeria. While some scholars like Blench and Dendo (2004: v) classify Ukwuani as a language of Igboid group, others like Nwaozuzu (2008: 12) classify Ukwuani as a dialect of Igbo. Moreover, a debate on the true classification of Ukwuani has been interestingly going-on on Nairaland Forum for a couple of years now. In view of the above controversies on the true position of Ukwuani, and bearing in mind the linguistic, socio-economic and political implications of getting it right in the placement of a linguistic variety, especially as one of the antidotes to language endangerment, this paper tries to ascertain the true position of Ukwuani using every linguistic and socio-cultural criterion for language and dialect classification to test the supposed true identity of Ukwuani. It is discovered that Ukwuani is a language with its own peculiarities; not a dialect.

1.0 Introduction

Language is said to be a uniquely powerful communication system that is stimulus and medium independent, abstract, arbitrary and productive. Dialects, on the other hand, "are mutually intelligible forms of a language that differ in systematic ways" Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007: 431). The great level of language endangerment in Africa is one of the challenges facing the contemporary linguists. A language is said to be endangered when "the socio-economic, political, technological, cultural and religious ecologies have altered to a point where some language species cannot survive or thrive in them." Ifesieh, Agbogun and Tonukari in Anagbogu, P.N. (2006: 49). Back home in Nigeria, the Ethnologue of the Languages of the World reveals that "the number of individual languages listed for Nigeria is 529. Of these, 522 are living and 7 are extinct. Of the living languages, 21 are institutional, 76 are developing, 357 are vigorous, 26 are in trouble, and 42 are dying" (http://www.ethnologue.com/country/NG).

There are many causes of language endangerment. Some of them include: abandoning of a language by its native speakers in favour of another language seen as being prestigious, man-made or natural disaster which can cause exodus of native speakers, contact of languages, non-adoption of a language as a means of documentation and medium of instruction, national language policy, negative cultural behaviour of the native speakers towards their language, etc.

1.1 **The opposing views**

The table below is adapted from Blench and Dendo (2004: IV):

Language Group Acronym Reference

Abini	*Upper Cross*	
Abuan	*Central Delta*	*Gardner 1980*
Akpes	*Ukaan-Akpes*	*Ibrahim 1989*
Arigidi	*Akokoid*	
Ban	*Kegboid (Ogoni)*	*Ikoro 1989*
Bete	*Bendi*	
Cen.Delta	*Delta-Cross*	
Defaka	*Ijoid*	*Jenewari 1983*
Degema	*Edoid*	*Thomas and Williamson 1967*
Ebira	*Nupoid*	
Edo	*Edoid*	*Agheyisi 1986*
Efik	*Lower Cross*	
Egene	*Edoid*	*Thomas and Williamson 1967*
Ekit	*Lower Cross*	
Ekoid	*S. Bantoid*	*Crabb 1965*
Eleme	*Kegboid (Ogoni)*	*Ikoro 1989*
Emai	*Edoid*	*Schaefer 1987*
Epie	*Edoid*	*Thomas and Williamson 1967*
Ganagana	*Nupoid*	*Sterk 1977*
Gokana	*Kegboid (Ogoni)*	*Ikoro 1989*
Gwari	*Nupoid*	*Hyman 1970*
Ibani	*Ijoid*	

Ibibio	*Lower Cross*		*Kaufman 1972, 1985*
Idoma			*Idomoid Questionnaire: E.O.O. Amali*
Igbo	*Igboid*		*Williamson and Ohiri-Aniche in prep*
Isekiri	*Yoruboid*		
Izon	*Ijoid*		
Kakanda	*Nupoid*		*Sterk 1977*
Kalaɓarị	*Ijoid*		
Kambari 1965	*Kainji*		*Hoffmann*
Kana	*Kegboid (Ogoni)*		*Ikoro 1989*
Kenyang [1991]	*S.Bantoid*		*Mbuagbaw*
Koto	*Nupoid*		*Sterk 1977*
Legbo	*Upper Cross*		
Lekono 1987	*S.Bantoid*		*Hedinger*
Lokaa	*Upper Cross*		
Londo	*S.Bantoid*		*Kuperus 1985*
Lungu	*Plateau*		
Magongo	*Ọkọ*		
Mambila	*N.Bantoid*		*Perrin 1992*

Language	***Group***	***Acronym***	***Reference***

Mbo	*S.Bantoid*	*Hedinger 1987*
N.Ibie	*Edoid*	
Nembe	*Ijoid*	
Nkọrọọ	*Ijoid*	
Nupe	*Nupoid B*	
Obolo	*Lower Cross*	
Ọgbi̲a	*Central Delta*	*Wolff 1969*
Okrika	*Ijoid*	
Ọkọ	*Ọkọ*	
Pyem	*Plateau*	
Tarok	*Central Nigerian LB*	*Longtau & Blench (ined.)*
Tiv	*S.Bantoid*	
TuNen	*S.Bantoid*	
Ubeteng	*Upper Cross*	*Ibrahim wordlist*
Udo	*Akokoid*	
Ufia	*Upper Cross*	
Ukaan	*Ukaan-Akpes*	*Ibrahim wordlist*
Ukue	*Edoid*	*Ibrahim wordlist*
U̲kwu̲ani̲	*Igboid*	
Urhobo	*Edoid*	
Vute	*North Bantoid*	
Yeskwa	*Plateau*	
Yoruba	*Yoruboid*	*Abraham 1958*
Zarek	*Plateau*	

The table above, no doubt, indicates that Blench and Dendo recognize and classify Ụkwụani as one of the Niger-Congo languages. They link Ụkwụani to the Niger-Congo phylum by adopting Williamson's (1989) and Williamson & Blench's (2000) classifications. The classifications place Ụkwụani as a language of Igboid group of Benue-Congo language family. However, Nwaozuzu, G.I. (2008: 12) has a contrary view to Blench and Dendo's classification of Ụkwụani as a language. He rather classifies Ụkwụani as belonging to one of the West Niger Group of Dialects of the Igbo language. His position is manifested in the following extract:

> ***West Niger group of dialects (WNGD)***
> *The Western Igbo came under the influence and pressure from Benin and Idah and this has reflected especially in their political ideology and orientation. In fact they provided a vehicle for the encroachment of Edo and Igala culture on the Igbo people. This area of Igboland is found in the present Delta State of Nigeria. Territorially they are marked off from Bini and Warri, their non-Igbo neighbours. Like other dialect groups they exhibit a high degree of phonological, lexical and syntactic similarities. Some of the areas found under this dialect group are Ika (i.e. Agbor), Oshimili, comprising Asaba, Ibusa etc. Aniocha, comprising Ogwashiuku, Iseleuku. Such other groups as Ezechima, Ubulu Ụnọ, Olana, Obomkpa and Ogbodu are within this dialect area. Others are Ukwuani, Akoko, Illa, Kwalle etc.*
> Nwaozuzu (2008:12)

Different scholars or groups in their different publications have, in one way or another classified Ụkwụani either as a language or as a dialect. This development, no doubt, is in affirmation by the claim of Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007: 431) that "it is not always easy to decide

whether the differences between two speech communities reflect two dialects or two languages"; a position Agbedo (2000:21) affirms to. Though it is confusing to ascertain if Ikekeonwu (1987:183) is in agreement with Nwaozuzu (2008) by classifying what she termed "Ukwali" as a "Niger Igbo" dialect. This confusion is as a result of the fact that there was nothing like "Ukwali" but 'Kwale' and 'Ụkwụani' in Ndokwa Local Government Area of the defunct Bendel State at the time she presented her paper. Moreover, while 'Kwale' is presently the headquarters of Ndokwa West Local Government Area, 'Ụkwụani' is a local government area in Delta State. However, in view of the earlier publications before the Ikekeonwu's paper - Ida Ward (1941) and Oraka (1983) - which limited their collections of data on Igbo dialects to Kwale in Warri and Aboh provinces, repectively, it is likely that Ikekeonwu (1987) was referring to 'Kwale', and not 'Ụkwụani'. With this position, Ida Ward (1941), Oraka (1983) and Ikekeonwu (1987) belong to the scholars that separate Ụkwụani from Igbo.

On the contrary, the Delta State Government classifies Ụkwụani as a dialect of Igbo by claiming that the people of Ụkwụani "are a mono-linguistic group – the Ụkwụanis (an Igbo dialect)". This position, no doubt, shows that the Delta State government classifies Ụkwụani as a dialect of Igbo language which is in agreement with the view of Nwaozuzu (2008). However, the native speakers of Ụkwụani do not agree with their state government's classification. To them, Ụkwụani is a distinct language that exists in Nigeria like every other Nigerian language. They claim through the Ndokwa Association United Kingdom on http://na-uk.org/history.php that "the Ụkwụànì language is related to several languages in the Niger Delta region. The Ndokwa people speak Ụkwụani, with varying dialects spoken by various communities within Ndosumili area" and on http://ndokwaunite.org that the three local government areas in Ndokwa – Ndokwa East, Ndokwa West and Ụkwụani - "speak

Ụkwụani language and are known and recognized as distinct ethnic nationalities since pre-colonial times". The divergent views on the classification of Ụkwụani variety are not limited to the above opposing views. For instance, while Wikipedia classifies it as a dialect of Igbo, Tony Nammor in his speech on "*The growth and development of Ndokwaland and people in Delta state, Anioma and Nigeria*" on Wednesday, September 6, 2006 in USA spoke extensively of Ụkwụani as a language. Moreover, it is interesting to note that for about five years now, a debate on the true classification of Ụkwụani as a language or as a dialect has been going-on on *Nairaland Forum*. It is in appreciation of this development that this paper applies linguistic/cultural point of view to ascertain the true classification of Ụkwụani.

2.0 Exploring the linguistic and cultural criteria for language/dialect classifications

This paper would be counter-productive if a conclusion is made on the true classification of *Ụkwụani variety* without the adoption of the International Organization for Standardization's (ISO's) criteria for language identification. The ISO 639-3 standard applies the following basic criteria for defining a language in relation to varieties which may be considered dialects:

i. That two related linguistic varieties are normally considered varieties of the same language if speakers of each variety have inherent understanding of the other variety at a functional level (that is, can understand based on knowledge of their own variety without needing to learn the other variety).
ii. That where spoken intelligibility between varieties is marginal, the existence of a common literature or of a common ethno linguistic identity with a central variety that

both understand can be a strong indicator that they should nevertheless be considered varieties of the same language.

iii. That where there is enough intelligibility between varieties to enable communication, the existence of well-established distinct ethno linguistic identities can be a strong indicator that they should nevertheless be considered to be different languages.

2.1 Applying criterion i

This criterion, which Agbedo (2000:21) confirms, simply indicates that for two different varieties to be considered as a language, the native speakers of either of the varieties should have inherent understanding of each of the two varieties at a functional level. That is, the native speakers of the two varieties in question should be speaking one another's variety without any previous learning. This criterion overrules a situation whereby the native speakers of say variety 'A' understand and speak say variety 'B' or the native speakers of variety 'B' understand and speak variety 'A' as a result of contact or earlier conscious or unconscious learning. Consequently, this paper would be going contrary to this criterion if we use the Ndoni people who are surrounded by and intermingle with different dialects of Igbo in their daily activities for the analysis of **criterion i**. No doubt, the following Igbo and Ụkwụani data have great similarities:

	Igbo (Orlu)	**Ụkwụani (Obiaruku)**	**Gloss**
1.	lee	nee	look
2.	ga	je	go
3.	ahụhụ	afụfụ	suffering
4.	nahụ	lasụ	sleep

5.	kwuo	kwu	speak
6.	mmi/mụ	mme	me
7.	anyị	anyị	we
8.	mmiri	mmiri	water
9.	azịza	eziza	broom
10.	jide	jide	hold
11.	eke	eke	first market day
12.	orie	orie	second market day
13.	afọ	afọ	third market day
14.	nkwọ	nkwọ	fourth market day
15.	ụka	ụka	church
16.	chukwu	chukwu	God
17.	su	sụ	pound (yam)
18.	sụ	sụ	wash (e.g.cloth)
19.	ite	ite	pot
20.	ọnwa	ọnwa	month
21.	ọnwa	ife	moon
22.	ọkụ	ọkwụ	fire
23.	ọkụ	upke	light (bulb)
24.	ishi	ishi	head
25.	akwụkwọ	ekwụkwọ	book
26.	ukwu oshishi	ukwu oshishi	tree
27.	were	weri	take
28.	loruo	nọdị	stay
29.	ebe	ebei	where
30.	mmụị	mmanya	a drink
31.	ntụ	ntụ	ashes
32.	unyi	unyi	charcoal

	Igbo (Orlu)	**Ụkwụani (Obiaruku)**	**Gloss**
33.	iko	okwukwu	cup

34. oche	oche	chair
35. ihu	isu	front
36. oshi	oshi	to steal
37. akwụ	ekwụ	palm fruit
38. akị	akwụ	palm kernel
39. ego	ego	money
40. iši	egiši	house fly
41. anwụ	enwụ	mosquito/sun
42. ehihie	efifie	afternoon
43. ara	ela	madness
44. agwa	egwa	beans
45. ala	ani	land
46. anyanwụ	enyanwụ	the sun
47. ishe	ise	to draw
48. nuo	nu	push
49. ahụrụ	enwụlụ	smoke
50. ahịa	afịa	market
51. ụkwụ	ụkwụ	leg
52. were	weri	take
53. ịma	ịmarị	to know
54. ịchọ	ịchọ	to search for

The native speakers of both the Igbo language and the Ukwụanị variety can understand any of the above words in isolation. But this does not translate into the fact that the native speakers of either variety can understand each other, even when the use of any of the above words is involved. For instance, when I presented the Ụkwụani version of the under listed structures to some native Igbo speakers whom I am sure never had any contact with the Ụkwụani people, they could not understand the meanings of the structures. Similarly, when I presented the Igbo version to some native

speakers of Ụkwụani, though they made lots of attempts, unlike the Igbo native speakers (even some of them almost guessed right the meanings of some of the constructions), they never confidently got the meanings of those structures.

1 **a. Igbo:** Ana m aga njem.
b. Ụkwụani: Njekọ ụzọ.
c. Gloss: 'I am travelling.'

2. a. **Igbo:** Ahụhụ ekweghi ya zuo ike.
b. Ụkwụani: Afụfụ anụna zu ike.
c. Gloss: 'Suffering never left him/her.'

3. **a. Igbo:** Ọnwa na-agba.
b. Ụkwụani: Ife na-eti.
c. Gloss: 'The moon is bright.'

4. **a. Igbo:** Ara na-agba nwata ahụ.
b. Ụkwụani: Ela na-akụ arugbe kenu.
c. Gloss: 'That child is mad.'

5. **a. Igbo**: Iši juru n'ulo a.
b. Ụkwụani: Egiši eju ụnọ kene.
c. Gloss: 'This house is full of houseflies.'

The great cognates that exist between the varieties can be attributed to the fact that both Igbo and Ụkwụani belong to one language group, the Igboid, as Blench and Dendo rightly identified. Secondly, the dominance of the Igbo language in the present day Delta State, especially those in the old Abor Native Authority, is not controversial. This development has consequently given the Igbo language a great social status in that part of the country. It is a well known fact that once a language enjoys some prestigious status; people find it interesting and profitable to learn and use the language. Hence, many communities in the old Abor

Native Authority embraced the Igbo language, especially as they are surrounded by Igbo neighbours and business associates.

This development must have contributed to the borrowing of Igbo words into Ụkwụani. Moreover, due to the Nigerian earlier national language policy that for any Nigerian citizen to be certified by the West African Examinations Council as a Senior School Certificate holder, the citizen must have passed a national language with at least credit level. As Ụkwụani is not among the national languages of Nigeria, the closest language that was then taught and registered by the secondary students from the Ụkwụani area, in compliance to the then national policy on education (in extension, language), was the Igbo language. That, no doubt, must have popularized the Igbo language among the native speakers of Ụkwụani; hence, the great absorption of Igbo words.

2.2 Applying criterion ii

In elaboration, this criterion states that in a situation whereby even when the native speakers of a variety say **variety C** understand and use another variety say **variety D**. Variety C and D can only be considered to be the dialects of a given language if, and only if, the native speakers of **variety D** also understand and use **variety C** as well. Otherwise, varieties C and D should be seen and considered as two different languages. Agbedo (2000: 21) also identifies with this criterion. I believe, this is the implication of Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007: 431) position that "sometimes this rule-of-thumb definition is used: when dialects become mutually unintelligible – when the speakers of one dialect group can no longer understand the speakers of another dialect group – these dialects become different languages". This criterion further means that even if variety C and variety D share a common literature with a central variety (i.e. variety E) and the native

speakers of the two varieties also share common ethno linguistic identity with one another, the two varieties should be considered as two different languages as far as the first condition exists.

As stated earlier, due to the social status of the Igbo language among the native speakers of Ụkwụani, the learning of the Igbo language against Ụkwụani in schools, and the sharing of a language group with the Igbo language, most native speakers of Ụkwụani do, at least, understand the Igbo language expressions. Inversely, the native speakers of the Igbo language who have not in one way or another had any contact with Ụkwụani do not understand Ụkwụani, much to talk of speaking it. No wonder the native speakers of Ụkwụani made lots of positive attempts to understand those earlier given Igbo structures. No doubt, this criterion makes it clear that notwithstanding the earlier listed cognates, Ụkwụani and Igbo are two different varieties. This is manifested with the fact that the level of mutual intelligibility between the Igbo and Ụkwụani is marginal. Moreover, the two varieties are gradually separating their literature. For instance, in most of the churches (as Ụkwụani people are predominantly Christians) in Ụkwụani, they have different programs and literature for English, Igbo and Ụkwụani. There is also the teaching and learning of Ụkwụani at the primary and secondary schools in Ụkwụani Local Government Area of Delta State. The teachers of Ụkwụani in those schools are not below NCE holders in Ụkwụani (not Igbo).

2.3 Applying criterion iii

This criterion stipulates that in a situation where intelligibility is very high and there exists great evidence that the native speakers of the concerned varieties share lots of commonness in ethno linguistic activities, the varieties should be

considered as different dialects of a language. In other words, this criterion states that wherever the level of intelligibility among the native speakers of two or more varieties is highly mutual, and not marginal, in addition to great ethno linguistic affinities among them, the varieties concerned should be considered as dialects of a given language.

The unavoidable questions here are "Is the mutual intelligibility among the native speakers of Igbo and Ụkwụani not great enough to be considered as one language?" and "Is there no ethno linguistic affinity among the native speakers of Igbo and Ụkwụani?" There is no gainsaying the fact that due to the great number of cognates listed earlier, it will be logical to conclude that the mutual intelligibility among the native speakers of the two varieties is great enough for them to be seen as one language. However, this is not the situation. We should remember my earlier clarification that though the two varieties share lots of cognates in isolation, mutual intelligibility is not always there when the words are used in structures. Moreover, as we can go on and on to list lots of cognates in Igbo and Ụkwụani, so also we can go on and on to list words that are far from being cognates in the two varieties. This claim can be buttressed with the following data:

S/N	**Igbo**	**Ụkwụani**	**Gloss**
1.	ugbo	ogo	farm
2.	gị	iyo	you
3.	ayọ	otita	onion
4.	mmanụ nni	ofigbo	palm oil
5.	iyi	onokwu	stream
6.	agwọ	ifugboko	snake
7.	nte	ebụzụ	cricket
8.	ọtele/ike	ọkpụ	buttocks

9. nkịta	awa	dog
10. enyo	uhegbe	mirror
11. njile	atakpana	snail
12. nwanyị	onyinye	female
13. nwoke	onyeke	male
14. oshishi	mbụ	stick
15. ede	akashị	cocoyam
16. ọbara	edeke	blood
17. igidere	ndịdị	earthworm
18. akpụ	ịmalaka	cassava
19. akpụnkọrọ cassava	mpịkọ	food made from fermented
20. ọkụrọ	aniịnọ	okra
21. ngwere	okpo	lizard
22. mma oge	mpama	cutlass
23. abalị	ngede	night
24. ndewo, ibọla chi greetings	ajie/ogbuiji	(for men) different
	oteofe/ọwụesụ (for women)	
25. okie	mbụka	rat
26. abụbụishi	egirishi	hair
27. njem	ụzọ	journey
28. guzoro	nishi	stand up
29. ọgụ	egbedi	twenty
30. kọnkịrị	mkpụrụịkaị	gravel
31. uwe	ewo	dress
32. nka	kashị	old age
33. nwantakịrị	arugbemmadụ	a child
34. umengwụ	ulee	laziness

35. nshị	aya	faeces
36. meshie/mɛʒie	rụkụme	repair
37. ụtọ	enine	sweet (taste)
38. ụzọ/mkposhi	ekwo	door
39. ahụọnụ	ajafụ	beard
40. ọchịchịrị/itiri	bii	darkness
41. cheta	nyarị	remember
42. ihere	ekpụ	shame
43. ifo	inu	story
44. ịhụ	isume	to roast
45. ọhịa	ugboko	bush
46. ịtụghie	ịgwọme	to wrap
47. teta	nishi	wake up
48. tana	kete	today
49. uru ahịa	elile	profit
50. afọ	asụa	year
51. ahụrụ	eshishọ	sweat
52. amusu	ogbome	witch
53. ọkara	mbịrịbọ	half
54. mehie/mepe	kpufu	open
55. elili	ililo	melon seed
56. ntu	ipele	nail
57. guzoro	turu	stand

There is no way we can logically conclude that two varieties that have as much un-related words as they have cognates do have mutual intelligibility among their 'raw' native speakers.

On the condition of having ethno-linguistic affinity, we cannot claim, at this juncture, that such exists. As noted earlier, some versions of Ụkwụani history trace the origin of Ụkwụani people to the Benin Kingdom in Edo State, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw and Isoko in Delta State. Moreover, this claim is not unconnected with the fact that Ukwanis have

lots of ethno-cultural practices with those ethnic groups. More on the ethno cultural behaviour of the Ụkwụanis is discussed in **2.1**.

Having explored the ISO's criteria for language and dialect classification, let us x-ray two other salient criteria in agreement with Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007: 431) that "it is also not easy to draw a distinction between dialects and languages on strictly linguistic grounds". These criteria include cultural practices and the views of the native speakers.

3.0 The Igbo's versus the Ụkwụani's cultures

Culture is said to be the way of life of a given people. The culture of a people can never be separated from their linguistic behaviour. No wonder language is said to be a part of a people's culture. The culture of the Igbos and that of the Ụkwụanis are far from being the same. The Igbos have their unique cultural practices. They are known for their state of acephalous. Traditionally, the headship of a typical Igbo setting falls on the family level. No wonder the popular saying "Igbo e nwe eze" (No king in Igboland). The present ezeship status in Igboland is fallout of the colonial era in Nigeria. History has it that for the British colonial administration to successfully implement their Indirect Rule System in Igboland, they had to introduce the ezeship stool and use their superior authorities to compel the Igbos to subject themselves to 'ndi ezes' (traditional rulers). But this is not the case in Ụkwụani. The Ụkwụani people culturally practice gerontocracy, where the oldest man is installed the traditional ruler, designated Okpala-Uku. Retrieved from http://www.deltastate.com.ng/Local-Government/Ụkwụani-local-government.html. They have their cultural observance on how to identify the oldest person in their kingdoms and designate him as the Okpala-Uku. Once a person is designated, his subjects will immediately develop the palace and transfer every symbol of authority from the former Okpala-Uku to

his residence. He will remain the Okpala-Uku throughout the remaining part of his life time.

Moreover, other cultural practices like the ways of greetings, dressing codes, eating habits, marriage, festivals, young/ elder relationship, heritage, burial ceremonies, farming system, traditional religion, etc. of the people of Ụkwụani are far from being similar to the ones found in Igboland. For instance, while it is a taboo for an adult to be addressing his mother (except in some occasional or emphatic situations) with her name in Igboland, it is a cultural practice in Ụkwụani for adults to address their mothers on daily basis by their names as they address their own children. While Ụkwụani practice both patrilineal and matrilineal heritage, the Igbos practice only patrilineal heritage. Similarly, while a married woman who is still with her husband can acquire a landed property without the involvement of her husband in Ụkwụani, such practice is seen as a taboo in a typical Igbo community. While a man is at liberty to marry as many wives as he can and leave his wives to remain with their parents while he invites or visits them at will, though an Igbo man can marry many wives, he must relocate them from their maiden homes. A married Igbo woman can only live with her parents when there is a serious misunderstanding between her and her husband. In fact, the ethno cultural differences between the Ụkwụanis and the Igbos can continue, if time and space can permit us. As the ethno-cultural practices of the native speakers of the two linguistic varieties – Ụkwụani and Igbo – are different, it translates into a simple fact that the two varieties are different languages.

3.1 The native speakers' views

This linguistic criterion is a very sensitive criterion that is usually taken for granted. It is more logical for the native speakers

to tell us their mother-tongues than the other way round. In other words, no matter how strong our argument might be, the native speakers and users of a particular linguistic variety should be allowed to tell us what they speak and use. In view of this, the native speakers of Igbo have no role to play in this criterion. A simple research using questionnaire reveals that the native speakers of Ụkwụani see themselves as Ụkwụanis but admitted that they have lots of affinity with the Igbos. However, they agree that their neighbors like the Ijaws, Itsekiris, Urhobos, Isokos, including the Ikas, Asabans, Abohs, etc. see them as Igbos. Out of 275 native speakers presented with the question "Is Ụkwụani Igbo?" 178 (64.7%) responded that Ụkwụani is not Igbo. They argued that those who see them as Igbos do that in error; 42 (15.3%) agreed that Ụkwụani is a variety of Igbo; 36 (13.1%) claimed that it could be that they migrated from the Igbo, but they should not be seen as Igbos in the present; while 19 (6.9%) were indifferent.

4.0 Conclusion

So far we have looked at the classification of Ụkwụani which is one of the necessary steps of saving it from being endangered. We have seen different reasons why Ụkwụani should be classified as a language. Moreover, due to the presence of great cognates existing in Ụkwụani and Igbo, I agree with Blench and Dendo (2004), Blench and Crozier (1992), Ruhlen (1987), and other linguists who argue that Ikwere, Ika, Igbo, Ụkwụani, Izii, Ogba and Ekpeye languages belong to one language group. More research should be done in Ụkwụani to enhance its further development. Its inclusion among the Nigerian languages should be encouraged. This will make it possible for the language to be included among the focus languages of the Nigerian language

planning and policy. The native speakers of Ụkwụani should be encouraged to use and appreciate literatures in Ụkwụani.

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