

IGBO CULTURAL PATTERN AND THE GROWTH OF PENTECOSTALISM IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL ENQUIRY

Onyeka Egwuonwu

Dept. of Religion and Human Relations,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State-Nigeria

mayoronyi@gmail.com

DOI:[10.13140/RG.2.2.21448.03842](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.21448.03842)

Abstract

Every religious sect has the potential to revolutionize any society and Pentecostalism is no exemption. This academic study explored the extent to which the Igbo cultural pattern and identity have been influenced by the exponential growth of Pentecostalism. The paper revealed that the phenomenal expansion of Pentecostalism could be attributed to political, economic, social and spiritual factors. It was also observed that the growth of Pentecostalism is having considerable impact on the cultural pattern of the Igbo people. Firstly, this religious trend is partly responsible for the emergence of traditional affiliated churches that are formed around syncretistic principles that originated from African traditions. Secondly, the prosperity messages of many Pentecostal churches are obviously among the main factor responsible for emergence of the Igbo society as one that now worship wealth and material possession. Thirdly, many Pentecostal churches exhibit over-fraternalization, religious nepotism and spiritual ethnicity, which unfortunately have detrimental impact on the Igbo culture of oneness and brotherhood as indicated in the region's umunna and age grades traditional systems. Lastly, Pentecostalism is also contributing to the declining state of the Igbo language and many of these churches discourage the use of Igbo language in their services as well as use of Igbo names among their converts. Thus, it is an unarguably fact that Pentecostalism is having significant impact on the cultural pattern of the Igbo society.

Keywords: Igbo Culture, Pentecostalism, Christianity, Southeast Nigeria

Introduction

Religion is one of the most prominent elements of culture. This probably explains why most humans are naturally and essentially religious. The Igbo people like most other tribes are religious, and have always been haunted by the enormity of eternity. According to Rotimi *et al.* (2016), the Igbo people have always believe in

the existence of a Supreme Being, whom they believed must have been responsible for the creation of the universe and all its contents. The author observed that such belief among the Igbo must have been compelled by the systematic ordering of the universe and cosmos. The belief in the existence of a Supreme Being is generally accepted by most religions, including Christianity. Today, Christianity, which is currently one of the world largest religions, consists of various denomination and sects. The Pentecostals is one of the fastest growing sects today. Their doctrines and teachings focus more on direct personal experience with God through the Holy Spirit.

According to Nwachukwu (1994), pentecostalism as it is known today first emerged in the 1970s in Nigeria. It eventually witnessed fast growth and even got enshrined within the mainstream churches. Today, the movement is widely associated with amazing testimonies of God's wondrous works. But most prominently, Pentecostalism is known for their messages on prosperity, which according to Rotimi *et al.* (2016), appears "to give hope and succour to a vast number of toiling Nigerians". The phenomenal growth of the Pentecostalism has consequently revolutionized the religious and even cultural pattern of many societies, including the Igbos.

Historically, the pioneer European missionaries in Igboland did not exhibit any form of cultural tolerance, during their quest to convert the natives. Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2017) opined that the doctrine could not have been totally blamed for such cultural intolerance and discrimination, as the Igbo Christians are as orthodox as the mainstream Christian denominations like Roman Catholics, Anglican and Methodist Churches. Instead, the authors attributed such acts of cultural intolerance to two major reasons. Firstly, Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2017) blamed the expatriate missionaries, who according to them, has failed to free themselves from the emotional, cultural and social frame, under which they used to express their Christian life. In other words, the missionaries associated Christianity with the European civilization, which in turn justify the demonization of every aspect of the Igbo culture and way of life. This postulation is also reflected in the words of Uzukwu (1996), who pointed out that:

The colonial ideology is that of domination and exploitation of the colonized, intended to derive maximum profit from minimum investment. To realize this objective, the colonizers went ahead to deny the being of the colonized, their person, their culture, their worldview. In its place was installed the person, the culture, and the universe of the

colonizer for the realisation of the interests of the latter. The successful implementation of this ideology alienated the colonized (p.29)

Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2017) identified the second factor responsible for such cultural intolerance as the recognition among the early Igbo Christians, of their own shortcomings. According to the authors, the early Igbo Christians discovered that propagation of the gospel in their local sphere, ministration to the poor, worshipping in spirit and truth, tending the sick and lifting the fallen are not just enough. Instead, the demonization of the Igbo culture makes it necessary to use modernism to project the Igbo cultural image. However, the inability of the Igbo Christians to accomplish this culminated to missionary hostility to their identity and culture.

Furthermore, Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2017) pointed out that the early Igbo Christians believe that a combination of acceptable aspects of the Igbo culture and Christianity could help re-affirm the Igbo's cultural identity. They further opined that such responsibility lies exclusively with the Igbo Christians themselves. This postulation explains why the first generation Igbo Christians displayed great respect for their tradition and restoration of Igbo identity. For them, such recognition does not contradict the principles of Christianity. However, this belief is clearly different from what is obtainable among contemporary Igbo Christians, especially the Pentecostals, who are increasingly shunning almost every aspect of the Igbo culture and identity.

Consequently, this academic study will strive to explore the extent to which the Igbo cultural pattern and identity has been influenced by the exponential growth of Pentecostalism. The main focus of the research will be on whether the rise of Pentecostalism had a considerable impact on what the Igbo cultural pattern used to be. The findings of this academic study will established a sort of correlation between Pentecostalism and Igbo cultural pattern.

The Origin of Pentecostalism in Nigeria

The emergence of Pentecostalism in Nigeria could be traced to the evangelical revival led by Joseph Ayo Babalola in the 1930s. According to Akanbi and Beyers (2017), this evangelical revival movement laid much emphasis on the efficacy of prayer. It also encouraged all members to exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This movement, coupled with the influence of American Pentecostal preachers, ushered in the era of Pentecostalism in the country. However, it is very imperative to note that there is no direct connection between Pentecostal

movement in Nigeria and Azusa Street Revival of the United States. Akanbi and Beyers (2017) noted that there has always been some relationship between leaders of the Nigerian based movement and their counterparts in the western world. The authors observed that such interplay between local and foreign initiative is very instrumental in the classification of what is known today as Nigerian Pentecostal movement.

Some authors were of the opinion that Pentecostalism only emerged in Nigeria, after the country's independence in 1960. One notable example is Ojo (2006), who traced the movement to the 1970s campus Christianity. According to the author, Pentecostalism was established through student prayer and Bible study groups. This movement coincided with the era of national oil boom as well as the period when higher education had become quite popular in the country. Furthermore, Ojo (2006) pointed out that the emergence of Pentecostalism in the tertiary institution is what actually prompted the spread of the movement among the younger generations, who incidentally were more experienced and have the education necessary for promotion of the new trend.

Since its emergence, Pentecostal Movement has continued to witness a tremendous growth. By 1990s, it became one of the most dominant factors in the life of an average Nigerian. Coincidentally, the 1990s was the period when the country experienced severe economic, social and political issues that consequently decimated its middle class. Akanbi and Beyers (2017) defined Pentecostal Churches as those denominations that emphasizes on the efficacy of prayers, manifestation of Spiritual gifts, power of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues as proof of being a Born Again. However, a good number of these churches also preach prosperity messages and claim to offer instant miracles to financial, social and personal issues. Akanbi and Beyers (2017) argue that these messages and claims of instant miracles may be among the major factor that prompted several hundreds of thousands of middle and working class Christians to leave the mainline churches for these Pentecostal churches, at the peak of the economic crisis of the 1990s. Similarly, Archer (2004), also pointed out that Pentecostalism experienced an exponential growth during times of crisis. In his words, he pointed out that:

Pentecostalism began as and continues to be a complex, heterogeneous and eclectic movement in both theological and social composition. During the period that ran roughly from the American Civil War to the Great Depression, American society was caught in the vortex of change as mass immigration, urbanization, and industrialization re-sculptured the North

American landscape. As a result, societal problems became much more complicated and acute. Yet 'most public-spirited Protestants still felt that the key to a better life together lay in personal moral reform.' Thus the most prevalent evangelical Protestant attempts to reform urban life was based on principles of private action and personal responsibility (p.12).

However, Anderson (2004) partly attributed the expansion of Pentecostalism in Africa and especially Nigeria to certain cultural factors. For instance, the author observed that in Africa generally, Pentecostalism was able to make effective use of existing 'oral structures' in the propagation of the gospel. In this context, the oral structures include liturgical dance, comprehension of how the body relate to the mind in the course of healing by prayer, the inclusion of dreams and visions in worship, and the use of oral liturgy, narrative theology and witness. However, Hollenweger (1997) argue that the main factor responsible for the growth of Pentecostalism lies on the group's method of worship. According to him, the active participation of members, flexibility of its liturgy, enthusiastic nature of the worship style, relative novelty of its messages and increased media attention are all among the main factors that make the group quite outstanding. Among all these elements, active participation of everybody in the worshipping process appears to be the main factor encouraging the growth and expansion of the group.

Today, Pentecostalism has been recognized as one of the major ways of expressing Nigerian Christianity. Its impact is not restricted to the new generation churches as its influence has extended to the orthodox churches. Unarguably, Pentecostalism has the potential to act as catalysts for change. This is quite understandable as the movement's activities could be used to engage the society at large. This possibility necessitates the need to investigate how it has influenced the cultural pattern of the Igbo people.

Factors Responsible for the Exponential Growth of Pentecostal Church Growth

There are diverse factors that triggered the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism in Igboland and other parts of Nigeria. These range from leadership ambition to emphasis on Holy Spirit, pursuit of material prosperity, dress code, liturgical freedom, good pastoral care etc. Unarguably, the increasing focus on the activities of the Holy Spirit is the most genuine reason for the growth of Pentecostalism. It is imperative to note that, base on the Pentecostals'

perception, the activities of the Holy Spirit include but not limited to miracles, divine gifts, divine healing and speaking in tongues. For the sake of convenience, Diara and Onah (2014) classified the major factors responsible for the growth of Pentecostalism into four major groups namely: political, economic, social and spiritual factors.

Diara and Onah (2014) attributed the political factors to leadership ambition, which has been linked directly to proliferation of churches in recent years. Many self-acclaimed men of God that founded their own churches automatically assumed the leadership of the congregation which of course is very natural. There are actually several designated leadership positions in a typical Pentecostal church. These include, General Overseer, Apostle, Apostle General, Bishop, Archbishop, Prophet, Healer, among others. So understandably, the desire to be in control is obviously one of the major factors responsible for the proliferation of churches in our society today. It is actually what fuel the high rate of splits among the Pentecostal churches. Additionally, there have also been scenarios where individuals baptized in the mainline denominations converted to newly established churches and eventually attain some leadership position and recognition in their new places of worship. On a more positive lane, the Pentecostal system is quite intriguing and mesmerizing. Unlike most orthodox churches like Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Communion, the system is quite simple and basic. The decision-making processes in the Pentecostal churches are rarely politicized. Probably, many members that left the mainline churches are disgusted by the type of politics that played out in the mainline churches.

Diara and Onah (2014) pointed out that the economic factor responsible for the growth of Pentecostalism mainly has to do with the pursuit of material prosperity. The authors argue that this quest for materialism is clearly the greatest factor that increases the proliferation of churches in today's society. In their words, Diara and Onah noted that:

Many who throng to Pentecostal churches are people looking for prosperity, and being conscious of this fact, many of their ministers have turned prosperity preachers. Many leave the mainline churches with the single motive to form their own churches where they will not only be chief executives but also financial controllers, and most of such people choose the Pentecostal mode of church life for easy attraction of the masses (p. 398).

It is important to note that prosperity messages only became popular in the 1980s, which coincided with the same period when the country is on economic upheaval. This coincidence is a clear indication that the increased popularity of prosperity message is being facilitated by the country's bad economy. Thus, some Pentecostal pastors capitalized on this situation to exploit the desperate masses. A similar situation was observed in South Africa during apartheid regime, where many preachers focused more on messages of freedom which incidentally was what the masses needed and wanted to hear. Currently, many Nigerian preachers have adopted a similar strategy which in reality is specifically aimed at attracting new members and retaining the old ones. Sadly, the messages of most prosperity preachers are no longer on living a holy and righteous life, but on topic that could potentially attract new members. Indeed, this strategy is truly working in the society today.

Diara and Onah (2014) also identified social factor as another powerful factor that promotes the proliferation of Pentecostal churches in our society today. These factors manifests in several forms. A typical example is the existence of membership social welfare in many of these Pentecostal churches. It is an undisputable fact that Pentecostal churches are very outstanding in pastoral care. For instance, most of these churches have follow-up specialists that are tasked with the role of taking care of new converts. These specialists, who may be called elders, evangelists and workers, even visit the new converts in their homes and give them some words of encouragement. This approach makes the new convert to have that feeling of belonging to the congregation. The pastors and prophets of the Pentecostal churches are also much more willing to spend some time with sick members of their churches. The intensity of pastoral care in the mainline churches is nothing compared to that of the Pentecostal Churches.

Additionally, some Pentecostal churches are also much more liberal when it comes to mode of dressing. In fact, this particular feature is one of the major factors that attract young people to this category of churches. In many of these churches, dressing is widely recognized as being in accordance to individual's disposition. For instance, in some of the most modern churches, women are not under any obligation to wear headscarves or tie. In the orthodox churches, such simple and free attitude to dressing is nonexistent, although it is highly prevalent in their branches in the Western and more developed world. The liberal nature of dressing among the Pentecostal churches is prompted by their general belief that God is not interest in man's external appearance. They back up this claim with the biblical quote of Mathew 5:8, which says that "Blessed are the pure in heart

for they shall see God". Thus, the focus is more on spirituality. Many young members also view the more conventional mode of dressing as being old fashioned and operating under the realm of the Old Testament.

Diara and Onah (2014) identified marital factor as another important cause for the expansion of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. This is based on the conviction that joining Pentecostal church could increase one's chances of getting married. Such belief is particularly much more common among females, which explains why many young ladies throng to this category of churches. This argument is quite valid to a considerable extent as many of these churches have well-established marriage scheme that bring young men and women together. They are also known for sponsoring marriage seminars and workshops for intending husbands and wives. Thus, for youngsters that have become disillusioned with the monotony and rigidity of church life in the mainline churches, the Pentecostal churches remains the best and most suitable alternative.

The phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria today is also fueled by the spiritual factor. In fact, this option seems to be the most genuine and acceptable reasons for the exponential growth of the Pentecostalism in the country. Most Pentecostal churches lay much emphasis on the activities of the Holy Spirit, especial miraculous healings. This is quite understandable as humans are naturally impressed by extraordinary things. Thus, the miraculous works and healing demonstrated in many Pentecostal churches is not an exception. Until recently, many of these extraordinary occurrences are nonexistent in the mainline orthodox churches. Bonke (2005) identified these extraordinary spiritual occurrences to include prophesy, vision, speaking in tongue, healing and deliverance services. Visitors that experienced such event tend to be awed and consequently convinced of the existence of something new and special in such movement. Through this way, they easily get converted and then established themselves as members of that church. Graham (2008) listed other spiritual factors that encourage conversion to Pentecostal churches as Pentecostal doctrines, evangelical activities and the inspirational nature of their services and worships. Unarguably, the church services and worships in most Pentecostal churches are not only inspiring but also entertaining. Many members of the mainline churches found the use of choruses in their worship as attractive and a unique way of adoring the Almighty God. The Pentecostal and evangelical doctrines of this category of churches are considerably more fascinating than the dogmatic tradition of the mainline churches.

Diara and Onah (2014) pointed out that of all the above stated factors, miracle working appeared to be the strongest facilitator of Pentecostalism. Most people were obviously drawn to these churches due to the divine powers which some of these pastors and prophets display. The performance of miracles is unarguably one of the main focal point of prophetic healing ministries. Unfortunately, this is now being used as a marketing strategy by almost all churches, with many pastors and preachers sourcing metaphysical power from dark sources.

The Influence of Pentecostalism on Igbo Cultural Pattern

The emergence of Pentecostalism has triggered intense renewal among all Christian denominations in Igboland. As observed by Ebebe (2004), deliverance, healing, signs and wonders, fasting, prayer, speaking in tongues and renewal programs are becoming increasingly popular among all denominations including the orthodox Churches. The phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism in Igboland has ushered in a unique form of spirituality that was never introduced by the western missionaries. It has also led to an inauguration of a more radical approach to ecclesial polity and faith that is quite different from the original practices of the orthodox Churches. It is accurate to argue that Pentecostalism has roused up a terrific yearning for primal spirituality among the Igbo people. Pentecostalism has unarguably been integrated into the religious consciousness of today's Igbo nation. However, it is very important to note that the impact of Pentecostalism is not restricted to the Igbo Christianity. As a formidable agent of social change, it is also having considerable impact on the cultural pattern of the Igbo people. Specific examples of such impact are discussed below.

The Emergence of Traditional Affiliated Churches

In Igboland today, there are certain Christian denominations, which Nnaemka (1999) described as being formed around syncretistic principles that originated from African traditions. In most cases, these denominations are a consequence of the Africans' encounter with other world religions, Christianity inclusive. But in many cases, the level of syncretism involved in these denominations is so evident that such churches could not be classified as Pentecostals. Nevertheless, the fact that these denominations used the Holy Bible and were able to respond to some religious questions regarding their activities clearly indicated that the formation of their Churches are influenced to considerable extent by the exponential growth of Pentecostalism. However, in addition to the Christian principles, this

category of churches has certain elements of metaphysical power and African spirituality, which indicates one popular way through which Pentecostalism is currently influencing our cultural pattern. But the inclusion of metaphysical power and African spirituality explain why these types of Churches are also classified as Neo-pagan churches. The most common examples include Brotherhood of the Cross and Star and El-Messiah Spiritual Temple. They are also known to operate healings homes, just like most other Pentecostal churches. The desire for life transforming miracles and spiritual experiences have also been identified as some of the features that make this category of Churches quite attractive to the masses, despite their neo-pagan practices.

Ogbu (1998) also identified those Christians that worship on (Sabbath) Saturday as another category of Christian denomination that appeared to be a consequence of the intermingling of Pentecostalism with the Igbo culture. Just like the previous group, this category of Christians relies mainly on African traditions and the scripture for their ministrations. But like the Pentecostal churches, they also lay much emphasis on the Holy Spirit, prophecy and healing. The only difference between them and the previous example is that they recognize the Old Testament practices of adopting the seventh day of the week as a sacred day of worship. Some examples of these churches include Universal Praying Church, Holy Sabbath of Christ, Holy Sabbath Church of God, Universal Church of Christ, Holy Sabbath of Christ, Riches of Christ, Living Faith Sabbath, Christ Healing Sabbath, and God's Holy Sabbath etc.

Increased Materialism Among the Igbo

Prosperity messages are among the main contributory factors to the exponential growth of Pentecostalism in Igboland. Unfortunately, such messages have increased quest for wealth among the Igbo. According to Achunike (2004), it is an undisputable fact that some clergy are known to take economic advantage of every situation that exists in the society and the spiritual awareness associated with Pentecostalism is no exception. Pentecostal pastors and preachers have attained a substantial level of material success, a situation that has led to the emergence of a sort of "ministerial jealousy" in Igboland. For some people, material flamboyance is one of the yardsticks used to assess the validity or success of Pentecostal Pastors and preachers. This development is indeed unacceptable as it is contrary to the Biblical injunction, especially when considering the fact that the Son of Man had no place to lay his head.

It is important to note that this intense quest for materialism is not restricted to the pastors and prophets alone. The cancer is also eating deep into the fabric of contemporary Igbo society. The Igbo cultural value has always insist on the principle of hard work, which explains certain idioms like *aka ajaja na ebute onu mmanu mmanu* (success and wealth is solely a consequence of hard work). But the popularization of the posterity messages by many contemporary pastors and prophets have led to the belief that wealth and riches are evident of God's miraculous workings in one's life. Thus, wealth and riches are now used as index for evaluation of one's divine favour. For some pastors, anybody that is experiencing some economic issues is not a born again. Such mindset has also led to situation where prosperity of members is used to determine the churches that truly worship God accurately. This trend has prompted the Igbo society to become one that now worship wealth and material possession.

Achunike (2004) also observed that base on the preaching and message of some Pentecostal pastors, every Igbo Christian is expected to live well and give the best to God. The implication of such belief is that the members' dignity now depends exclusively on the level of their contribution to the various projects being executed by the church. Such perception has also extended to the Igbo society at large, where one's dignity is measured by his wealth and contribution to the society. Thus, the Igbo society is no longer one in which emphasis is on ethical values but rather on wealth. Therefore, one can argue that the current stigma attached to financial brokenness and bankruptcy in Igbo society could be attributed to the posterity messages of many Pentecostal churches. Unfortunately, such mindset has encouraged many people, especially the younger generations, to indulge in all manner of corrupt practices so as to improve their financial position.

Decline of the Igbo Culture of Brotherhood

Historically, the Igbo society and culture has always been characterized by strong brotherhood, which largely manifest in form of *umunna* and age grades. But the emergence and subsequent growth of Pentecostalism has drastically degraded this culture of oneness. According to Ukpong (2006), this situation could be linked directly to mode of operation of most of these Pentecostal churches. For instance, members of a particular congregation refer to one another as "brother" and "sister". They are also known to provide brotherly assistance to one another, such as visitation of the sick and helping out in securing paid jobs. Ordinarily, this communal life, which is very much similar to those of the early

Christians, is quite a good thing. It is actually in line with the communalism and togetherness of the Igbo society.

However, although the reawakening of the ancient Christian life is quite a recommendable development, the way and manner is being practice in the society exposed many Pentecostal Churches to the risk of over-fraternalization, religious nepotism and spiritual ethnicity in Igboland. But most importantly, such development is having detrimental impact on the Igbo *umunna* and age grades traditional systems. For instance, the over-fraternalization of many Pentecostal churches, which is unchristian, prompts some church members to regard those that do not belong to their own denomination as strangers and sinners, including family members and relatives. Thus, they tend to live away from world of sinners, thereby shunning the traditional *umunna* and age grade systems. This postulation was also confirmed by Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2017), who noted that the proliferation of Pentecostal churches has led to the emergence of an entirely new means of social identity in the Igbo society. The authors further pointed out that this force of solidarity and fraternity among members of the Pentecostal churches prevent them from uniting with wider Igbo society. This argument was also supported by Ekwuru (1999) who in his words lamented that:

Certainly, in these few decades, a lot of socio-cultural changes have taken place. Some of them have been observed to be too sudden, total and devastating, while others happened so gradual but equally corrosive in their cultural impact. Most of the cultural forms and modes that constituted the nucleus of the traditional communal life have been observed to have vanished. The pristine social network that promoted brotherly love within the kinship structure of extended family system has been severed and dismembered. The village commune of the political structure that guaranteed a type of republican form of democratization has been deformed and repudiated (p. 11 - 12).

In their study, Ubaku and Ugwuja (2016) observed that many Pentecostal churches are clearly encouraging their members to get rid of every type of cultural affinities. They specifically gave an instance of the Believers Love World, who according to them, encourage members to always perceive themselves as citizens of Zion. Of course, one obvious requirement for such perception is to lose all forms of attachment to ethnicities. This form of life style has dire consequences for the Igbo society generally. It is actually among the main factors

that led to the disconnection and estrangement of members from their immediate communities. It also explains the relentless decline of the Igbo culture and language.

Pentecostalism as One Consequence of Declining State of the Igbo Language

Language as an essential aspect of culture is one of the main identity of any group of people. Similarly, Odinye (2010) described language as an ethnic identity that ought to be handled seriously because; any society that loses its language has unarguably lost its identity. Nwadike (2008) described language as a key to the people's heart, which is also important for communication as well as national development. The above postulations clearly revealed the important role of language in today's modern world. Unfortunately, the Igbo language in recent years has continuously been on the decline. This is extremely bad as the Igbo language is one cultural legacy bequeathed on the Igbo people as part of their identity. But this identity is obviously on the verge of collapsing due to neglect and persistent disuse by the Igbo people themselves. Ogwudile (2014) decries this bad habit and further avers that:

The Igbo language is supposed to be the most powerful tool to which Igbo indigenes think, create, aspire, desire, feel and express their enlarged mental horizon and fulfill that which man is capable of in his language. Igbo people, as a race, are supposed to be very proud of their language, but the reverse is the case (p.10).

It is imperative to note that this bad habit of neglecting Igbo language is being facilitated by a number of factors. In their study, Ubaku and Ugwuja (2016) identified the activities of many new generation Pentecostal churches as among the factors that promotes the decline of Igbo language. In their words, "Pentecostalism has substantially sub-standardized the Igbo language (p.27)". This postulation is prompted by the fact that the Igbo language hardly plays any roles in the services conducted by these churches. According to Ubaku and Ugwuja, some Pentecostal churches openly declared Igbo language as being antithetical to progress. Unfortunately, such declaration has profound impact on the members' mentality, as it prompts them to view the Igbo language as being unproductive. Some Pentecostal pastors that discourage the use of Igbo language in their services argue that the use of local languages may result to the division of the congregation along ethnic lines. But in reality, this argument holds no water as demonstrated in Yoruba land, where many Pentecostal Churches use Yoruba

interpreters in their services. In Igboland, it is only the mainline churches like Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Commission and Methodist Mission that fully use Igbo language in their services. In Igbo towns where there is high tendency of having residents of other ethnic origin, these churches still have separate Igbo and English services for their members.

Additionally, Ubaku and Ugwuja (2016) also observe an obvious de-accentuation of the use of indigenous names for newly converts. For instance, one of the interviewees that participated in the study admitted that “after joining Covenant Peoples Assembly, he had to change his name from Obumneme Omengboji to Victor Daniels” (p.27). This practice could be attributed to the general perception that man’s destiny could be influenced by his or her names. Thus, it is quite common to see members of the Pentecostal churches giving their children such names like *Favour, Success, Miracle, Divine* etc. But ironically, such practice is not so common in the Yoruba land, where the identities of the members are not only representing adequately, but also promoted. As an increasing number of the Igbo people continue to alienate from the local language, it is also becoming clear that the language is at the great danger of extinction.

Conclusion

This academic study explored the extent to which the Igbo cultural pattern and identity has been influenced by the exponential growth of Pentecostalism. The study revealed that that the phenomenal expansion of Pentecostalism, which could be attributed to political, economic, social and spiritual factors, has considerable impact on Igbo cultural pattern. It was specifically observed that the growth of Pentecostalism is among the primary reason responsible for the emergence of traditional affiliated churches, which are formed around syncretistic principles that originated from African traditions. The study also attributed the prosperity messages of many Pentecostal churches as the main factor responsible for emergence of the Igbo society as one that now worship wealth and material possession.

In summary, the rise of Pentecostalism in Igboland has contributed immensely in the refutation of the region’s original social system. Consequently, the love, spirit of oneness and unity that used to characterized the Igbo nation is now gone. The situation is further compounded by the common practice of demonizing one’s ancestral home. For instance, it is common for contemporary Christian having

some challenges to attribute such to the evil handiwork of their kinsmen in the village. Lastly, Pentecostalism is also contributing to the declining state of the Igbo language. It is a fact that Pentecostalism is having significant impact on the cultural pattern of the Igbo society, which is not surprising as every religion has the potential to revolutionize any society.

References

- Achunike, H. (2004). *The Influence of Pentecostalism on Catholic Priests and Seminarians in Nigeria*, Onitsha: Africana First Publishers Limited.
- Akanbi, S.O. & Beyers, J. (2017). The church as a catalyst for transformation in the society', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(4) 1-20
- Anderson, A., (2004). *An introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Archer, K.J. (2004). *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century. Spirit, Scripture and Community*, London: T & T Clark International,
- Bonke, H. (2005). *Evangelism By Fire*, Orlando: Full Flame LLC.
- Bonke, H. (2007). *Holy Spirit Revelation & Revolution: Exploring Holy Spirit Dimensions*, Orlando: E R Productions LLC.
- Diara, B. & Onah, N. (2014). The Phenomenal Growth of Pentecostalism in the Contemporary Nigerian Society: A Challenge to Mainline Churches, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(6), 395-405
- Ebebe, C.O. (2004). *The Impact of Pentecostalism on the Catholic Church*, Port Harcourt: Letatalk.
- Ekwuru, E. G. (1999). *The Pangs of an African Culture in Travail: Uwa Ndi Igbo Yagara Ayaga*. Owerri: Totan.
- Graham, B. (2008). *The Holy Spirit (New Edition)*, Nashville: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.
- Hollenweger, J.W. (1997). *Pentecostalism: Origins and developments worldwide*, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Nkemnkia, M.N. (1999). *African Vitalogy: A Step in African Thinking*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa
- Nwachukwu, F. (1994). *The Birth of Systematic Theology in Contemporary Black Africa: An Investigation into New Interpretations of the Christian Faith by the Newly Evangelized*, Rome: Domenici-Pecheux

- Nwadike, I.U. (2008). "Igbo Language and Culture! Whither Bound! (Asusu na Omenala Igbo: Ije Anaa?), In *F.C. Ogbalu Memorial Lectures 1&3*, ed. R. N. Umeasiegbu, Onitsha: Onitsha Varsity Publishing Co. Ltd, in association with Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 2008, p. 13.
- Odinye, I.S. (2010). Preventing the Extinction of Igbo Language. *A New Journal of African Studies*, 1(1), 79-92.
- Ogbu. K. U. (1998). The Third Response: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa, 1970-1995, *Journal Of African Thought* 1(1), 26-41
- Ogwudile, C.E.C. (2014) . The Igbo Language: A Tool for Policy Implementation and National Building, *Journal of Modern European Languages and Literatures*, 2(1), 92 -121.
- Ojo, M. (2006), *The end-time Army: Charismatic movements in modern Nigeria*, Trenton: Africa World Press
- Okpalike C. G. & Nwadiakor K.L. (2017). The Missionary Twist in the Development of The Igbo Identity: The Dialectics of Change and Continuity, *International Journal of Anglisticum*, 6(4), 1-25
- Rotimi, N.C., Nwadiakor, K.L. & Ugwuja, A.A. (2016). Nigerian Pentecostal Churches and Their Prosperity Messages: A Safeguard against Poverty in Nigeria? 1980 - 2014, *Mgbakoigba, Journal of African Studies*, 5(2), 10-22
- Ubaku, K.C. & Ugwuja, A.A. (2016). Pentecostalism and The Dwindling State Of Igbo Language: An Appraisal, Proceedings of 86th The IIER International Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, 9th-10th November 2016, ISBN: 978-93-86291-10-3
- Ukpong, D.P. (2006). *The Phenomenology of Pentecostalism in Nigeria - A Theological and Ecclesiological Reflection*, Rome: Pontificia Universita Urbaniana.
- Uzukwu, E.E. (1996). *A Listening Church. Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books.