

WILL THE YORUBA LANGUAGE SURVIVE BEYOND THE 21ST CENTURY?

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INTRODUCTION

Today, many native speakers of the Yoruba language take the continued survival of their language for granted and hardly give any thought to what fate might befall it in the future. This nonchalant, not to say negative, attitude is especially prevalent among the elite who no longer speak the mother tongue to their children. Rather, they speak only English, the ex-colonial official language because of the benefits that attach to the ability to speak the foreign language. Since the elite are the role models whose behaviour is always aped and imitated by the others, Yoruba native speakers of the lower social classes have also formed the habit of speaking English to their children. The situation described above is true of the behaviour and attitude of Yoruba native speakers to their language in the Republic of Benin and Togo.

It is against this background that I consider it germane to ask if the Yoruba language will survive beyond the 21st century. In other words, one may ask: Is the Yoruba language endangered and likely to go into extinction? The unequivocal answer is yes! And it may go into extinction if care is not taken to ensure its continued usage and development by those who own it. Currently, in Nigeria and in Africa in general, hundreds of languages are highly endangered or extinct (Batibo 2005). The factors responsible for the endangerment of the Yoruba language will be highlighted in a subsequent section of this lecture. Also, measures that should be taken to prevent the decline of Yoruba will be discussed.

For now, let us turn to the identification of the Yoruba nation. There is always the tendency on the part of a majority of Yoruba people in Nigeria to believe that Yorubaland begins and ends in Nigeria. Nothing could be more erroneous. The traditional homeland of the Yoruba people lies roughly between latitudes 6° and 9° N and longitudes 2° 30' and 6° 30' East, a little beyond river Mono (see appendix). For instance, of the seven traditional kingdoms established by Oduduwa's grandchildren, three are in today's Republic of Benin viz Alaketu of Ketu, Onisabe of Sabe and the Olupopo of Popo.

Some of the dialects of Yoruba spoken in Benin Republic and Togo are: Ajase, Idasa, Ife Seti, Ije, Isa, Kaboli, Ketu, Manigri, Kura, Moretan, Mokole, Pobe, SabeSabe, Sabe Sauru, Ife Atapame, just as we have Ijebu, Ijesa, Ekiti, Yewa, Egba, Ondo, Akoko, etc. in Nigeria.

Speakers of these dialects of the language all recognize themselves as "Omo Oduduwa".

THE PARTITION OF YORUBALAND

Consequent upon the Berlin Conference of 1884-5, the Yoruba nation was partitioned and balkanized among British, French and German colonialists. When Germany lost its African colonies after the First World War, Togo fell under French rule. One significant consequence of the international boundaries established by European colonialists across the Yoruba homeland is the fact that the Yoruba people on various sides of these borders have ended up having scanty knowledge of those on the other side of such borders.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE YORUBA LANGUAGE FROM MID 19TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

In Nigeria, the Yoruba language, was seriously studied and worked upon by missionaries in the first half of the 19th century. The Yoruba language was reduced to writing and its orthography established between 1840 and 1850. This was the result of team work by an international group which included the British, Germans, Danes, Americans, Italians and Africans

(Ade Ajayi 1960). It is remarkable that Yoruba men played an active role in the process of the early development of the Yoruba language. Some of them are Bishop Ajayi Crowther, who translated the Holy Bible into Yoruba, Rev. Thomas King, and T. B. Macualay. The prime motivation for the missionaries' work on Yoruba derived from their conviction that the surest way to get the Yoruba christianized was through their own indigenous language. By 1859, the first Nigerian newspaper, *Iwe Irohin*, published by Reverend Townsend appeared in Abeokuta. A few years earlier, Samuel Ajayi Crowther had published a Grammar of Yoruba language. Between that period and 1897, there were publications written in Yoruba by Germans (Reverend Gollmer and Hinderer) and Yoruba writers such as S. A. Allen, Mojola Agbebi and Rev. Lijadu. There was a flourish of publications in Yoruba up till about 1900. Between 1900 and 1920, the tempo slowed down only to pick up again from mid 1920s to mid 1950s.

There was the era of Yoruba literati such as Obasa, I. B. Thomas, and D. O. Fagunwa. There were also several pamphlets and newspapers published in Yoruba by Lagos-based printers. Hitherto, it could be said that the propelling force behind the development of the Yoruba language was the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

Beginning from the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa and the Action Group Government of the Western Region began to show interest in Yoruba cultural studies. The Western Region Literature Committee (W.R.L.C.) was established in 1951 with the sole aim of producing teaching materials. As a result of the cultural policy of the Western Region Government, the W.R.L.C. was replaced by the General Publications Section (G.P.S.) located within the Ministry of Education during the tenure of Chief S. O. Awokoya as Minister of Education. It must be stated that Chief Awokoya was passionate about the growth of the Yoruba language. The function of the G.P.S included the publication of books especially those written in

Yoruba for school children and for adults. It published *Aworerin*, a magazine that was devoted to encouraging young people to read Yoruba (This writer was an avid reader of the magazine in his secondary school days). Among the staff who worked with total commitment at the G.P.S. were D.O. Fagunwa, D. Kalejaiye, J.O. Oye and Miss Jean Saunders, and in a space of ten years, 52 Yoruba titles were published.

At the Conference for Authors in Nigerian Languages which held in Ibadan in March 1959, some of the decisions taken by the Yoruba Group at that Conference were:

- (a) Yoruba should be taught in Teacher Training Colleges.
- (b) Yoruba should be included as an essential subject in our primary schools and examined at primary six levels.
- (c) Instead of detesting the infiltration of foreign words into Yoruba language, efforts should be made to purify them in accordance with “the genius of the language”
- (d) Good Yoruba teaching could help the nation to advance more rapidly.

Without any iota of doubt, the above recommendations remain relevant till the present time and these will be discussed towards the end of this presentation, as part of the recommendations for the survival of Yoruba.

In 1965, the G.P.S. was reconstituted and charged to “advise on questions of policy appertaining to the production of literature both vernacular, and English ...” However, in his opening speech at the inauguration of the newly constituted committee, the State Minister of Education, Chief N.A. Ajibola stated emphatically that:

“It is the firm belief of my government that the ideas and culture of a people are only fully expressible (sic) in the language indigenous to those. And it may not be unlikely that the absence of any dynamic growth in the thoughts of our people in the last decade has been due to the fact that, we are, for reasons that are basically economic, forced to express ourselves in a language absolutely foreign to our thought.

My government would therefore want your particular attention on the ways and means of correcting this major aspect of our education so that the interest to read and produce in the vernacular may become general...

Before the end of that year, (1965), one of the key recommendations of the committee was to the effect that:

- ***Government should set up a technical terms committee which would make it possible for all subjects to be written and taught in Yoruba (emphasis mine).***

The G.P.S. Advisory Committee went further and set up eleven committees that would translate technical terms in various domains into Yoruba. These were:

- i. Linguistics
- ii. Physical Sciences
- iii. Natural sciences
- iv. Mathematics
- v. Administration
- vi. Medicine
- vii. Engineering
- viii. Humanities
- ix. General experiences
- x. Law
- xi. Agriculture

These were radical and far-reaching decisions. The Committee even went further to recommend that Yoruba be made compulsory in all schools in Western Nigeria, and that Yoruba should be co-official with English in the Western House of Assembly and the House of Chiefs. It

was also recommended that a credit in Yoruba be accepted as equivalent to a credit in English for the purposes of employment in the civil service.

The point one wants to make with this overview¹ of efforts at the development of the Yoruba language is that the Yoruba elite, at least up till the 1960s, were proud of their language and culture and made conscious and deliberate efforts to make the language a suitable tool for the transmission of knowledge and discourse in all modern domains.

However, the military intervention of 1966 set the hand of the clock back with respect to the efforts being made by Government to modernize Yoruba language. Even though the military administration did not consider the development and modernization of Yoruba a priority, efforts continued to be made toward this at institutional and individual levels. One of such was the Ife Six-Year Primary Project at the then University of Ife.

Mention must also be made of the efforts made by *Egbe Ijinle Yoruba* in developing Yoruba language and literature. Among other activities, the Egbe strove to get Yoruba adopted as an official language of the Western Nigerian Legislature as well as make Yoruba a compulsory subject at the primary six examination. It also pressed for the establishment of a Yoruba Language Commission, all these in the mid 1960s. These were revolutionary steps indeed. Another radical step taken by the Egbe was their ability to find appropriate Yoruba words and phrases for Latin, English and French technical terms pertaining to the law of contract.² More will be said about coining of Yoruba technical terms in the various domains in a subsequent section of this presentation. Unfortunately, the political unrest in the West frustrated the realization of all that the Egbe set out to achieve.

THE IFE SIX-YEAR PRIMARY PROJECT

The Ife Six-Year Primary Project (SYPP) which began in 1970 at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) OAU, was at the initiative of Yoruba educationists and

linguists under the leadership of Professor Babs Fafunwa. The aim was to demonstrate that primary education given entirely in Yoruba from Primary 1 through to 6 was likely to produce better results. All subjects were taught in Yoruba whilst English and Yoruba were taught as subjects in the experimental classes. The result from the project showed that the children taught in Yoruba performed better than their counterparts who were taught in the 3-3 medium. This result could be said to have provided some justification for the view expressed by Chief N.A. Ajibola in 1965 which has been cited above.

Again, unfortunately, at the point at which the experiment was to be generalized, a non-Yoruba Military Administrator took over in the Western State. Since the project was not one of the priorities of the military administration, it was allowed to die a natural death. Since then, most of the efforts made to modernize Yoruba have been at the level of individual scholars and professionals either in response to academic needs in the teaching of Yoruba at the tertiary level or in response to the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution or purely out of personal interest.

RECENT EFFORTS AT DEVELOPING A METALANGUAGE AND TECHNICAL TERMINOLOGY FOR YORUBA

There is a provision in the Nigerian Constitution which proclaims Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as co-official languages with English to be used in the National Assembly. The caveat is that the three Nigerian languages can only be used “when adequate arrangements have been made therefor”. (Section 55). The Constitution also stipulates that one or more other languages spoken in the State may be used in State Houses of Assembly “as the House may by resolution approve (Section 97).

Consequently, a *Quadrilingual Glossary of Legislative Terms (English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba)* was compiled in 1991. The late Professor Adeboye Babalola and some Yoruba scholars created and compiled the Yoruba terms in that glossary. In the area of metalanguage, the Yoruba

Studies Association of Nigeria (YSAN) published *Ede-Iperi Yoruba* II by Oladele Awobuluyi in 1990 and *Ede Iperi Yoruba* I by Ayo Bamgbose in 1992. Both authors are distinguished linguists. These two publications have since made it possible to teach Yoruba in Yoruba to University students of the language. Examinations at the Bachelor's degree level are entirely in Yoruba, and postgraduate students of Yoruba now write their theses and dissertations in Yoruba whilst oral defence is in the Yoruba language also. In 1993, Mr. V. A. Odetayo, an engineer created, compiled and published the *Yoruba Dictionary of Engineering Physics*.

Earlier in 1989, Professor Kola Owolabi published *Ijinle Itupale Ede Yoruba: Fonetiki at Fonoloji Yoruba*, in 1990, Emeritus Professor Ayo Bamgbose published *Girama ati Fonoloji Yoruba* and a number of others³. About ten years later, Mr. Tunji Adeyomoye, an agronomist and graduate of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), who taught mathematics for several years at the secondary school level, published *Mathematics ni Ede Yoruba*. In 2001, Dr. Kayode J. Fakinlede of the Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA), compiled and published *Modern Dictionary of the Yoruba Language: Translation of Modern and Scientific English to Yoruba*.

Professor Omotoye Olorode a botanist, whilst at Obafemi Awolowo University compiled native words for different plants in Yorubaland.⁴ Of special interest is the work of a linguist, Professor Kola Owolabi of the University of Ibadan who, whilst translating the 1999 Nigerian Constitution into Yoruba, created indigenous legislative terms for the language. In the past decade or more, he has devoted his entire time and energy to the creation of technical terms in specialized domains for use in Yoruba. In 2008, he established the Centre for Yoruba Language Engineering (CYLE) in Ibadan. One of the objectives of CYLE is to

channel efforts towards the modernization and application of Yoruba in specialized domains such as technology, science, medicine, engineering, agriculture, law and politics, administration, etc. by expanding its vocabularies through the addition of technical or sub-technical terms and encouraging its use for practical purposes in various domains.⁵

From the foregoing, one can see that for about 200 years now, both at institutional and individual levels, a lot of time, energy and resources have been invested in developing the Yoruba language. As a matter of fact, Yoruba is today the most developed Nigerian indigenous language in the sense that it is the only one that has terminology covering all of the following areas.

- i. Primary school Science and Mathematics Terms.
- ii. Linguistics, Literature and Methodology Terms.
- iii. Legislative Terms and
- iv. Engineering Physics Terms. (Owolabi 2006: 23)

One would have expected that with all the work that has been done on and in Yoruba as summarized above, native speakers of the language would have developed a high sense of pride and attachment for the language such that they would proudly make use of it and pass it on to their children. But what do we observe today about the native speaker's attitudes to their own language?

NATIVE YORUBA SPEAKERS' ATTITUDE TO YORUBA

Currently the attitude of the Yoruba people in Nigeria to their own language can best be described as nonchalant if not actually negative. When spoken especially by the western-educated Yoruba man or woman, it is laced with so many English words that one begins to wonder which language is being spoken. Needless to say, the proficiency level of an average Yoruba aged 25 years and below can be said to be very low as most can neither read nor write the language. A

vast majority cannot count in the language also. Awobuluyi (2014) sums up the situation as follows:

Any careful observer of developments within the contemporary Yoruba community is bound to be filled with grave fear for the future of its indigenous language. Many Western educated Yoruba persons today seem to consider it a mark of sophistication for them to speak English where they should speak Yoruba, their native language. They speak only English to their children at home, and wish only English to be also spoken and taught to them at school from kindergarten level to the University level...

Some of the western educated people even go as far as saying that Yoruba is not capable of expressing scientific and technological concepts. They forget or are unaware of the fact that there is no language that is created readymade and equipped with technical terms for use in the various domains. Every language that is today developed such as English, French, German, etc. have had to go through the phase of terminology creation and vocabulary expansion. For instance, it was not until 1530 that French started to replace Latin as medium of instruction. And it was not, until the establishment of the Academie Française in 1635 that French began to enjoy official recognition, which became confirmed as a result of the 1789 French revolution. And in recent times, Britain and France have had to engage in deliberate activities of increasing and enriching the vocabularies of their languages in order to ensure that they have the necessary technical terminology for modern discourse in various domains.

The point must be made that there is nothing that has been done and is currently being done to develop languages such English and French that has not been done and is not being done to develop the Yoruba language. The major difference there can be said to be between English and French on the one hand and Yoruba on the other is the fact that while speakers' of the former

have a sense of pride in their respective languages, Yoruba speakers sense of pride in their own language appears questionable. That is why Yoruba can be said to be an endangered language. That is, Yoruba risks disappearing and going into extinction if the speakers do not rouse themselves from their lethargic disposition towards their language and start to make every conscious and deliberate effort at using the language for daily transactions as well as ensuring its continued development in order to make it a suitable tool for discourse in all the domains of modern life. This is what raises the question – will the Yoruba language survive beyond the 21st century?

Given the negative attitude of Yoruba speakers in the homeland to their language, the question as to whether or not the Yoruba language will survive beyond the 21st century becomes very pertinent. It is all the more so in the light of the troubling statistics by experts that by the turn of the century, 90% of the world's languages will have disappeared from the face of the earth, leaving only about 600 languages. UNESCO (Paris) is worried about this prognosis and has, in recent years, been busy working out strategies to prevent the impending calamity. It is common knowledge that a language lost is like a whole library destroyed. If the Yoruba language were to die out by or before the turn of the century, it would be a monumental loss not only to the Yoruba race world-wide but even to humanity.

ATTITUDE TO THE YORUBA LANGUAGE IN THE DIASPORA

As a result of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and recent migrations away from home, there is a Yoruba Diaspora in various parts of the world. Given the resilience of the Yoruba culture, the Yoruba descendants in these places have been able to preserve some key elements of their Yoruba cultural identity in the Diaspora. Although they have lost the Yoruba language as a result of the repression that they experienced in their new homes, they are very eager to re-acquire the language. So strong is the urge to learn the Yoruba language that Brazil recently proposed having

Yoruba as a second official language. But where are the teachers? According to Kola Abimbola (2005: 36 – 37),

*close to one hundred million 'black', 'white',
and multi-racial people in Argentina, Australia,
Brazil, Columbia, Cuba, France, Haiti, Italy,
Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Spain, Trinidad and
Tobago, U.K., U.S.A. and Venezuela now organize
their day-to-day lives on the basis of Yoruba
belief and cultural practices.*

To these may be added others such as Honduras, Guyana, etc. Brazil is said to have the largest concentration of Yoruba people in the Diaspora, numbering about 80 million. Cuba is another country with a substantial number of Yoruba descendants and strong Yoruba cultural influence. They have expressed concern about the attitude to the Yoruba language at home and have vowed that they will be the ones to return home to teach the language to the young Yoruba people after they might have lost it! One cannot imagine the psychological trauma that the loss of the Yoruba language will cause Yoruba descendants in the Diaspora given their strong attachment to the language.

Another reason one should not contemplate the death of the Yoruba language is the fact that it is the vehicle for the world-famous Ifa literary corpus. Needless to say, Ifa has adherents all over the world who stream annually to Ile-Ife and Oyo on pilgrimage. Furthermore, the Yoruba numeral system is a unique feature of the language.

Recently, the Yoruba language has attained a pre-eminent position among other foreign languages taught in the European and American universities. As a matter of fact, for some years, American students from various universities in the U.S.A. were coming to Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife for a seven-week intensive summer course in Yoruba language and culture. All of them enjoyed financial support of the Fulbright Foundation. It is noteworthy also that the

American State Department has now established a Yoruba Language Centre at the University of Ibadan in Ibadan. The main function of the Centre is to train Americans of different professional backgrounds, including students, to speak, read, and write Yoruba with a high degree of competence. They have been doing this very creditably. The centre has a professional linguist, Professor Kola Owolabi as Director. The course lasts about 6 months. And way back in 1997, Michka Sachnine, a French linguist who taught Yoruba for close to twenty years at the Institut National des Langues Orientates (INALCO), Paris, published a Yoruba-French dictionary.

Given the world-wide interest in the Yoruba language on the part of laymen, religionists and scholars, and given some of the unique features of the language such as its numeral system mentioned earlier, it would be a monumental loss to humanity if the language were to disappear.

THE FUTURE OF YORUBA LANGUAGE

The question of the survival of Yoruba has been agitating and continues to agitate the minds of many Yoruba men and women, scholars, politicians, traditional rulers, administrators, professionals and others. It is undoubtedly out of concern for the future of the language that virtually all State Houses of Assembly (SHA) in the Yoruba States of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti have deemed it fit to devote one day in the week to the use of the Yoruba language for the proceedings of the SHA. Laudable as this may be, it is neither adequate nor sufficient in ensuring Yoruba survives beyond this century. Also, as recently as September 2014, the Osun State House of Assembly passed into law the Osun State Education Amendment Bill for the compulsory teaching of Yoruba in all schools in the State so as to ensure the maintenance of the language. To my mind, these measures can only be regarded as half-hearted attempts to save the Yoruba language. Much more concrete, radical and revolutionary measures will have to be taken if Yoruba is to survive beyond this century. Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed. These recommendations can be subsumed under three rubrics

viz. Yoruba language acquisition policy, functions to be allocated to Yoruba language, and expansion of Yoruba word-stock (vocabulary). Detailed recommendations under each are as follow:

A. Yoruba Language Acquisition Policy

- i. Effective from January 2017, Yoruba must be used as medium of instruction from Primary I-VI in all primary schools in all the Yoruba speaking states of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo Ekiti. Radical as this recommendation may appear, it is not earth-shaking if we recall that the Ife Six-Year Primary Project (ISYPP) of Fafunwa and his colleagues at the then University of Ife has convincingly demonstrated the viability of this idea. It is doable, and fairly easily too, because the materials for the implementation of this recommendation are readily available including ‘A Glossary of Technical Terminology for Primary Schools in Nigeria’. Needless to say. English shall be taught as a subject at this level.
- ii. Yoruba language should be made a compulsory subject in all secondary schools in the Yoruba states.
- iii. The existing colleges of Education (teacher training colleges) should be adequately equipped to train teachers who specialize in the teaching of Yoruba as a mother tongue, as a second language (to cater for non-Yoruba Nigerian and African learners of the language), and as a foreign language (to cater for foreign non-African learners of Yoruba). Such teacher-trainees should enjoy automatic scholarship for the duration of their training. The same privilege should be extended to those who choose to study Yoruba language and literature at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in the university

- iv. Teachers of Yoruba at the secondary school level should enjoy a monthly bonus allowance as an incentive.
- v. Relevant government agencies should embark on massive production of cartoon strips that would arrest the attention of young Yoruba native speakers and motivate them to learn and master the language.
- vi. State Ministries of Education should deploy available ICT facilities for Yoruba language teaching meant for young Yoruba native speakers as well as second and foreign language learners.

B. Functions to be Allocated to Yoruba

- i. In the State Houses of Assembly in Yorubaland, Yoruba should be made an alternative official language for legislative proceedings on a daily basis instead of the current practice of one day in the week.
- ii. Potential candidates for recruitment into the public service of each of the Yoruba States must demonstrate proven competence in Yoruba by passing prescribed examinations in Yoruba to qualify for entry to various grades of the service. Such candidates must possess a minimum of a credit in Yoruba at the West African School Certificate Examination.
- iii. Radio and Television Stations (whether private or public) must be encouraged to air not less than 75% of their programmes in Yoruba.

C. Modernization of Yoruba and Expansion of its Word Stock

- i. Universities in Yoruba States should be made to engage in the modernization of Yoruba for use in various specialized domains such as agriculture, engineering, medicine, law, administration, accountancy, physical sciences, natural sciences, social

sciences, ICT, etc. It will be recalled that way back in 1965, the G.P.S. Advisory committee had set up eleven technical committees that would translate technical words in various disciplines into Yoruba (see p. 5 above).

- ii. Institutes, centres, professional organizations/associations and private individuals who are involved in the modernization of Yoruba should receive support and encouragement from State Governments.
- iii. One possible source of the expansion of the Yoruba word-stock is the Ifa literary corpus which is reputed for its vast body of knowledge and wisdom. There are scholars in various disciplines in the universities in Yorubaland who are also *babalawos*. Such experts could be encouraged to delve into the corpus for words that could be taken from there and used as technical terms.
- iv. In the process of seeking for technical terminology for Yoruba, borrowings should not be ruled out. This was one of the decisions taken by the Yoruba group at the conference of Nigerian authors in 1959. It may, therefore, not be out of place for Yoruba to consider borrowing from languages with which it has been in contact in Yorubaland such as English, Arabic and French. Other languages that could be looked into for borrowings are Portuguese and Spanish with which the Yoruba language and culture have been in contact in Brazil and Cuba for about three to four centuries now. Some of the ways and means by which these recommendations can be implemented are highlighted in the section that follows.

D. Need for an Inter-State Regulatory Agency for the Modernization of Yoruba Language

It is of overriding importance that the six Yoruba states jointly set up a Yoruba Language Commission or Academy. This was one of the 1965 recommendations of the *Egbe Ijinle Yoruba* which wanted a Commission “that would have authority over the growth of the language.” If such a body was considered desirable in 1965, it is all the more so today so as to avoid the emergence of different varieties of standard Yoruba in various states and in countries such as Benin Republic and Togo. The Commission or Academy shall be charged with:

- the coordination of all the activities relating to the modernization and enrichment of Yoruba;
- work in close concert with all institutions, associations/organizations, and individuals involved in developing technical terminology for Yoruba;
- the publication of works written in Yoruba;
- the publication of English-Yoruba and Yoruba-Yoruba dictionaries;
- recruit teachers of Yoruba for the Diaspora;
- Institute prizes for exceptional works published in Yoruba;
- Organise, in collaboration with other bodies, periodic workshops, seminars, lectures, and conferences on Yoruba language modernization;
- Work in close collaboration with the media to ensure the acceptance of neologisms in Yoruba by the general public and specialists; etc

Funding the Commission/Academy and activities related to the modernization of Yoruba

Although the Commission or Academy shall be jointly established and funded by the Yoruba State Governments every Yoruba native speaker at home and abroad (including members

of the Yoruba Union in Stockholm and elsewhere as well as in the Diaspora) should be encouraged to contribute some money, no matter how small, towards the activities of the academy. For instance, primary and secondary school pupils at home in Nigeria could be encouraged to make an annual contribution of N50.00 (fifty naira), whilst university students contribute N100.00 (one hundred naira), and adults, irrespective of status or professional calling contribute a minimum of N250.00 (two hundred fifty naira). Wealthy Yoruba individuals should also be approached for support. Organizations such as the Development Agenda for Western Nigeria (DAWN) and O'dua Investment Company Limited should be made to give the Academy annual subvention towards its activities.

If the approach suggested above with respect to every Yoruba native speaker and Yoruba descendant at home and abroad getting involved in providing support for the modernization of Yoruba language, it would engender a sense of common ownership of and pride in the language. It would strengthen the position of Yoruba language and culture on the world scene and signpost the contribution of Yoruba to world civilization.

Conclusion

Apart from indigenous professional Yoruba linguists and some individuals and organizations who have liept up active interest in ensuring that the Yoruba language remains vibrant, we have to acknowledge the contribution of the practitioners of the Yoruba home video in ensuring the survival of the language among its native speakers notwithstanding some shortcomings in their usage of the language.

Also, indigenous Christian churches such as the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), the Cherubim and the Seraphim (C & S), and the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) have to be commended for contributing significantly to the maintenance of Yoruba language. For these

Churches, the Yoruba language is an official medium of worship, and consequently, they have fostered literacy in the language.

However, if Yoruba is to survive beyond the 21st century, ability to speak, read and write the language must be made to attract some economic incentives as stated in recommendation B(ii) above. Once Yoruba native speakers are made to realize that proficiency in Yoruba will bring economic benefits just as proficiency in English does, the motivation to learn and master the language will be high. Consequently, parents will then see the need to speak Yoruba to their children at home thus ensuring the survival of the language and its inter-generational transmission beyond the 21st century. Consequently, the current negative attitude of Yoruba native speakers toward their language would begin to change as they would start to acquire a high sense of pride in what is theirs.

I cannot close my exposition without expressing my sincere gratitude to the President, Secretary and the entire members of the Yoruba Union in Stockholm for inviting me and sponsoring my trip to Stockholm, even without ever setting eyes on me, to deliver the special lecture at the 2015 celebration of the Yoruba Day here in Sweden. You all here present may not realize that by this invitation, you have made a significant contribution toward s the survival of our language. It is my expectation that you will even do more to ensure our language does not go into extinction. I would also like to express my gratitude to Superior Evangelist Femi Arayemi of the Celestial Church of Christ, Olorunsogo Circuit Headquarters, Ile-Ife, for reading the draft of this lecture and making useful suggestions.

Thank you for listening.

NOTES

1. This overview of the mid - 1940s to mid-1960s draws extensively from Professor I.A. Akinjogbin's 1992 J. F. Odunjo Memorial Lecture.
2. See I. A. Akinjogbin's The Growth of Yoruba Studies in the Western Region of Nigeria 1955 – 1965. Part two p. 59 in Olatunde O. Olatunji 1996 (ed.): *The Yoruba History, culture and Language* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
3. See Oladele Awobuluyi's *Yoruba Must Not Die Out. Yoruba Ko Gbodo Ku*. Obafemi Awolowo University Faculty of Arts Lecture 2014, p.17
4. A Frenchman, Pierre Fatumbi Verger, a babalawo who spoke fluent Yoruba has also worked extensively on Yoruba plants and medicinal leaves.
5. See Babs Fafunwa Centre for Yoruba Language Engineering Handbook, June 2008, p. 16.

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