The Nwagu Aneke Project

Donatus Nwoga
Chukwuma Azuonye, University of Massachusetts Boston
Nelson Okonkwo
Pat Ndukwe
O. S. Ogwueleka, et al.

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University of Nigeria

The Nwagu Aneke Research Project Proposal
THE NWAGU ANEKE RESEARCH

PROJECT PROPOSAL
1. PROJECT TITLE

The Nwagu Aneke Research Project.

2. PROJECT ADDRESS

C/O Professor D.I. Nwoga, Project Director,
Office of the Director,
Division of General Studies,
University of Nigeria,
Nsukka, NIGERIA.

3. RESEARCH TEAM

D.I. Nwoga, B.A.(Belfast), M.A., Ph.D.(London) - Professor of African and Comparative Literature, Project Director

Chukwuma Azuonye, B.A.(Nigeria), Ph.D.(London) - Senior Lecturer in Oral Literature, Project Coordinator

Nelson Okonkwo, B.A.(Nigeria), M.A.(A.B.U.), P.G.D, Ph.D. (Auckland) - Lecturer in Commonwealth and Comparative Literature, Member

Pat Ndukwe, B.A.(Ife), D. Phil.(York) - Lecturer in Socio-Linguistics and Language Planning and Member

O.S. Ogwueleka, B.A.(Nigeria), M.A.(Ife), Ph.D.(O.A.U) - Lecturer in Semantics and Igbo, Member

F.U. Okafor, M.A. (Pontif. Urb,) Ph.D. (Greg.) - Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, Member

P.N.C. Ngwu, B.A.(Nigeria), PGCE (Sorbonne), M.A., Ph.D. (Ohio), Lecturer in Adult education, Member

Iroha Udeh, B.A.(Imo State), M.A. (Nigeria) - Research Assistant, Secretary.

4. BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the 1960's, while Nigeria was celebrating her Independence publicly, a secret phenomenon was taking place the significance of which is only beginning to emerge now. In the village of Umuleri in Anambra Local Government Area of Anambra State, a village dibia, called Nwagu Aneke, went to bed. In his sleep he was visited by ndi mmuq (spiritual beings that had been our ancestors when they were living in the flesh), and asked to perform some purificatory rituals. An izu (4 day week) after he had completed the rituals, Nwagu Aneke says, the
spirit beings came back and
told me that I would have the knowledge of the book. They said that the
work I had to do in the world was enormous, that the words I had to deliver
to the world were numerous, that the actions I would have to perform in the
world were extensive. They said that it was not work that could be done from
memory that I had come to do. That the messages I had to deliver were not
messages that could be carried fully in memory. That the actions I had to
take were not actions that could all be borne in memory. That the people
who now live on earth would say that I had run mad. So it was necessary that
I would obtain the knowledge of the book.

After some years of excruciating labour, Nwagu Aneke, who had never been to
school, developed a writing system that is completely original, derived from
symbols which he claims to have found on tree leaves in the forests.

This phenomenon is significant in a number of ways which we will mention
briefly here.

It makes irrelevant and outmoded one of the main bases of European
detraction of African cultures which was based on the presumption that Africans
never evolved any system of writing and therefore lacked the graphic infrastructure
for high technological and humanistic achievement. In the Eurocentric histories of
the advancement of human civilisation, from the great middle-eastern and oriental
cradles, Africa south of the Sahara has often been excluded. The fallacy of these
presumptions has been revealed through recent scholarship. Black Africa, it has
been discovered, is one of the most fertile centres so far as the development of
graphic systems of communication is concerned. The great Pharaonic civilisation of
ancient Egypt which evolved the hieroglyphic basis of the contemporary Greek and
Roman scripts was a black African civilisation; and south of the Nile valley,
numerous systems of writing at various stages of development have been
discovered. In West African culture, over thirty such scripts have been documented
and studied and among these is the Vai script of Sierra Leone and Liberia which is
today the medium of alternative mass literacy increasingly commanding official
recognition by national governments and international literacy agencies.

In Nigeria, south-eastern Nigeria seems to be the most fertile ground for
indigenous scripts. The *Nsibidi* pictographic and ideographic system which is
closely related to *uri* body decoration has for many generations before the
incursion of European ways been a medium for cultic, erotic and official
communication among the traditional elite of the Cross River valley, including the
Igbo, the Efik-Ibibio and various Ogoja groups. Other graphic systems have been
reported throughout Igboland, including the *urĩ-ala* of the Ngwa, the *akwu kwọ-
nmanwụ* of parts of Okigwe, the Aniocha script and the yam-marks of the Bendel
Igbo.

The syllabic system associated with the name of Ogbuevi Nwagu Aneke has
come at the peak of this history to introduce by far the most notable and
sophisticated of these graphic systems.
Not only did Nwagu Aneke receive a complete writing system founded in the phonological structure of the Umuleri Igbo with features which can accommodate other African languages, he also received from his supernatural mentors a complete message for the renewal of mankind in the face of the spiritual nullity into which it is deemed to have been thrown by the middle-eastern faiths. The Nwagu Aneke script is thus not only a challenge for linguists and students of writing systems but for students of history, religion and philosophy. Its significance goes beyond the reconstruction of the perceived gaps in African historiography created by colonialist misrepresentations, it also poses numerous practical possibilities which need to be examined fully and applied towards the realisation of a number of educational and socio-cultural objectives.

The present project is a follow-up to work on the script initiated by Professor D.I. Nwoga in July 1983 when he first met Ogbuevi Nwagu Aneke through the intervention of an amateur ethnographer, Mazi Ike Manafa of Aguleri, and following many press reports about the script. Professor Nwoga's work has established the nature of the script, the basic lineaments of the message and the significance of the whole phenomenon in his book, *Nwagu Aneke: Scriptures of an African Visionary.* But Nwagu Aneke is not only a phenomenon but a living and committed artist who is still active and whose system continues to grow in a high and moving tension. The present project is not only intended to study the script in all its aspects and to make it available to the world of learning for various scholarly and practical educational purposes; it is also intended to protect the object of study (Nwagu Aneke himself) and provide for his continued productivity.

The project is conceived as a long-term activity needing generous endowment support from government, educational and cultural agencies and foundations and private financiers. Interests from the capital endowment will be used for the upkeep of Nwagu Aneke and for defraying the cost of work on the script and message by members of the Nwagu Aneke Research Group, including the production and publication of papers, books and monographs, and presentations at learned conferences and workshops at home and abroad.

5. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Nwagu Aneke Project are as follows:

5.1. To set up and administer a fund for the maintenance of Nwagu Aneke, for the payment of adequate compensation to him and his heirs for the acquisition of his existing manuscripts, and for sponsoring research in the Nwagu Aneke script and message, and related African scripts.

5.2. To set up an effective machinery for the acquisition and preservation of future manuscripts in the script and related African scripts.

5.3. To create the necessary atmosphere for the continued production of literature in the Nwagu Aneke script by Nwagu Aneke himself, his successors, and others who will become versed in the script and related scripts.
5.4. To set up a machinery to promote the practical use of the script both in formal educational establishments and in adult literacy programmes.

5.5 To undertake systematic study of the script and the message of Nwagu Aneke in all their aspects, bearing in mind their significance for literature, the history of writing systems, historiography, philosophy and other branches of learning.

5.6. To engage in other activities designed to promote the better understanding of the Nwagu Aneke script and message, their preservation and dissemination, their implications for the elucidation of relevant aspects of human culture, history and thought.

6. VALUE OF THE DOCUMENTATION AND STUDY OF THE SCRIPT AND MESSAGE

The documentation and study of the Nwagu Aneke script and message is conceived not only as an urgent salvage ethnography project but a long term research project the value of which is multifaceted, covering various scholarly, cultural, educational and historiographic goals as well as possessing a potential for practical use in social policy implementation, especially in the area of mass literacy programmes. These facets of the value of the project need to be further clarified:

6.1. Scholarly Value:

The Nwagu Aneke script is a syllabic system of writing, a system which occupies a well-established niche in the history of writing systems. The syllabic writing system has traditionally been categorised as being an intermediate stage between phoneticized pictographic and alphabetic systems. However, as this research project intends to demonstrate, the more we can understand the provenance, nature and other aspects of the script, the more we can understand certain aspects of the evolution of writing systems on which there is doubt, debate or paucity of reliable evidence. The presence of a living innovator of a type of script which belongs to an early stage of writing offers an excellent opportunity to study such problems in synchrony. But beyond these, the Nwagu Aneke script promises to contribute excellent data for the study of the rudiments of visual communication and for the investigation of certain aspects of the interface between literacy and orality.

The script also challenges the assumption that alphabetic scripts are based on the most sophisticated and accurate analysis of language structure as compared with other "earlier" writing systems. Two broad directions of research suggest themselves in this regard. Firstly, an investigation of the status of the script as a syllabary examining such issues as: the relations, interconnections of the script with extant syllabaries; the grammatical features of the script with regard to its fidelity to the grammatical rules of Igbo and the internal consistency of the script with regard to the correspondence between its graphic symbols and the grammatical

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**Full Word Symbols**

- ubosi
- uche
- avo
- ovia
- nga
- ogbu
- ogbenye
- ugwu
- ije
- aku
- ike
- ọka
- akwa
- akwakwọ
- ọpo
- ọla
- ọna
- ahu
- ọnu
- ọnwa
- ọro
- iru
- asato
- ose
- ewu
- uwa
- ụzo
- izu
- ọya
forms they are intended to represent. Secondly, the implications of the adoption of the script for language planning and other forms of social engineering would be considered.

6.2. Historiographic Value

An investigation of possible sources of the script outside the claims of supernatural inspiration will lead to ethnohistorical excursions and comparative references to related forms of writing which must be of historiographic value. Is the Nwagu Aneke script an isolated phenomenon or does it have an antecedent in the march of Igbo civilisation? The location of the script in Umuleri, within the sphere of the great Nri hegemony and civilisation raises further questions of interpretation which must be of historiographic significance.

6.3. Philosphic Value

As has been pointed out above, the Nwagu Aneke script has come with a complete message for the renewal of the world believed to have been communicated to Nwagu himself by the great ancestral spirits. The message challenges the philosophical basis of contemporary civilisation and its theologies and presents the worldview and philosophy of traditional Igbo and therefore African culture. This worldview is refracted through what is decidedly Nwagu Aneke's own personal, or inspired, reflections on the nature of reality, the living and acting agents in the universe in which we live, the activities of ordinary human beings and their social, political, religious and military leaders. The message of Nwagu Aneke calls attention to itself not only as a coherent and complete philosophical system, but by reason of the new perspective which it presents for the revaluation of the dominant systems on which the mainstream of modern western-dominated civilisation is founded.

There will be valuable sidelights from the study of the message on much of the controversy among philosophers on the question of the very existence of African philosophy. A particularly relevant and important factor here is that, whereas most field work in African philosophy so far has been conducted by Western-trained philosophers who, unconsciously, filter their evidence through the foreign structures of thought in which they have been trained, the writings of Nwagu Aneke constitute a body of evidence available for study and re-study, a body of evidence written over decades during which Nwagu Aneke had received no recognition for what he was doing. This body of writing therefore is most likely to contain the original reflections of (or inspired messages delivered through) a traditional mind undistorted by foreign forms of learning and/or literacy.

6.4 Social Value:

The more than 100 exercise books written by Nwagu Aneke contain reflections and messages that need to be articulated vigorously as a contribution to improved social and moral understanding and behaviour. His writings are made up of daily diary entries, some of them prophetic utterances, covering the following aspects of life:
• the work for which he was sent into the world at this time and how immense and difficult his assignment is, his domestic life, and his interactions with his neighbours,

• the history and culture of Igbo in general and Umuleri in particular and about their leadership conflicts and cultural and religious decay from which they must be regenerated,

• leadership and politics in Nigeria, the governance by councillors, politicians and soldiers, and the condition of the common man,

• the situation of Africa and the black people in the contemporary world and the future assignment of the black races,

• God, the deities and the spirit beings that govern the world and the interaction that should exist between human beings and these forces, between human beings and human beings, and between human beings and the other creatures - animals, insects, trees, grass, etc., that people the world,

• the evil that has engulfed the world and how human beings must change and adopt the appropriate words, actions, and deeds that will save them and their world, etc.

These messages need to be extracted and articulated for debate or for acceptance towards fulfilling the destiny of the world.

6.6. Cultural Value.

The Nwagu Aneke script, together with its message, ought to be projected to the world as a valuable African contribution to human culture. Together with other documented indigenous African scripts, it negates the old colonial detractive of Africans as being backward by reason of their cultures not having evolved writing systems of their own. For the Igbo, in particular, the Nwagu Aneke script, and other indigenous graphic systems such as *Nsibidi* should be promoted as remarkable landmarks in African culture history.

6.7. Educational/Practical Value:

It is beginning to be accepted in the scholarship of literacy that people acquire literacy more easily through syllabic scripts than through alphabetic scripts. A recent project on the Vai script of Liberia and Sierra Leone has shown that non-literate Africans find it easier to acquire literacy in their own languages through a syllabic form of writing than the alphabetic form represented by the Roman script introduced through colonialism and missionary education. A similar observation has been made by Nwoga in connection with the Nwagu Aneke script. These observations need to be further verified through systematic field work geared towards the development of the script for the purposes of adult literacy programmes. The possibility of alternative literacy in the script needs to be pursued with vigour if field researches confirm the observations. The development of alternative literacy in the script need not be seen as either obstructive or destructive since such a second-tier of literacy exists in some other countries and...
does indeed exist in Northern Nigeria, where there is the Ajami script which provides alternative literacy in Hausa, Fulfulde, Kanuri, etc. Such alternative literacy can be effectively exploited in devising communicative strategies for reaching the rural masses with vital health care messages, agricultural extension services and other kinds of information about social policy which are intended for them.

Another practical potential of the Nwagu Aneke script is that it can be developed into a most viable system for an African shorthand. Being based on an African phonological system, it contains symbols for consonant sounds like -kp-, -kw-, -gb-, -gw-, -ny-, -nw-, etc., which are common to most African languages but which are not to be found in the English phonological framework which is the basis of Pitman's and other shorthand systems popular in Africa.

7. URGENCY OF THE PROJECT

7.1. The Manuscripts

Nwagu Aneke has been writing prolifically in the script for over 27 years. Some of the older manuscripts exist in fragile exercise books and a few have been lost in the author's frequent movements from his home to Nsukka where he is now a Writer-in-Residence. The dangers of misplacement, theft, fire and other perils are constantly before the manuscripts. There is therefore an urgent need to ensure that they are acquired and deposited in a more secure environment.

7.2. Nwagu Aneke Himself

Nwagu Aneke himself is rapidly aging and, more importantly, is in danger of losing his sight, having lost the use of one eye already. There is an urgent need to set up a pension fund for him, to provide working materials for his use, to compensate him adequately for all manuscripts acquired from him, to provide him with readable photocopies of all such acquired manuscripts in order to ensure that he is not frustrated by the loss of the manuscripts which he loves to re-read again and again, and, finally, to place him in a comfortable environment for the rest of his life to enable him to continue producing new manuscripts.

7.3. The Research

For the Nwagu Aneke Research Group, there is need to provide funds for the procurement of working materials for the project; for the publication of manuals, papers and monographs, for the presentation of the results of the investigations at local and international conferences and for travel to meetings and other forums in which matters related to the policy and practical aspects of the script are to be discussed. Furthermore, funds need to be set aside for the award of postgraduate scholarships and prizes to students of the script and related African scripts.

7.4 Educational Use of the Script.

The Nwagu Aneke Research Group does not intend to stop with scholarship

(Continued on page 10)
The old type of book knowledge that people have been using, the spirit beings have discarded that type, and that is why they have come and taught me a new kind of writing which people will use to find the truth, lest truth recedes too far away from us. It is this writing which I do that all human beings will now learn. If anybody rejects it, I will not bother with that person. But whoever accepts it, I will teach that person. Truth and good conduct are what the spirit beings of God want, and that is why they taught me the knowledge of the book so that I will teach others if they accept. With this book, truth and good conduct will be found. Whoever is holding this book in his hand will not tell lies. And whoever is holding this book in his hand will not cheat and deceive. That is what it means to drink the wine as it came out of the raffia tree. Do not dilute this wine with water to drink it. This is a proverb that I have spoken. Whoever reads this book should add nothing to it. This is the sacred book. When you want to read this book, you should think and reflect before you start to read. If you want to write it, you should think and reflect before you write. What you should write should be the truth. What you should write should be good conduct. If you add anything else, that is your own doom.
but also plans to develop the practical and pedagogical use of the script. There is need therefore to provide funds for the production of writing and reading materials in the script, and for the practical testing of programmes towards the growth of competence and skills in the use of the script.

8. Budget

A capital sum of 1,000,000.00 naira is to be raised. This is to be put into fixed deposit under the supervision of the Board of Trustees described below. Interest thereof will be deployed to meet the recurrent research needs of the Nwagu Aneke Project.

In addition to the above capital sum to be put into fixed deposit, a take-off capital sum of 250,000.00 naira will be required for the acquisition of the Nwagu Aneke manuscripts and for the equipment of a project office.

8.1. Acquisition of the Manuscripts

(a) A block payment to Nwagu Aneke from the take-off capital of 125,000.00 naira for the acquisition of his manuscripts. These manuscripts will be deposited in a secure and safe location in the University Library for preservation.

(b) An annual allocation of appropriate funds from the recurrent income for the servicing of the Nwagu Aneke manuscripts and for the acquisition of new ones.

8.2. The Nwagu Aneke Pension Scheme

From the proceeds of the fixed deposit:

(a) Payment to Nwagu Aneke of a monthly maintenance allowance of 1,500.00 naira to 2,000.00 naira for the rest of his life.

(b) Provision of writing materials (paper, pens and other material) for Nwagu Aneke.

(c) In the event of the death of Nwagu Aneke, a death benefit will be paid to his family, and the project funds will also provide for participating in his funeral expenses.

8.3. The Project Office

Two rooms in the Division of General Studies Building, one an administrative office and the other a study and conference room, will be assigned to the project. It will hold photocopies of the Nwagu Aneke texts and other script materials for the regular study of the material by the research group and other interested scholars.

The office will be equipped with a computer with a scanner (with optical character reader) and printer, typewriters, a duplicating machine, a photocopier, filing cabinets and a project vehicle. It will be staffed by a secretary and a typist.

Budgetary provisions will be made as follows for the project office:
(a) The balance of the take-off capital will be used to equip the office.

(b) An annual allocation from the proceeds of the fixed deposit will be used for running the office: the purchase of stationery, remuneration of office staff, maintenance of project vehicle and office equipment, hiring of temporary transcribers, translators, etc..

8.4 The Research Group

(a) Grants to members of the group, and others as the need arises, for research on the script and message, and other related topics like the biography of the visionary, the psychology of inspiration, traditional philosophy and transitional life, comparative aspects of the script and other local and international forms of communication, etc..

(b) A special grant to any member of the group writing a monograph or book on the script, related script, or the message.

(c) Support to members of the group to present their works in the script at local and international conferences, subject to the limit of one international (overseas) conference and 2 local conferences.

(d) Award of postgraduate scholarships to students specialising on scripts in their theses, dissertations or project reports.

8.5 Literacy Programme with the Nwagu Aneke Script

(a) Funds will be allocated for research projects on the use of the Nwagu Aneke script for the teaching of literacy both at the school and adult education levels.

(b) Funds will also be allocated for the development of computer and other mechanical printing programmes for the script.

(c) Manuals on the reading of the Nwagu Aneke texts, and graded primers for the development of proficiency in the writing and reading of the scripts, will be financed.

9 Board of Trustees

The capital and other financial provision of the Nwagu Aneke Project will be administered by a Board of Trustees comprised of Government and other financiers of the project, the University of Nigeria, the project Director and the project Coordinator.