

ON IGBO PRIMER AND IGBO LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT: REVISITING THE LEGACIES OF CROWTHER, TAYLOR AND JONAS

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Abstract

On the establishment of Christianity and the church, the introduction of western education, and the development of Igbo language, researchers have trammelled the efforts of the clergy, voyagers, risk takers, and dedicated persons whose efforts cannot be ignored. In the voyage that brought the first church into Ala Igbo, established the first public literacy in Igbo language, and set up modern schools which began in 1857, the name: Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther a freed slave of the Yoruba extraction looms large due to his unflinching efforts to actualize these projects. A second name that looms large was Reverend John Taylor, who was born in Sierra Leone by parents who were also freed slaves of the Igbo extraction. Consequently, the two personalities that dot the pages of literatures in topics on early development of the Church in Igbo land, and functional literacy in Igbo language were Crowther and Taylor. We shall briefly examine the works of these two missionaries as well as a third missionary: Simon Jonas in the development of Igbo written works that served as pivots to literacy in the Igbo language, and possible reasons for the non-inclusion of Jonas amongst these Great Two. The present paper adds to the body of knowledge on the history of Igbo literacy and writing which is an important area of Igbo studies that seeks to unlock cultural roots and social evolution as well as provide a roadmap on changes in language over time. The study adopts a historical – descriptive methodology based on documentary analysis of early Igbo publications and relevant scholarly works.

Key words: *Igbo Language, Igbo Primer, Literacy, Translation, Language development.*

1.0. INTRODUCTION

The development of Igbo language transitioned from precolonial *Nsibidi*, a set of indigenous non-alphabetic scripts to a Latin-based standardized alphabet. This transition, which spanned over a century, has witnessed a series of political and linguistic debates ranging from orthography controversies viz: Lepsuis, Union Igbo, Ida Ward, and the Onwu, Orthographies. Indeed, these were modern controversies which the earlier researchers on Igbo language did not have to contend with, as they groped through the dark alleys of an indigenous language that should be documented and kept alive by the language owners. These researchers were Ajayi Crowther, John Taylor and Simon Jonas.

Fifty years after Britain abolished slave trade in 1807 the first group of Igbo freed slaves, also referred to as *re-captives*, arrived in Onitsha onboard the ship called Dayspring, in the company other liberated missionaries of the Nigerian descent, prominent among whom were Bishop Ajayi Crowther, Reverend John Taylor, and Simon Jonas. The term “recaptives” was used to refer to Africans who had been liberated by British Royal Navy, from slave ships heading out of Africa. These recaptives had been settled first in Sierra Leone; they got baptized, received education, and learnt different trades. Before the Dayspring expedition into Igboland, the first expedition to return to Igboland began in 1853 when a party of three prominent Igbo ex-slaves, under the leadership of Reverend Edward Jones (principal of Fourah Bay College) visited Nigeria but was prevented from entering Igboland. The primary reason for this hitch was the inadequacy of their ship which could not berth on Niger’s more shallow waters, lack of government backing (in terms of finance, and insufficiency of arms to protect voyagers from hostile

factions along that region. Indeed, the primary reason for the voyage of Reverend Edward Jones was to “test the waters” and survey how the local leaders would be willing to accept the liberated Christian slaves back into the community. However, a year later, in August 1854, a specialized iron-steamer named the *Pleiad* was utilized by William Baikie (a doctor in the British Navy) to successfully navigate the waters and arrive at Aboh and Asaba. Subsequently in July 26, 1857, Baikie returned as the leader of the New Niger exploration train, alongside Samuel Ajayi Crowther, John Taylor, and Simon Jonas. The next day: July 27, 1857, the team held the first church service at the palace of the Obi of Onitsha, Obi Okazua. This service marked the beginning of the Church Missionary Society in *Alaigbo*.

The first subtitle of this paper discusses in brief the arrival of the missionaries into Onitsha, and an introduction of each of the significant voyagers on board the *Dayspring* ship that berthed at the river Nigeria, Onitsha.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Arrival and Settlement

When the crew comprising Ajayi Crowther, John Taylor and Simon Jonas arrived in Alaigbo in 1857, they first settled at Onitsha waterside, where they started Christian evangelism, while also establishing trade in the region. Other historical figures that facilitated this resettlement were the Sierra Leonean Igbo Community (called The Saro), and Obi Okazue: the traditional ruler of Onitsha who granted land to the British Missionaries and traders to establish their first permanent stations and schools. While the British merchants traded majorly in palm oil, the missionaries were into evangelism and education. With an end to slave trade, these foreign merchants quickly adapted to a “legitimate trade” in palm oil which were exported in massive quantities to England, where they were processed into soaps, and lubricants for heavy machinery and steam engines. With the absence of an official legal tender, the economic exchange were textiles, firearms, metal tools, and salt which the British used in trading with the Igbo middlemen.

Language Primer and Igbo Language Development

WHAT IS A LANGUAGE PRIMER? A language primer is an introductory guide to a beginner who wishes to learn a new language. It is characterized by short, controlled vocabulary and structured lessons, focused on the foundational principles of a language. A language primer deals with simple, inductive learning with a focus on everyday usage of the language rather than heavy theoretical linguistic principles. Its core characteristics include structured lessons, inductive approach, practical focus, and clear formatting. As introductory tools, primers are helpful to specific groups including the novice language learners (students, tourists), and educators and parents (to guide young learners through early reading and writing as well as phonetics). Primers are also used by writers and editors (as reference manuals and touchups to the established rules of grammar and punctuations). Today, they are used by software professionals (for programming language primers into AI coding tutorials). There is no doubt that language primer is a foundational introductory text which teaches the language basics. Consequently, it builds the core architecture for effective communication, reduces the cognitive load of a learner, and prepares the ground for an understanding of a new culture. Indeed, a primer is a first step into formal language learning of a language.

Backgrounds of Crowther and Jonas

Despite the undeniable huge role of Simon Jonas in the writing of the first Igbo primer, the credit had often been given to Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Perhaps, the background of each of these missionaries would shed more light on the contentious issue of authorship and/or contribution to this significant work. We shall approach our discussion from three perspectives: the exposure, educational background/experience, and each writer’s link to his family roots.

Exposure:

Ajayi Crowther's Exposure: Crowther was widely traveled. Having been rescued from a slave ship, educated by the missionaries, and traveled across the oceans to meet with the whitemen, Crowther is no doubt fulfills the persona in an Igbo proverb: *OnyeIje (ka onyeisiawoihemara)*. The Great Awakening which began in America and spread quickly to Germany and England was influential in the spread of Christianity into West Africa, and the ordination of indigenes into the clergy. Crowther was first an Anglican priest, then a Bishop, who was ordained in England before returning to Africa to continue his work. While the experience and education of Simon Jonas was undeniable, Crowther was indeed the *isisekpunti*; the primus inter pares; in the Dayspring Voyage to Onitsha.

SIMON JONAS' EXPOSURE: Simon Jonas was a trained interpreter, catechist and evangelist before his journey from Sierra Leone to Aboh and Onitsha. Unlike Crowther who traveled vastly across two continents, Jonas' travels were between Sierra Leone and what is now called Nigeria. He lived and worked in Freetown, which he regarded as home after his rescue from a slave ship. Being educated and trained as a catechist, Jonas was part of the team that journeyed to Aboh in the company of Ajayi Crowther in 1941 to discourage slave trade. His inclusion in the voyage was not by accident: Jonas spoke competent Igbo, thereby acting as a bridge between the missionaries (Rev. Crowther and Rev. Schon) and the Igbo Monarchs. Jonas knew his job well, and his linguistic competence helped to quell the suspicion of the indigenous peoples. Jonas' first trip to Aboh and the goodwill fostered amongst the missionaries and the local population paved a way for the 1857 return to the Coastal areas of Igbo land; this time, Onitsha.

Education and Experience:

SAMUEL AJAYI CROWTHER'S EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE: It was also a known fact that amongst all the missionaries that arrived at Onitsha, Ajayi Crowther was apparently the most educated and the most widely traveled. Crowther attended a Missionary School in Bathurst, Freetown; he attended Fourah Bay College also in Freetown where he studied theology, Greek and Latin Classics, and linguistics in 1827; In the 1840s, he traveled to CMS Missionary College, Islington, London where he underwent intensive seminary instruction in Anglican doctrine, biblical language, and homiletics; He was ordained as a priest in 1842 by the Bishop of Oxford. His experience equipped him with the necessary qualifications for his ordination as an Anglican Priest and as a linguist. He was later awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity by the University of Oxford for his great scholarship in theology and linguistics.

Before his arrival at Onitsha in 1957, Crowther had arrived as a missionary in his homeland Yoruba via Badagry in the company of British missionary: Henry Tonwnsend. Crowther published the first grammar in his indigenous language, Yoruba in 1843, Yoruba vocabulary in 1852, and a translation of four books of the New Testament. Crowther no doubt, understood the importance of language, communication and translation hence his reliance on Simon Jonas as the linguistic pivot for this trip. Elaborating further on the role of Bishop Ajayi Crowther in Igbo language development, Obaro Ikime [1980] pointed out that Crowther was the driving intellectual force behind the Igbo project, even as he relied heavily on translators and native speakers. Thus, the concept, organization, and publishing were the result of Crowther's determination to do the needful:

[I]f he [Crowther] did not conceive of the idea of the book, there wouldn't have been the need for a translator... Thus, the claim to authorship is valid (Obarolkime, quoted in Olatunbosun, 2021).

Drawing a parallel to the above statement, a publicist blog, Myafrik, stated that the publication of Isoama-Ibo not only paved the way for Igbo literature but also showcased Crowther's expertise in African languages (Myafrik blog, 2025).

Simon Jonas's Education and Experience:

The towering personality of Bishop Ajayi Crowther notwithstanding, the education background of Simon Jonas also consisted of western missionary schooling as well as training as a catechist in Freetown. Jonas was trained as an interpreter and translator of English and Igbo. His vast knowledge of Igbo made him a huge asset to Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther hence he assisted in the translation of biblical texts into the Isuama Igbo dialect. Simon Jonas not only co-authored the first Igbo Book called *Isoama-Ibo: A Primer* (1957) by providing the precise phonetic and vocabulary translations for the 17-paged work; his linguistics prowess was also showcased in his translation of the opening chapters of the Gospel of Mathew; which was used by J.C. Taylor when the first missionary school was opened in July, 1857.

Before the 1857 expedition in Onitsha, during the visit of the missionaries to Obi of Ossai, King of Aboh in 1941, Simon Jonas demonstrated his linguistic prowess by his oral interpretation of the Beatitudes (of Mathew 5:3-12). This led to the quick conversation of the Royal Household and the request from the Obi that Jonas should live with them for some time in order to continue his evangelical work. Jonas was not only skilled in interpreting English and Isoama-Igbo, he easily adapted to regional dialects of Igbo including Aboh and Onitsha dialects, which he encountered along the River Niger. The translation materials provided by Simon Jonas laid the linguistic foundation for subsequent scholars including Archdeacon T.J. Dennis who eventually compiled the first Igbo Bible.

It has been stated that Simon Jonas taught Igbo Bishop Crowther in 1856 through intensive tutorials, lexical dictation and word-gathering, collaborative scriptural translation- all of which culminated to their successful publication of *Isoama-Ibo: A Primer*. As clearly stated by Frances Pritchett (1983), below:

While Crowther was the formal academic publisher, the entire intellectual substance, vocabulary, and grammar patterns of the 17-page book were the direct result of the language lessons he received from Simon Jonas (Pritchett, 1983: francpritchett.com).

LINK WITH FAMILY ROOTS: The importance a person's knowledge of his or her own background accords a person quite some special foundational impetuses to service, in the public sphere. Not only does it provide a strong sense of identity which anchors one to the past while guiding the future, it also builds cultural resilience as well as improves mental well-being, providing a framework of shared values to pass on to the next generation. Both the Igbo and Yoruba ex-slaves expressed strong interest in their homeland and wished to be reunited.

SAMUEL AJAYI CROWTHER'S LINK WITH FAMILY ROOTS: Prior to his arrival at Onitsha in 1857, Crowther's first major missionary journey was to Badagry in Yorubaland in August 1845. Then, he reunited with his family, after his ordination in England. He was born in Osogun in the present Oyo State, where he and his family were captured by Fulani slave raiders during the famous Yoruba (Owu) war of 1821 to 1829, when he was about 12 years old. The slave raiders sold little Crowther to Portuguese slave dealers, and he was transported through the Atlantic Ocean to the New World. Fortunately, the Portuguese ship was intercepted by the British Royal Navy anti-slave patrol, and he was safely brought to Freetown, Sierra Leone where he resettled among other liberated Africans, converted to Christianity, acquired his education, and rose to become the first Anglican Bishop in West Africa. In 1846, he traveled inland with Rev. Townsend into Abeokuta his homeland to establish the first Church in Yoruba land.

SIMON JONAS' LINK WITH FAMILY ROOTS: While Crowther traced and reunited with his family in Abeokuta, there did not appear to be a similar effort by Jonas to do same with his original family in Alaigbo. Nevertheless, Jonas dedicated his life to contributing immensely in the development of Igbo land through his linguistic expertise and evangelical work. Until his death, there was little reference to his particular region in Igbo land. Part of the reasons for the failure of Jonas to reconnect were as follows:

- i) During their first Niger expedition which took them to Aboh in 1841, their steamship was HMS Albert, Crowther was assigned the role of not only an interpreter but also the facilitator of the meeting between the Obi of Aboh and the missionaries. Part of Jonas' message to the Obi of Aboh was the suppression of slave trade. When the royal father hesitated over this plan, Jonas described to him the realities of the misery of slave trade in the entire Igbo land: the desolation, the wars, uncultivated farms, and ruined villages. Finally, Jonas described his own experience as a boy slave who suffered with over two hundred other boys on their forced journey to the coast for shipment to the new world; the untold hunger, fatigue, and death, and suicide by many. Perhaps the above harsh experiences of young Simon Jonas in slavery influenced his desire not to be reunited with his original home and family.
- ii) There were indications that Jonas knew his background even as he did not wish to look in that direction. A case in point was with a historic moment, dubbed by historians as "The Anya Encounter". During one of his evangelical works, Jonas and his group met a man, said to be from the "Anya Community". Jonas recalled that this place was the exact area in which he had been enslaved as a young man. Interestingly, Jonas recognized the man he was speaking with, as somebody that nursed him during an illness while he was a slave in that community. That was the closest reference made by Simon Jonas about his ancestral connection with Igbo land. Until his death, history simply knew Jonas as a native of "Isoama region of Igbo".

The Isuama Igbo People and Their Dialect

Isuama Igbo people are a major group of Igbo speakers who primarily inhabit the south-central regions of Igboland. The area includes Okigwe, Orlu and Owerri zones in Imo State. It also includes Isuikwuato, primarily Imenyi, Amawu and Oguduasaa) and Bende in Abia State. The dialect of Isuama was a crucial foundation in the first formal writing of a standardized form of Igbo language, specifically, *Isoama-Igbo: A Primer*, compiled by Samuel Ajayi Crowther with the assistance of Simon Jonas. There was mass displacement and forced slavery of the people of this region during the transatlantic slave trade. Consequently, the major dialect of the Igbo people in slavery was the Isuama dialect. With the abolition of slavery and the settlement of the freed slaves in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Isuama dialect became the lingua franca of the Igbo people in Sierra Leone. As evangelism was being carried by missionaries into the Igbo region, there was the need to utilize the expertise of a known indigene and competent speaker of the Isuama dialect, hence the inclusion of Simon Jonas in the project. Consequently, it became the official Igbo form, used to transcribe Igbo. Today, the modern standardized version of Igbo language, known as Igbo Izugbe is a combination of Isuama and Umuahia dialects to form the basic grammatical and vocabulary forms of the standardized Igbo language.

Early Efforts at Igbo Primer Before 1857

OLDENDORP: Earlier than Crowther, there had been some published materials in Igbo, by Oldendorp: a German Missionary, in 1777. This book titled *Geschichte der Mission der EvangelischenBruder auf den Carabischen* (*History of Evangelical Mission of the Brothers in the Caribbean*). Oldendorp's book contained some Igbo words, numerals, 2 sentences, and 13 nouns. However, this effort was categorized under "Materials" because it did not compare with the works attributed to Crowther and his co-workers especially Simon Jonas.

RICHARD LEMON LENDER: Meanwhile, Richard Lemon Lender, a 19th Century voyager who sailed through the coast of the Niger before returning to England, wrote down a few Igbo words collected in his journey, which he submitted in his report to England.

SIGISMUS WILHELM KOELLE: One of the greatest researcher of Igbo language in his time was Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle, who made important collection of words, phrases and sentences in African languages. His work, titled *Polyglotta Africana* which he collected from freed Igbo slaves in Freetown, and published in 1854. Koelle's *Polyglotta African* comprised of 280 items which were structured around everyday expressions in Igbo: numerals, body parts, and basic words. Koelle recorded Igbo language across five different dialects he accosted namely, Isuama, Ishielu, Abaja, Aro, and Mbofia.

CMS RESEARCH TEAM BEFORE 1857: With the abolition of slave trade and the repatriation of most slaves in England and America into a slave camp in Sierra Leone and Fernando Po, three missionaries: Hannah Kilham, J.F. Schon, and Ajayi Crowther were officially assigned by CMS to document the languages of the freed slaves in Sierra Leone and Fernando Po. Hannah Kilham was able to collect a few words in Igbo, and focused on other African languages that were widely spoken at the slave camp; Schon showed a deep interest in Igbo languages; while Crowther was focused on Yoruba language.

J.F. SCHON'S CONTRIBUTION BEFORE 1857: Apart from Oldendorp discussed above, James Frederick Schon was a linguist and missionary of the Church Missionary Society who demonstrated sustained interest in Igbo language. In 1840, and seventeen years before the Dayspring Voyage into Onitsha, Schon compiled a large wordlist that contained 1,600 Igbo lexical items, which he translated into basic prayers. Armed with his "book", Schon boarded the 1840 Niger Expedition that arrived at Aboh, where he attempted to communicate with the Obi of Aboh, using his Almighty Igbo: Isuama Dialect. To his utmost shock, the local community found his utterances very strange and unintelligible. This made him develop cold feet on working with Igbo language; he dropped that study entire and focused rather on Hausa. It took another seventeen years after 1840 for Crowther, Taylor, and Jonas to develop a revisit Igbo language studies.

SAMUAL AJAYI CROWTHER'S CONTRIBUTION BEFORE 1857: Before the Onitsha expedition onboard Dayspring, Ajayi Crowther, who opted to study his language, Yoruba, had published the first grammar in his indigenous language in 1843, had published Yoruba vocabulary in 1852, and already had a translation of four books of the New Testament by 1857. Schon who initially took up the study of Igbo, had abandoned the project in 1840 when his work failed to meet up to expectations in his communication with Aboh people of Igboland. Thus, there was a vacuum in the Igbo language studies and development until the arrival of Crowther and his team seventeen years later: 1857.

Contents of A Language Primer

A language primer is a basic guide or foundational course designed to teach the absolute basics of a language. A primer is often made up of the alphabet, essential vocabulary, core grammar, and common conversational phrases designed to help beginners to start speaking and writing quickly. The major building blocks of a primer are:

- i) The core foundation which consists of learning the scripts and alphabets and their pronunciations
- ii) Essential grammar such as parts of speech, sentence structure, and the basics of tense in the language
- iii) Daily phrases such as greetings, polite words, and how to make requests in the new language. The *Isoama-Ibo: A Primer* fulfilled these conditions at a time where there was nothing of such for literacy in the Igbo language, even for indigenous speakers.

A List of Earliest Igbo Primers in the 19th Century

Below is list of early Igbo Primers compiled by early missionary workers in Igboland.

- i) *Isoama-Ibo*: (1857). This 17-paged book is recognized historically as the first book written in the Igbo language, for public use. It was compiled by Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther with the assistance of Simon Jonas and published by the Church Missionary Society (CMS).
- ii) *Isoama-Ibo Primer, Revised Edition* (1859). This is a revised version of the 1857 Primer; this time, published by Reverend John Christopher Taylor. Taylor used this revised version to establish the first mission school in Onitsha.
- iii) *Oku Ibo* (1861): This coauthored work of J.F. Schon and John Taylor, dealt with the Grammatical Elements of Ibo Language. It served as a more comprehensive structural guide to Igbo.
- iv) *Vocabulary of the Ibo Language* (1882). Written by Samuel Ajayi Crowther, this focused more on lexicography and dictionary than a standard primer. The book served as an important foundational text as well as a pivot for further works by subsequent educators in the Igbo language.

2.1 Empirical Studies

For the Empirical Studies, we present a comparative summary as seen below.

Researcher	Period	Main evidence	Main concern	Major contribution
Crowther S. A	1857 – 1859	Isoama Ibo Primer	Orthography Literacy translation	Foundational written Igbo text
J. C. Taylor	1859 – 1866	Primer, Catechism, Sermons, Gospel/NT translations	Translation and language elaboration	Expanded Functions of Written Igbo
Simon Jones	1850 – 1860	Mission records, Linguistic collaboration	Interpretation and Indigenous mediation	Indigenous Linguistic knowledge.
Schon J. F.	1861	Oku Igbo	Grammar and description	Early Systematic grammatical analysis.
Hair. P. E.H.	1967	Historical documentary evidence	Early Study of Nigerian Languages	Reconstruction of missionary Linguistic work.
Van den Bersselaar	1997	Historical Records	Union Ibo and Standards sation	Demonstrated Problems of Imposed Language Unification
Ugochukwu, F.	2000	Archival document	Later missionary Igbo Studies	Long – term development of Written Igbo.
Igboanusi, H.S	2006	Historical/documentary sources	Missionary language development	Balanced progress and problems
Falford, .B.	2002	Bible history and translation records	Union Ibo Bible	Demonstrated limitations of Forced Linguistic unification.

Together these studies reveal five major stages in the development of written Igbo.

- i. There was documentation which was a collection of vocabulary and linguistic information.
- ii. There was codification which was represented precisely by the Primer and early grammatical descriptions
- iii. Elaboration was shown as translation, Catechisms, Sermons and other materials required Igbo to express increasing complex ideas.
- iv. There was standardization as the missionaries attempted to establish a wider written variety.
- v. There was also negotiation and resistance because the presumed standard does not always correspond to the Linguistic preferences of the Igbo communities.

Most of the studies reviewed here examined the missionaries as a group, the creation of the union Ibo, later Bible translation, or the general history of Igbo Linguistic Scholarship. They also gave important information about Crowther, Taylor and Jonas, but there was the need for a study that will discuss about the individual contributions of Crowther, Taylor and Jonas toward the development of Igbo literacy and writing.

This present study therefore adopts a historical and linguistic analytical approach to examine the individual complementary contributions of Crowther, Taylor and Jonas to the development of literacy and written Igbo.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a historical – descriptive research design, which is most appropriate for this work because the study investigates historical documents and describes their contributions to the development of written Igbo.

3.2 Sources of Data

This work relies primarily on documentary sources. These include:

- I. Crowther's Isoama – Ibo primer;
- II. Early Igbo grammatical and translation works;
- III. Scholarly studies of missionary linguistic activities in Igbo land;
- IV. Studies of Igbo orthography and standardization;
- V. Historical records on Crowther, Taylor and Jonas; their works, Education and experience.

3.3 Method of Analysis.

The analysis compares the individual works of Crowther, Taylor and Jonas rather than treating their contribution as same.

4.0 Data Presentation & Analysis.

For the Analysis we present the individual works of Crowther, Taylor and Jonas.

A Brief on The Works of Crowther, Taylor, Jonas

BISHOP AJAYI CROWTHER: Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1809-1891), an ex-slave of the Yoruba extraction, a pioneer linguist, a clergy, was the leader of the Church Missionary Society in Igboland. He was a rescued slave who rose to become a linguist and the first African Bishop in the Anglican Communion. With the assistance of Simon Jonas, Crowther was to publish a book accredited to his name: Isoama-Ibo: A Primer (1857). Crowther also published another book titled Vocabulary of the Ibo Language (1882). Many subsequent subchapters are centered on this great man.

REVEREND JOHN TAYLOR: Reverend Taylor was one of the early pioneers in Missionary work in Igbo land, and translated several religious texts in the Isuama dialect. Some works of Taylor included translations of scriptures, liturgy and hymns, catechisms, primers and vocabularies. John Taylor was born in 1815 to Igbo ex-slaves: an Isuama father and Arochukwu mother in Sierra Leone. He was a catechist, evangelist, translator and co-founder of the first school in Igbo land. Taylor had his early education at Charlotte Primary School from where he gained admission to Fourah Bay Institution in Freetown. He joined the missionary expedition to Igboland onboard the Dayspring Ship and arrived at Onitsha on July 25, 1857, where he and other voyagers (Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther and the Catechist: Simon Jonas) were welcomed on July 27 by the Obi of Onitsha: Oba Okazue and his elders. Taylor translated portions of the scriptures namely, the Gospel, Acts, and a large portion of the Epistles into Igbo. He used the Onitsha dialect in his translations.

SIMON JONAS: Simon Jonas. Jonas was an Igbo, also an ex-slave and catechist who worked in Sierra Leone before returning to Onitsha, Alaigbo on board Dayspring. The family background of Simon Jonas is unknown except that he was an ex-slave of Isuama-Igbo region who was amongst the recaptured peoples that were baptized and educated in Sierra Leone. He served as an Anglican catechist in the Temne mission. Temne Tribe came from Fouta Djallon in present-day Guinea. Jonas assisted both Taylor and Crowther in their linguistic efforts in Igboland. Isuama-Igbo was the only dialect of Igbo spoken by a large population of Igbo ex-slaves in Sierra Leone hence this was the only dialect of Igbo that the two reverend gentlemen had to work with. Whereas some researcher claimed that Jonas was ordained as an Anglican Priest in 1859, others claimed that he was not an ordained clergyman or priest rather, he remained a catechist and interpreter for the Church Missionary Society. However, the reference to the Bishop of London as the officiating Bishop in the ordination of Jonas in 1859 and his

contributions to Igbo language development cannot be quickly ignored in future research about this unsung hero. According to T.N.O. Okpe (2025) below,

Far from being peripheral assistants to European missionaries, Jonas and Taylor were at the epicenter of the missionary enterprise in Igbo land. Their fluency in the language, familiarity with the sociocultural intricacies of the Igbo worldview, and unyielding commitment to the Christian mission, uniquely positioned them as bridges between the foreign theology and indigenous spirituality.

Interestingly, both Crowther and Taylor relied heavily on their only source of information, Simon Jonas: a competent speaker of his dialect of Igbo called Isuama Igbo. From this Brief Data on the works of Crowther Taylor and Jonas presented above this study concludes that Jonas was the main man behind Igbo Primer as he was the only direct source of information as a competent speaker of Isuama Igbo.

Controversies On Crowther's Authorship Of The Igbo Primer

Historians have continued the debate on the linguistic competence of Crowther, to be attributed as the original author of *Isoama-Ibo: A Primer*. Consequently, critics have disproved the authorial right of Bishop Ajayi Crowther on this famous book. People have continued to cite the contributions of Simon Jonas which they claimed had been wrongly attributed to Crowther alone. The pro-Crowther group submits that Crowther indeed wrote the book; and only engaged little or no services from a handful of Igbo slave resettlers with whom he traveled to Onitsha from Sierra Leone. It was also claimed that with continued stay in Igboland, Crowther perfected his knowledge of the Igbo language, and with the help of Schon, the duo was able to "put their hands on a book using Igbo as a language. Consequently, rather than admitting the contributions of Igbo interpreters and translators, pro-Crowther group preferred to acknowledge the "help" of a non-Igbo whom we cited earlier as abandoning his research on Igbo when he encountered a "glitch" in Aboh in 1840.

It is important to note that Crowther did not stay for up to a year in Igbo land before the publication of *Isoama-Ibo: A Primer*. Thus, the probabilities of recruiting Schon as a language-informant, or perfecting his linguistic capacities under 12 months, were far-fetched.

CONCLUSION

Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther was by every means a towering figure in Christian evangelism in *Alaigbo*, and a primus inter pares in the development of literacy in his indigenous language of Yoruba. His two co-workers from Igbo extraction: Reverend John Taylor and Simon Jonas played important roles not only in evangelism but in creating primers for the indigenous language literacy amongst the Igbo people. Simon Jonas was a humble, unassuming figure, who lived a selfless life. Jonas was a devoted spiritual mentor for the people, serving as a living testament to faith, who patiently guided others by embodying core Christian virtues, viz: steadfast compassion, unconditional love, and humble service. Simon Jonas was an Igbo language mentor for his principal, Bishop Crowther, helped in writing the book, and faced his task as a catechist, language teacher, and human model of emulation in Christendom. Even as the debate about his authorial right to the first Igbo primer continues amongst today's intellectuals, Simon Jonas did not notice the ambiguity; if he noticed, he did not complain. Here was a man who followed the Christ-like admonition, never bothered to reconnect with his own community; who preferred to be *not for one but for all*. There is need for more studies on Simon Jonas, the ex-slave of Igbo land, who accompanied Samuel Ajayi Crowther to *Alaigbo*, wrote the first Igbo Primer with the renowned Bishop, lived among his people, and died as an unsung hero without a recorded year birth and death or place of death. Jonas was without a known burial place. This challenge is for us all.

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