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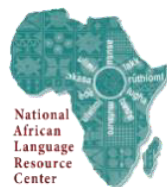
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Preserving Language, Culture, and Identity: Cape Coast (Ghana) *Asafo* Companies Demand their Chiefs Speak Fante (Twi) at Official Gatherings

Ebenezer Ayesu & Hannah Essien

Abstract

This paper explores the cultural significance and community-driven demand within the Fante ethnic group of Ghana led by the *Asafo* Companies of Cape Coast to discourage their chiefs from speaking English at official gatherings. The Fante, an Akan-speaking people primarily residing in the coastal regions of Ghana, have a rich cultural heritage that includes a distinct language, customs, and traditions. Over time, the encroachment of Western influences, including the use of English, has raised concerns among community members regarding the preservation of their indigenous language and cultural identity. Using ethnographic research approach, this paper seeks to examine the reasons behind the demand, the historical context, the impact of colonialism, and the possible consequences of cultural erosion. We also discuss the efforts made by the Cape Coast *Asafo* to engage with their chiefs and negotiate a balance between tradition and the evolving demands of the modern world.

Keywords: *Asafo* Companies; Fante (Twi); Cultural heritage & identity; Indigenous languages; Colonialism

Introduction

Funerals in Ghana are elaborate commemorative ceremonies, which mark not only the existential transition of the dead, but also crucially provide the opportunity for the reaffirmation and negotiation of complex social relations, political structures and ontological identities (Sutherland-Addy, 2011). Such was the occasion of the death, burial and funeral of the late Otumfuo Opoku Ware II (c. 1970-1999), the 15th Asantehene (King of Asante) during which the Asante people, one of the principal members of the Akan group in Ghana, highlighted every aspect of their socio-cultural lives and practices.

Incidentally, it was in the course of the funeral processes that most Ghanaians became arguably aware that by tradition and usage, the Asantehene never speaks English nor any other ‘foreign’¹ language to his people. It was such awareness that prompted the Cape Coast Asafo Companies whose members are also Akan people, to accuse their paramount Chief Oguaa Omanhene (Paramount Chief of Cape Coast), Osabarima Kwesi Atta II (c.1998 - present) of speaking English and therefore demanded his destoolment, the subject matter of this paper.

The paper is based on an ethnographic qualitative study which seeks to argue that communication is central to the administration of chiefly affairs and the socio-cultural practices of the people. Consequently, it is unacceptable for traditional leaders including Chiefs, Queenmothers, Priests and Priestesses to be and or perceived to be speaking a language foreign to their subjects including key stakeholders in governance - especially the Asafo Company members, as was the case in Cape Coast. Moreover, the insistence of the Asafo members understandably underscores the role of language in asserting communal identity, maintaining traditional authority, and resisting external influences that has the potential to threaten the continuity of Fante heritage.

Methodology

Ethnographic qualitative method was used in this research work involving oral interviews and interactions with key informants² made up of Chiefs, Queen mothers, Cape Coast Asafo leaders, prominent historians and administrators at the Central Regional house of Chiefs, Cape Coast. Archival records and above all, secondary sources were also used. As part of the methodology, interviews were conducted with the key informants. Their responses were then recorded and transcribed. To gain more insight, participant observation was also undertaken and documented for the research.

The Akan People of Ghana

The Akan people occupy the southern half of the Gold Coast (Ghana), part of Togoland and the southeast corner of the French Ivory Coast. In the Gold Coast, the northern limit of this area is the upper course of the Volta; the southern boundary is the sea-coast. They constitute over 46% of the population of Ghana. They include the Asante; Fante (which includes the people of Cape Coast and their Asafo companies); Akyem; Assin; Akuapem; Wassa; Kwahu; Ahafo and others (G.P. Hagan, personal communication, June-July, 1997). They speak the Twi language with its several dialects. Asante Twi, Fante Twi and Akuapem Twi are the most widely spoken Akan dialects.

¹ This includes Ghanaian non-Akan (Twi) and all other languages of the world.

² A working relationship was developed and established with informants, and their consent obtained for the study through their participation in the Asafo History Program and the Chieftaincy Governance and Development projects undertaken at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon.

Various scholars have attempted to assign reasons for the differences. The differences notwithstanding, they observe similar protocol when speaking. For instance, their communication is interspersed with the necessary courtesies to reflect one's age and or status. In addition to the language, all Akan people follow a common traditional calendar. They also practice common socio-cultural practices including succession and inheritance system. Above all, they are associated with the Akan-type Chieftaincy institution with its protocols and practices. It was therefore not surprising that the Cape Coast Asafo companies could not understand why the Oguaa Omanhene, Osabarima Kwesi Atta II would act differently when he had to communicate with them in public; hence their demand for him to be destooled.

The Fante Asafo Company System

Anyone visiting a coastal town in the central or western part of Ghana would be impressed by the organized military bands (Asafo) in the indigenous society (Datta & Porter, 1971). The membership of the group is made up of men and women and is closely associated with the Akan-type chieftaincy institution. The Asafo system is composed of military bands which are organized in villages, towns, and traditional states. Membership is automatic and generally based on patrilineal succession (Shaloff, 1974). All towns and large villages in Fanteland have one or more Asafo units and for which reason the English word 'company' is commonly used (p. 280). In Fante towns where there are several of them, the latter are distinguished from each other by the color of their uniform and flags; their emblems, which are either embroidered on flags or used separately.

Originally, the Asafo was the military wing of the community and therefore played important roles in times of war. Though that role no longer exists in view of the fact that today, traditional states no longer have the power to wage war, having lost it with the advent of the pax-Britannica, and therefore Asafo companies can have no opportunity of participating in a fight involving the state.³ This notwithstanding, it operates as a police force in certain circumstances. For instance, it has the responsibility of apprehending criminals; organizing a search party for a missing person, and the killing of a wild animal that is causing havoc in the community. It also has the responsibility of keeping the neighborhood clean and clearing of paths or roads leading to rivers and other important places in the town.

Above all, the Asafo is a leading player in the nomination, election and installation of Chiefs and Queenmothers. Even though none of them qualifies to be elected and installed as per Fante custom and usage, their wishes are considered since they are the ones who would carry the elected shoulder high through the principal streets of the community. Their rejection of the candidate would be tantamount to their refusal to do the obvious. In addition, in times of destoolment, they press charges against the Chief or Queenmother and at the end of the adjudication, they perform the rites for destoolment

³ That role has been taken over by the national army.

if the Chief or Queenmother was found guilty (Ayesu, 1998; 2011). Herein then lies the basis for the Cape Coast Asafo to accuse the Oguamahene and demand his destoolment.

Profile of Cape Coast

Cape Coast, one of the historic Fante towns in Ghana, is the administrative capital of the Central Region. It covers some 112.92 sq. km of land (Department of Survey, 1999; Nti, 2002). Originally known as Oguaa (Gua, Dwaa, Guae), the current name is the anglicized rendering of the Portuguese name Cabo Corso (meaning short cape) (Ward, 1967). Meanwhile, the date for its origins is not certain; however, it was well known that it existed as a fishing village known as Fetu before the Portuguese arrival on the Gold Coast (Ghana) in the 15th century. Incidentally, by the middle of the 17th century, Cape Coast an initial small town, had undergone considerable growth (Arhin, 1995; Fyn, 1971; Daaku, 1970). The development is attributed to the impact of trade with Europeans pioneered by the Portuguese but came to be dominated by the English in later times. During the period, the relationship between the people of Cape Coast and the Europeans; including the British was governed by commercial interests. For instance, the Europeans paid ground rent for their forts as they depended on the goodwill of the indigenous people for the improvement of trade. Consequently, they co-operated with the Chiefs and people of Cape Coast to ward off invaders, including Asante with the obvious intent to protect trade. In the course of these events, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) sent Philip Quaque to England to be educated as a missionary and to receive ordination in the Anglican Communion to assist them in their mission work on the Gold Coast (Bartels, 1955). On his return and through hard work, he laid the foundation for formal education in Cape Coast; and considerably enough in the Gold Coast (Ghana).

Then, the 19th century also saw a gradual yet insightful expansion of British authority in Cape Coast. Before 1821, the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, who had no jurisdiction in the internal affairs, including civil and criminal matters, administered British forts in the territory. In 1821 however, the British government took over the direct control of the area only to return it to the merchant administration in 1828. The British government's turn around ushered in a committee of merchants in London while the local administration was delegated to the Council of Merchants at Cape Coast (Kimble, 1963). Under the new arrangement, several British traders on the coast were appointed justices of the Peace for the trial of cases arising within the walls of the forts. The British 'presence' in the judicial matters of the area was intensified when George Maclean became the President of the Council in 1930; through which cases were increasingly brought to Cape Coast for adjudication (Kimble, 1963). Finally, expansion of British authority and influence in Cape Coast received a boost following the signing of the Bond of 1844 under which certain Gold Coast Chiefs, including King Joseph Aggrey Essien (1809-1869) of Cape Coast, acknowledged the power and jurisdiction of the British Crown.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the British and for that matter, the English language

had permeated the length and breadth of Cape Coast society. From the initial trading contact through the activities of Philip Quaque and the Merchant/Crown administration to the eventual signing of the Bond of 1844, one could imagine how attractive the English language had become to the indigenes. It was therefore not surprising that even the uneducated including, as we shall see later that Kwesi Atta I, uneducated Chief of Cape Coast spoke the English language in public.

The Asante Empire

The Asante Empire (1701-1896) was created by a group of Akan people occupying the present-day Ashanti Region and some parts of Bono, Bono East, and Ahafo Regions of Ghana (Owiredu, 2020; McCaskie, 1995; Wilks, 1996; Fyn, 1971). The origins of the Kingdom are closely associated with its history as a one-time colony of the Denkyira Kingdom. Its foundation is credited to its industrious and deify King, Osei Tutu (c. 1695 - 1717) and his close friend, Okomfo Anokye (Nana Nyantekyi, personal communication, March 1999). The foundation processes involved the use of magico-religious to bring down the Golden Stool (Sikadwa Kofi) from the skies, which landed on the laps of Osei Tutu; and for which reason he was made the King of the whole Asante people. Then after, a consolidatory ritual involving the use of concoction made of herbs, pieces of hair and nails of the principal leaders of the group as well as water made on the Golden Stool and later given to the leaders to drink (Nana Nyantekyi, personal communication, March 1999). Subsequently, the people were made to believe that the stool is the embodiment of their soul and that it and its succeeding occupants should be revered and protected; and that the day they lose the stool would be the end of the existence of the Kingdom (Nana Nyantekyi, personal communication, March 1999).

From the foregoing, it is evident that Asante was fully prepared for its war with its overlord, Denkyira that it defeated in 1701 at the battle of Fayiasse (Nana Nyantekyi, personal communication, March 1999). The successful execution of the war marked the beginnings of a deliberate efforts by the Kingdom to fortify the Golden Stool and its successive occupants beginning from Osei Tutu I. The process involved institution of taboos and or socio-cultural practices ostensibly to uphold the initial commands regarding the inseparable fate of the Golden Stool and the Kingdom. Among others, the taboos spelt out the responsibilities and privileges of Asante Kings and their subjects - the Asante people, and ipso- facto laid the basis for the Asante people's eternal attachment to their customary practices; their worldview and their language - the Asante Twi (Nana Nyantekyi, personal communication, March 1999; Aidoo, 1977). Such then was the philosophy that undergirded the burial and funeral ceremonies of the late Otumfuo Opoku Ware II (c. 1970 - 1999); and the possible beauty of which led the Cape Coast Asafo Companies to point out its absence in the administration of Nana Kwesi Atta II and for which reason they demanded his destoolment.

Asante's victory over Denkyira and through conquest and various schemes of differential incorporation succeeded in establishing its control over all its neighbors

(Aidoo, 1977) and thereby engaging directly and vigorously in the European trade on the coast of the Gold Coast (Fynn, 1971; McCaskie, 2007). In the course of it all, Asante traded with the Dutch, the Danes, the British and others. From a large array of forest products including gold and ivory which it exchanged for European merchandise—firearms; textiles; liquor and many others (Fynn, 1971; McCaskie, 2007). In the process, Asante’s relationship with the coastal states, including Cape Coast alternated between peace and war. Incidentally, the Asante wars would bring it into direct conflict with the British (Momodu, 2018). The development led to five series of war between the two. It was the outcome of one of these – the Sargrenti War (1894), led by British Army Major-General, Garnet Wolseley (1883-1913) that the British entered and burned down the Manhyia palace at Kumasi, the Asante capital and later stationed its Resident at Kumasi (Nana Nyantekyi, personal communication, March 1999).

Before then, George Maclean as part of his administration had brokered peace with Asantehene, Osei Yaw Akoto (1824-1834) in the Maclean Treaty of April 1831 under which Prince Owusu-Ansa, son of Asantehene (King of Asante) Nana Osei Tutu Kwame Asibey Bonsu (1800-1824) and his cousin, Prince Nkwantabisa, were given to Maclean as hostages “for Asante fidelity to Maclean’s imposed treaty.” (Owusu-Mensa, 1978). Eventually, both Maclean and Asantehene Osei Yaw Akoto (c. 1824-1834) decided to open

a new vista for Nkwantabisa and Owusu-Ansa beyond the narrow confines of Kumase, acquaint them with the English language and people, and associate them with Fante thoughts and feelings so that eventually would become, for the rest of their lives, ambassadors of peace between Asante on one hand and the British and the Fante on the other (Owusu-Mensa, 1978, p. 23).

The decision culminated in the two being sent to and educated in England. This notwithstanding, their backgrounds as non-royals who could not ascend the Golden Stool established, they could not have been said that the Maclean-Osei Akoto intent made significant in road into the Asante psychic and culture for the founding taboos of the Kingdom to be done away with.

Then came the developments leading to and the aftermath of the Yaa Asantewa War (1900-1901). From the surrender of Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I and his eventual deportation to the Seychelles Islands; and his eventual conversion to Christianity (becoming an Anglican communicant); to the capture and exile of Nana Yaa Asantewa and the ultimate defeat of Asante; to the return of Agyeman Prempeh as Kumasehene and later Asantehene, not much was arguably done and or achieved to diminish Asante culture and language, Asante Twi as was the case above.

Death, Burial and Funeral of Otumfuo Opoku Ware II (c. 1970-1999)

On 26th February 1999, Otumfuo Opoku Ware II (c.1970-1999) died. He was

given a state and Asante cultural funeral spanning four days of ceremonies blending both the Asante tradition and Christian traditions and buried on 25th March 1999 after a month-long mourning at the Royal Mausoleum at Breman, near Kumasi. Before then, an elaborate program had been put out by the funeral Planning Committee, led by Daasebere Nana Osei Bonsu II, Mamponghehene (chief of Asante Mampong), and the Acting King of Asante at that time. As part of the program, the late King was laid in state at the Manhyia Palace (Palace of the Asante King) on Sunday March 21, 1999. Then after, Paramount Chiefs in Asante and all those who owe allegiance to the Golden Stool swore the oath of allegiance on Wednesday March 26, 1999. The oath swearing instructively served two purposes. In the first place, it served as a reaffirmation of the chiefs' respect for the departed King. On the other hand, and perhaps most importantly, as a pledge to their departing overlord of their commitment to serve the Golden Stool and its succeeding Kings (Nana Nyantekyi, personal communication, March 1999).

Upon his death, the Asanteman Council placed a ban on drumming and all other funeral celebrations throughout Asante until after April 8, 1999, when the 40th day celebration of his passing would have been done (Ghanaweb, March 1999). The body of the Asantehene was then conveyed to the St. Cyprian's Anglican Church for a burial service on March 25, 1999 (Ghanaweb, March 1999). As part of the service, the late King was given a state funeral in recognition "of his invaluable service to the nation and the Chieftaincy institution (Nana Nyantekyi, personal communication, March 1999). Before then, Paramount Chiefs from all over Ghana including that of Cape Coast, Osabarima Kwesi Atta II and their large entourage of sub-chiefs, elders and some members of their traditional areas also attended the funeral during which they paid their respect to the departed King.

In all these deliberations, efforts were meticulously made to ensure that at every stage and time, Asante's time honoring cultural practices were highlighted; a development that brought to the fore the unwritten contract which prohibited the Asantehene from speaking any other language except the Asante Twi to his people. Importantly, almost every aspect of the funeral was given wide coverage as both international and local media outlets sought and obtained accreditation to cover it. The coverage was live and was embellished with commentaries on Asante culture and history; the deceased King's daily and ceremonial interaction with his subjects; the Asante people. Hence, the Cape Coast Asafo companies witnessed a firsthand exposure of Asante culture and etiquette on the part of their Kings and palace officials; and the people at large (Hagan & Odotei, 2001).

Oguaamahene, Osabarima Kwesi Atta II under Cape Coast Asafo Companies' Siege

Osabarima Kwesi Atta II, known in private life as Joseph Kwamena Sekum Haizel, was born 20th January 1940. His parents were Mr. George Kodwo Haizel; and Mrs. Mary Esi Haizel (Esi Bentuma) of Fiekessim, Cape Coast. Through his mother, he hailed from the Fiekessim House of Nana Birempong Cudjoe Ebiraze Royal Family Stool and

therefore qualified to ascend to the Cape Coast royal stool (Darko Ankrah, personal communication, February 2024; Supi Kwabena Mena, personal communication, September 2002). He had his elementary school education at the Government Boys' School, Cape Coast (formerly the Wesleyan Boys' School) which he completed in 1953. From there, he went to Adisadel College (Wesleyan High School) from 1954 to 1958 (Darko Ankrah, personal communication, February 2024). He later enrolled in the School of Administration at the University of Ghana, Legon where he pursued Accountancy course. He was awarded a government scholarship to the College of Commerce and Distribution in Glasgow (Scotland) where he qualified as a Professional Accountant with the Association of Chartered Accountants (Darko Ankrah, personal communication, February 2024).

From such a rich academic background, Joseph Kwamena Sekum Haizel joins a long list of Cape Coast and Fante men who benefited from the pioneering educational establishments spearheaded by the British in the area with its classic tool, the English language (Darko Ankrah, personal communication, February 2024), and prominent amongst these were, James Kwegyir Aggrey (1875-1927) and Kobina Sakyi (1892-1956). As a royal, Joseph Kwamena Sekum Haizel was nominated amongst three other persons, Rev. Kofi Martin; Zac Bentum (Jnr.); and George Erskine Ampah (all of the Fiekessim Royal House), to succeed Nana Kodwo Mbra V (1948-1996), Chief of Cape Coast who had just passed away (Supi Kwabena Mena, personal communication, September 2002). His nomination was accepted as demanded by Cape Coast traditional custom and practiced by the Tufohene (head of the Asafo companies) and Supis (superior captains) of the seven Asafo Companies of Cape Coast who went further to select him to occupy the Nana Birempong Cudjoe royal stool (Supi Kwabena Mena, personal communication, September 2002). Subsequently, his selection/election was approved by the Kingmakers of the Oguaa (Cape Coast) Traditional Area. Then after, Sekum Haizel was presented to the Oman Tufuhen (the then Nana Kofi Ebu I) for other customary rites which were performed by Bentsir (No. 1) Asafo Company of Cape Coast (Supi Kwabena Mena, personal communication, September 2002).⁴ In the process, he was confined in the ancestral buildings of Nana Birempong Cudjoe Ebiradzi Fikessim for one week during which he was taught the traditions of his departed elders; traditional songs and dances; made to go round the principal boundaries of Cape Coast and water bodies; and fed on traditional meals laced with medicinal plants and herbs. He was finally outdoored as Osabarima Kwesi Atta II, Paramount Chief of Cape Coast on 17th July 1998 as the 9th Occupant to the Nana Birempong Cudjoe Royal stool of Cape Coast (Supi Kwabena Mena, personal communication, September 2002).⁵

Before then, his nomination and subsequent installation as was the case with a

⁴ See also, <https://elicotgroup.wordpress.com/2021/01/20/osabarimba-kwesi-atta-ii-omanhen-of-oguaa-traditional-area/>

⁵ See also, <https://www.facebook.com/100064513970136/posts/957039168398319/>; <https://elicotgroup.wordpress.com/2021/01/20/osabarimba-kwesi-atta-ii-omanhen-of-oguaa-traditional-area/>

number of successions to stools in Ghana was challenged by a section of the Kingmakers who claimed he was not the rightful candidate. The challenge culminated in a number of court suits which started at the Cape Coast High Court; but he was finally cleared by the Supreme Court of Ghana (Supi Kwabena Mena, personal communication, September 2002; Gobah, 2015). It was possibly the contentious situation that hastened the Cape Coast Asafo Companies demand for his destoolment on grounds that he unlike Asante Kings, especially the late Otumfuo Opoku Ware II addressed publicly in the English language.

Osabarima Kwesi Atta II, Cape Coast Asafo Companies and the ‘Showdown’

As indicated above, the high-profile activities surrounding the death, burial and funeral of the late Otumfuo Opoku Ware II (1970-1999) brought to the fore the rich cultural practices and belief system of the Asante people of Ghana. Consequently, the Asafo Companies of Cape Coast acting in unison preferred charges against Osabarima Kwesi Atta II, their paramount chief for speaking the English language to them while dealing with them in public (Supi Kwabena Mena, personal communication, September 2002). As typical of Asafo actions, the members went on a procession of the principal streets of Cape Coast amidst the singing of war songs; shouting of insults and insinuations against Osabarima Kwesi Atta II accompanied by drumming and firing of musketry (Supi Kwabena Mena, personal communication, September 2002; Labi, 1998).

There was also the provocative movement of the buttocks of their female members (Sutherland-Addy, 1998). They rounded up the procession at the Cape Coast palace where they presented their charges to the Kingmakers whom they have earlier informed of the intent to prosecute Osabarima. Their main charge and which is the subject matter of this paper was that Osabarima, unlike the Asantehene always used the English language to address them publicly; a development which was against Fante custom and usage; and for which reason they swore and in a typical Asafo activity (Sutherland-Addy, E., 1998), the Asafo oath to demand his destoolment (Boaten, 1998). In the process, they recounted series of events and occasions during which he committed the offence. According to them, their greatest angst was his address to them during the annual grand durbar to round off the Fetu Afahye (the Fetu festival) which brought people from all walks of life to Cape Coast; and for which reason he was expected to address all sundry in Fante Twi (Supi Kwabena Mena, personal communication, September 2002). A development they argued would have displayed the richness and beauty of the language.

Then came the chance as demanded by Fante custom and usage, for Osabarima to defend himself. He expectedly conceded that he speaks the English language at all public gathering; but denied that that was an infringement of the Fante custom and usage as they want people to believe. He even went further to point to a number of precedence. His classic reference was that of his predecessor, Kwesi Atta I (c.1865- 1887) who though an illiterate, addressed public gatherings in the English language (Osabarima Kwesi Atta

II, personal communication, 2002-2003). He however indicated his preparedness going forward to speak Fante Twi in all public address to his people if it was made part of Cape Coast custom and usage; a move which was readily and understandably accepted and the matter brought to a close. (Osabarima Kwesi Atta II, personal communication, 2002-2003). Meanwhile, Kwesi Atta I's use of the English language though an illiterate was possibly due to his involvement in the British trading activities in Cape Coast and surrounding areas.

Lessons thereof

Though the charge by the Cape Coast Asafo companies proved unfounded at the end of it all, their action brought to the fore the noteworthy relevance of indigenous language to indigenous communities and especially key players in traditional governance positions including Cape Coast Asafo Companies in particular and their Fante compatriots in general. Much as there are more examples, we will treat only four of them for the sake of time and space.

Primarily, language is a platform on which a people's cultural identity is often deeply intertwined with their cultural heritage, traditions, and collective identity. For it serves the vehicle through which cultural knowledge, values, stories, and wisdom are passed down from one generation to another. The language itself can embody the unique worldview and experiences of the community. Actually, the scenes at Otumfuo Opoku Ware II's funeral activities became distinct following the deliberate efforts made by Asante commentators in their use of the Asante Twi to narrate and or explain events as they unfolded.

Secondly, a group's language and its use especially during special ceremonies like naming and marriage ceremonies as well as traditional durbars bring about social cohesion. This is especially so when the group becomes larger, and it engages with other closely related others. This is so because, language plays a crucial role in fostering togetherness within indigenous communities. It serves as a tool for communication and interaction among community members, consolidating bonds and fostering a sense of belonging. Thus, language use in various social contexts, such as ceremonies, rituals, and everyday conversations, reinforces community solidarity and shared values.

In addition, it ensures the preservation of indigenous knowledge. Generally, languages encapsulate centuries of traditional knowledge encompassing various domains such as medicine, agriculture, astronomy, navigation, and storytelling. Upholding these languages ensures the preservation and spread of invaluable knowledge systems that have sustained indigenous societies for generations. Finally, it is a medium for the empowerment and self-determination of a people. A revitalized indigenous language empowers indigenous groups by asserting their right to self-determination and cultural autonomy. Language revitalization efforts often concur with broader movements for indigenous rights, sovereignty, and recognition, enabling communities to reclaim their linguistic heritage and assert their identities on their own terms.

Incidentally, there has been much complaint by leading non-Akan members about

the perceived neglect of their language in the educational curriculum of the country. The most vocal of the group is Hon. Ayioi Otoo, a GaDangme indigene and a former Attorney General and Minister of Justice (2005-2006); and Ghana's High Commissioner to Canada (2017-2021).⁶ Regrettably, however, the group is yet to initiate a serious national discussion on the issue.

It must be pointed out that as much as this paper is make a compelling case for linguistic preservation, we are also cognizant of the potential challenges the country will face in its attempt to settle on one or two indigenous languages to be used for official engagements. These challenges are informed by the over 52 indigenous languages spoken in the country.

Conclusion

In effect, the charges made by the Cape Coast Asafo Companies were because of the group's desire that their language was given prominence by the highest office holder of their land, Osabarima Kwesi Atta II, their paramount ruler. That the charges were customarily unfounded, did not in any way stop them from going ahead with their intent at the end of which they succeeded in getting the Chief and his elders to commit to using the Fante Twi in their public address to their people. Incidentally, the dilemma of the Cape Asafo companies will continuously be shared by post-colonial African societies as they grapple with the continued use of European languages in our case English as official languages and the penchant of their educated traditional elite to speak them at all times even when addressing their own people.

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⁶ See <https://www.facebook.com/Class913fm/videos/nii-ayikoi-otoo-on-ga-language-suppression/193387933383184/>

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The Attitudes of Non-Native Hausa Students of Languages at Federal College of Education Zaria (Nigeria) Towards *Ajami* Writing System

Abdullahi Salisu Kademi & Abubakar Garba Bala

Abstract

This study investigated the attitudes of non-native Hausa students of languages towards *Ajami* writing system. The participants ($n=200$) were purposively selected from the population of non-native Hausa students of languages at Federal College of Education Zaria (Nigeria) in 2022/23 academic session. This quantitative study used a survey research design and data were collected through a questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that most (78–85%) of the participants had negative attitudes towards *Ajami* script. It was also found that 95 to 97% of them had zero understanding of *Ajami* script and were unable to distinguish it from an Arabic language text. The study recommended that non-native Hausa students of languages be exposed to *Ajami* writing system to enable them unlock the unexplored knowledge of Hausawa, their language, history, and culture and to also reconstruct their understanding of the differences between language, religion, and writing systems.

Keywords: *Ajami* script; Attitudes; Boko script; Non-native Hausa students; Perceptions

Introduction and Literature Review

Writing, as one of the productive language skills that allows for the representation of ideas, thoughts, and feelings in a printed form, is an intellectual activity (Nunan, 2003). It involves the expression and arrangement of one's thoughts in a written sequence that ensures communication. '*Ajami*' is a kind of writing system commonly used by some people especially in some West African countries. It is an Arabic word, which literally means 'non-Arab' or 'foreign.' However, as a writing system, it refers to the use of Arabic script to write non-Arabic languages, especially those predominantly spoken by Muslims in West African countries like Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, and Mali. (Abba 2015; Abdullahi, 2022; Ogorodnikova, 2023). According to Ngom et al. (2023), this system was created

by Muslim evangelists centuries ago to help them propagate Islamic religion in African countries. Hashimi (2020) sees it as a linguistic domestication of Arabic script by speakers of foreign languages for communication purposes. Diallo (2016) defines it as “Qur’anic alphabet appropriated and used to write African languages” (p. 62). Abdullahi (2022) considers it as an Afro-Arabic script, which is a modified form of Arabic script used to write African languages, such as Hausa, Wolof, Tamashek, Yoruba, etc. These local languages used Arabic scripts, which they came into contact with as a result of trade with Arabs, missionaries, and the subsequent conversion to Islam. For most of them, *Ajami* was not just a system of writing, it was as well a medium of instruction and a means for communication (Malik, 1999). In fact, according to Hashimi (2020), it was at a point being used among Muslims and those literate of Arabic letters throughout the world. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that although *Ajami* writing system uses the Arabic script, it is not exactly the same as Arabic writing system. This is because *Ajami* uses an adapted version of Arabic alphabet with additional letters, dots, and diacritics to represent sounds that do not exist in Arabic language.

Interestingly, some languages of African origin, such as old Kanembu (or Kanuri), Hausa, Tamashek, Songhay, Fulfulde, Wolof, Mandinka, Mande, Yoruba, and Nupe, had at least two vibrant systems of writing in the forms of *Ajami*, which uses the Arabic script, and Roman or Latin-based system, which uses the Latin script. Furthermore, Ogorodnikova (2023) confirms the existence of established and well documented *Ajami* traditions for the aforementioned West African (or ‘Sudanic’) languages. In northern Nigeria in particular, *Ajami* script was mostly used by Hausawa and Fulani scholars who were literate in Arabic letters and Islamic-oriented education before the arrival of the colonizers. According to Abba (2015), it was commonly used among speakers of Hausa and Fulfulde languages who were highly literate in Arabic language and usage. It was also the most popular model of written communication for Islamized West African communities (Diallo, 2016). Findings from many studies revealed that it contained rich and very important literary and cultural heritage of millions of Nigerians (Jabo & Bayero, 2014) and that it served as a transnational medium of communication in many parts of West Africa (Diallo, 2016).

Although some people see *Ajami* as a system of writing solely for religious purposes, many scholars have documented its use for secular purposes, both in the past and at the present. For example, Adamu (2010) claims that *Ajami*, has provided a medium through which religious and secular ideas were expressed in the forms of pamphlets, poems, letters, etc. Apart from using it for religious purposes, Diallo (2010) submits that it was also the dominant script in West Africa in many domains, including business, administration, literature, humanities, natural and social sciences, public communication, personal and private correspondences, as well as for spiritual and medicinal writings. Additionally, Ngom et al. (2023) argues insightfully that, rather than being a mere tool for religious knowledge, *Ajami* was an important medium for Africans to record their culture and the details of their lives safely, away from the eyes of Arab and European colonialists. Ngom et al. (2023) further assert that this script had been widely used across Africa for the day-

to-day writing needs of many communities for thousands of years. They further reiterate that while the spread of Islam, especially in Northern and Western Nigeria, was believed to be responsible for the acceptance and usage of *Ajami*, its use extended far beyond the religious purposes.

Likewise, Batiste (2007) argues that as far back as the 11th century, long before the imposition of Roman script in Northern Nigeria, *Ajami* was instrumental to the contribution of African scholars to Islamic heritage, world civilization, and advancement in scientific discoveries. Some of the fields in which it was used included the traditions of the Prophet (SAW), mathematics, chemistry, physics, astronomy, medicine, Islamic sciences, history, geography, government legislation and treaties, jurisprudence, logic and philosophy, as well as poetry and literature. As a matter of fact, even non-Muslims have employed *Ajami* for religious propaganda, business, advertisements, announcements and propagation of Christianity (Adamu, 2010).

Abdurrahman (2012) claims that it was the major system of writing in Northern Nigeria until the beginning of 19th century when the colonial administration replaced it with the Roman script. According to Philips (2000), it was Lugard's successor, Captain Wallace, who replaced the use of *Ajami* with Roman script. In addition, despite Captain Merrick's initial support for the continued use of *Ajami*, he eventually called for its total ban in 1909. Argungu (2005) believes that the banning of *Ajami* in favor of the Roman script, slowed down the wheels of knowledge, discovery, innovation, creativity, and civilization in Northern Nigeria.

However, in spite of the successes of the *Ajami* script in West Africa, Abdullahi (2022) argues that the recognition of Hausa *Ajami* script has been a challenging task due to its complex and unique characteristics, including variations in handwriting styles, inconsistencies in the use of diacritical marks, and lack of clarity of scanned *Ajami* texts. Likewise, Diallo (2016) says that despite the role of *Ajami* as a predominant means of spoken intra and inter community communication as well as a sub-regional medium of written communication in pre-colonial West Africa, "its effectiveness was impaired by its lack of a standardized and codified model for all users across the region" (p. 63).

***Ajami* in Hausawa Society**

Although Miskin (1989) reports that Kanuri was the first language to have been written in *Ajami* between the 10th and the 16th centuries, followed by Fulfulde, Hausa, Wolof, and Yoruba, Adamu (2010) believes that the use of *Ajami* script for writing Hausa language was an old tradition that was strengthened by the arrival of Muhammad b. Abdul Karim al Mughili in Kano. Likewise, many Europeans, such as Heinrich Barth and Adam Mischlich, have extensively studied Hausa language and produced excellent reference works in and on *Ajami*. Newman (1991) argues that, "one of the interesting things about Mischlich dictionary is that all the entries were given in *Ajami* [Arabic scripts] as well as in boko [Latin scripts]" (p. 2). Years later, a British Hausaist, Charles H. Robinson, also wrote a dictionary of Hausa language, which recorded a huge success because of its

inclusion of *Ajami* entries. The use of *Ajami* in Robinson's dictionary added accuracy to transcriptions and meanings and remained a reference point for the study of Hausa language and literature. Unfortunately, Newman (1991) reports that, due to British colonial government policy regarding Hausa orthography, the use of the *Ajami* was discontinued in the later editions of dictionaries by the Europeans.

Although Phillips (2004) argues that the colonialists' decision to replace *Ajami* was due to their ignorance of Arabic alphabets, especially its vowel system, there was no doubt that the interest of the northerners was not considered since millions of them were vast, knowledgeable, and excellent at using *Ajami* script. For example, the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate Usman dan Fodio, his brother Abdullahi dan Fodio, and his son Muhammad Bello, were great scholars who had written hundreds of Fula and Hausa texts on Islamic theology, law, politics, history, and philosophy using the *Ajami* script. According to Abdurrahman (2012), the successes of using *Ajami* in Islamic scholarship was the main reason why the Sokoto Caliphate became an important center for Islamic education.

In spite of the significant role *Ajami* has played in northern Nigeria, many non-Hausa speakers in Nigeria see it as an Islamic religious text. This could be because they are not able to distinguish between a native language written using the Arabic script and the Arabic language. They assume that anything written using Arabic script is either a verse of the Holy Qur'an or a text from Islamic literature. For instance, in a report by the BBC (2020) and The Economist of December 2020, a Lagos-based human rights lawyer filed a lawsuit asking the Central Bank of Nigeria to remove the Islamic text/Arabic language from the Nigerian currency notes. In its response, the Central Bank clarified to a Federal High Court that "The *Ajami* is not a symbol or mark of Islam but an inscription to aid the populace uneducated in Western education in ease of trade" (BBC, 2020).

Research Problem

Despite the immense and widespread successes and accomplishments of the northern Nigerian scholars in the use of the *Ajami* script in the pre- and early colonial periods, the colonialists banned it (Abdulkadir, 2011). They considered its users as uneducated, backward, and not qualified for public service jobs. That decision greatly crippled the *Ajami* writing system and categorized it as an obsolete system that needed to be scrapped (Abdurrahman, 2012; Argungu, 2005). Consequently, more than a century after this historical antecedent, Hausa *Ajami* script is still being viewed by some non-native Hausa speakers as a backward uncivilized writing system. Some of them even erroneously consider it as Arabic language or Islamic texts. Therefore, this study is relevant because it is one of the few studies that examine the attitudes of non-native Hausa speakers towards the *Ajami* script and seek to find out if non-native Hausa speakers are able to understand and clearly distinguish between an Arabic and *Ajami* texts.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the attitude of non-native Hausa students of languages towards the *Ajami* system of writing?
2. To what extent do non-native Hausa students of languages understand and are able to distinguish between *Ajami* and Arabic texts?

Research Objectives

This study is designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. to investigate the attitude of non-native Hausa students of languages towards the *Ajami* system of writing.
2. to examine extent to which non-native Hausa students of languages understand and are able to distinguish between *Ajami* and Arabic texts.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design, which is typically used to gather insights into people's attitudes or choices or behaviors through gathering inputs from various sets of people. One of the rationales for choosing this research design is the fact that it is one of the most popular and common methods of extracting certain data (such as behaviors, opinions, characteristics, etc.) from a group of people. In addition, it is relatively easy to administer.

The study was conducted in several stages. In the first stage, the researchers requested and acquired a formal approval from the management of the college to conduct the study. Then, some subjects were selected for the pilot-testing. To avoid certain undesirable effects, care was taken to ensure that those who participated in the pilot study were excluded from the main study. After that, the tools were checked for validity and reliability. In the next stage, the sample for the main study was recruited and their informed consent was obtained. The participants were also informed of the objectives of the study, their rights, and notified that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions if they wished. After that, the survey was group-administered to ensure high response and return rates. Finally, the collected data was checked and analyzed.

The study was conducted at the Federal College of Education Zaria, in Kaduna state, Nigeria. Participants ($n=200$) were selected using the purposive sampling technique. This technique is often used in quantitative studies such as this. The main rationale for using purposive sampling technique in this study is to ensure that the participants meet the basic criteria of the desired sample – they are non-native speakers of Hausa, but they have native-like fluency in it; they were in the second or final year of their program.

Demographic data revealed that 45% of the participants were males and 55% of them were females. Their age range was between 19 and 22, with 20 as their mean age. About 60% of them were in their second year of study, while 40% were in their third and final year of the National Certificate of Education (NCE) program. None of them spoke Hausa as a first language, but they all had native-like fluency in it.

The instrument used to collect the data for this study was a survey called Attitudes towards *Ajami* Script Survey (see Appendix 1). This tool was developed by the researchers, printed, and distributed to the participants. It had three parts. The first part required the participants to answer demographic information questions like age, gender, native language, level of fluency in Hausa language and their year of study. The second part, had 6 items arranged on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The third part of the survey had two questions. The first question asked the participants if they could read an *Ajami* text. The other question asked them if they could distinguish a text written in *Ajami* script and another one written in Arabic language.

The data collection tool used in this study was validated and piloted to make sure that it accurately evaluated the desired measures. A panel of experts was hired to establish its content validity and give feedback on how to modify it. The tool was piloted on 30 students of the college, who were excluded from the main study. It was also subjected to reliability tests using Cronbach’s alpha. As seen in Table 1, the reliability coefficient of the tool was 0.78 for the pilot test and 0.86 for the main study, which indicate high internal consistency of the tool.

Table 1. Alpha Reliability of Pilot and Main Studies

| Instrument | No. of Pilot Study Items | No. of Main Study Items | Cronbach’s Alpha | |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| | | | Pilot Study (n =30) | Main Study (n = 200) |
| Attitudes towards <i>Ajami</i> Script Survey | 8 | 8 | .78 | .86 |

Results

The data to answer the research questions were collected through a survey and analyzed using descriptive statistics. To compute the results, ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ percentages were combined to represent the degree of agreement, while ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ were combined to represent the degree of disagreement.

Results of Research Question 1

The data in Table 2 indicates that the majority of the participants (85%) were not comfortable with the *Ajami* writing system. They believed that this system of writing was only used by Islamic scholars, and they considered it as an outdated system that should

be discarded (78%). Regarding the desire or interest in learning it, almost 80% of the respondents stated that they were not interested and they did not see any reasons why the use of *Ajami* scripts should be encouraged. Likewise, 81% of the participants felt that *Ajami* script was not as important as the Roman script. Based on these results, it could be argued that the overall attitude of the respondents towards the *Ajami* script was negative, as they overwhelmingly reported that they were not comfortable with it and had no interest in learning or using it. In addition, they considered it an outdated system of writing that was inferior to the Roman script.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Research Question 1

| Statements | # of Participants | SA | | A | | N | | D | | SD | |
|--|-------------------|----|-----|----|-----|----|----|----|-----|----|-----|
| | | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| I am comfortable with <i>Ajami</i> script. | 200 | 5 | 3% | 5 | 3% | 20 | 9% | 90 | 45% | 80 | 40% |
| This script is the same as Arabic script and it is only for Islamic scholars. | 200 | 70 | 35% | 85 | 43% | 10 | 4% | 20 | 10% | 15 | 8% |
| In my opinion, this script is outdated and should be discarded. | 200 | 85 | 43% | 70 | 35% | 10 | 4% | 15 | 8% | 20 | 10% |
| I am not interested in learning this script. | 200 | 90 | 45% | 70 | 35% | 10 | 4% | 15 | 8% | 15 | 8% |
| Hausa language students at this college should be encouraged to study this script. | 200 | 16 | 8% | 15 | 8% | 14 | 6% | 75 | 38% | 80 | 40% |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----|---|----|----|-----|----|----|----|-----|----|-----|
| <i>Ajami</i> writing system should be made as important as the Roman system of writing. | 200 | 9 | 5% | 20 | 10% | 10 | 4% | 79 | 40% | 82 | 41% |
|---|-----|---|----|----|-----|----|----|----|-----|----|-----|

Results of Research Question 2

The data in Table 3 presents the results of the participants' understanding of the *Ajami* writing system and their ability to distinguish it from an Arabic text. As shown on the table, most (between 95 and 97%) of them said they could neither read *Ajami* nor distinguish it from a text of Arabic language. Based on these results, it could be argued that an overwhelming majority of the participants did not understand *Ajami* script and could not differentiate it from Arabic language texts.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Research Question 2

| Question | % of Participants | Yes | | No | |
|--|-------------------|-----|----|-----|-----|
| | | F | % | F | % |
| Can you read the text below? | 200 | 6 | 3% | 194 | 97% |
| Are you able to distinguish between <i>Ajami</i> and Arabic texts? | 200 | 10 | 5% | 190 | 95% |

Discussions

The finding of RQ1 revealed that the participants overwhelmingly had negative attitudes towards *Ajami* script. They indicated that they were not comfortable with it and had no interest in learning it. Also, they considered it an outdated system of writing. The finding of RQ2 revealed that most of the respondents could not understand *Ajami* script and 95% of them could not see the differences between an *Ajami* text and another text written in Arabic language. Some of the possible reasons why some people perceive *Ajami* texts negatively, according to Kominko (2015), is the erroneous assumption that any text written in Arabic script is either a verse of the Holy Qur'an or a text from Islamic literature. Another possible reason is the radical shift that occurred in the "linguistic ecology" of West Africa as a result of colonialization (Diallo, 2016, p. 60). It was on record that after the colonial domination, European languages and secular education model were imposed and *Ajami* system was pushed to the background. According to Diallo (2016), the colonialists used both their hard power (military and coercive force) and their soft power (schools, churches, intelligence gathering, and persuasion) to "curb the spread of

Islam and thwart the spread of Qur’anic literacy and education” (p. 65). This negatively affected the status of *Ajami* in the region. Likewise, it could be argued that some non-native Hausa students did not understand *Ajami* because of its being appropriated from Arabic language and script, which was originally learned for religious needs. As such they still associate it with the religion of Islam. Consequently, it is not surprising that the participants in this study failed to identify *Ajami* texts or distinguish it from Arabic texts because they have not been taught how to read it and the society no longer promotes its use. Even among Islamic scholars, only a small percentage still uses it.

Conclusion, Major Findings, and Limitations

This study had two key findings. The first one, which answers the first research question, is that majority of the participants perceived *Ajami* negatively and as a result of which they were neither comfortable with it nor did they have interest in learning it. The second one, which answers the second research question, is that the respondents could neither read *Ajami* nor distinguish it from a text written in Arabic language.

This study had some limitations in terms of research design and sample size. In terms of research design, the study adopted a quantitative approach. A further study using mixed methods research design is likely to give more robust findings and a better understanding of the research problem. As for the sample size, only 200 participants, from a single site, were used for the study. A future study with more participants recruited from different sites across northern Nigeria might provide more reliable findings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that non-native Hausa students of languages be exposed to *Ajami* writing system to enable them unlock the yet to be explored knowledge of Hausawa, their language, history, and culture, and to also reconstruct their understanding of the differences between language, religion, and writing systems. It is also recommended that the status and relevance of *Ajami* be revived due to the significant role it played in the history of many West African languages. In fact, Ibrahim et al. (2010) recommends the introduction of a hybrid strategy, where both *Ajami* and Roman scripts are studied in primary schools and colleges of education, just like any other subjects such as Hausa, Arabic, and English languages.

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Appendix

Attitudes towards Ajami Script Survey

Part 1: Personal Information

1. Name: (optional): _____
2. Age: _____
3. Native Language: _____
4. Year of Study: Second [] Third []
5. Fluency in Hausa Language: Native-like [] High [] Low []
6. Language of Study: _____
7. Gender: Male [] Female []

Part 2: Survey Questions

| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. I am comfortable with Ajami script | | | | | |
| 2. This script is the same as Arabic script and it is only for Islamic scholars | | | | | |
| 3. In my opinion, this script is primitive and should be discarded. | | | | | |
| 4. I am not interested in learning this script. | | | | | |
| 5. Hausa language students at this college should be encouraged to study this script. | | | | | |

6. Ajami writing system should be made as important as the Roman system of writing.

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

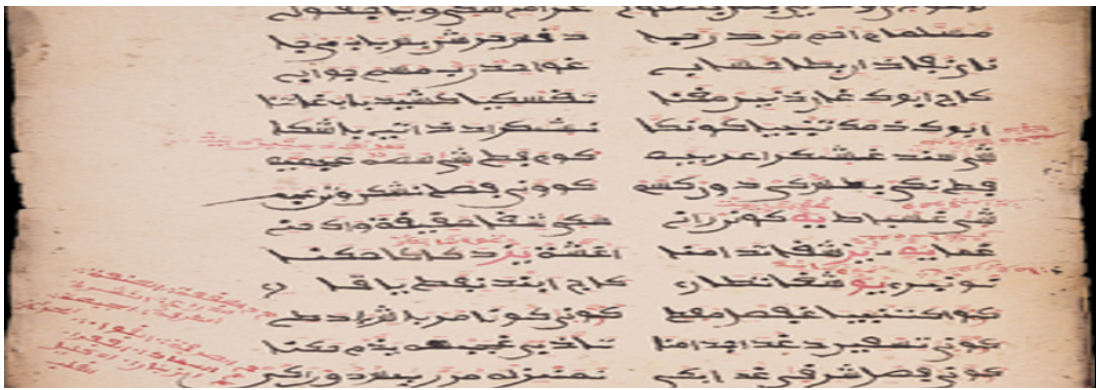
Part 2: Text Identification

1. Can you read the text below?

Yes []

No []

s



2. Are you able to distinguish between an Ajami text and a text written in Arabic language? Yes [] No []

Managing Exceptions in Teaching Yoruba Pronouns

Oluseye Adesola

Abstract

One of the make-or-break aspects of the Yoruba grammar that a foreign language learner must master is the Yoruba pronoun system. However, there are several exceptions on Yoruba monosyllabic pronouns that language learners need to remember to use the language fluently. For example, even though the third person singular subject monosyllabic pronoun is shown to be **ó** ‘he/she/it’ in Yoruba (Bamgbose 1990:114), there are exceptions to when it can be used in Yoruba sentences. It must not occur before the negation marker, **kò**. And, it must not occur before the future tense marker, **yóò**. Our students stumble on these and other exceptions that Yoruba imposes on monosyllabic pronouns with implications for their proficiency in the language. The goal of this paper is to highlight these exceptions that Yoruba teachers need to point out to the students in such a way that will make it less daunting for the students to process. Our hope is that bridging the gap will assist our students to reduce their errors and be more proficient in the language.

Keywords: Pronouns, Yoruba, Monosyllabic pronouns, Disyllabic pronouns, Overgeneralization, Exceptions

Introduction

It has been documented that foreign language learners struggle with learning how to use pronouns perfectly in many languages, including Spanish, French, and English (See García 2014, Shimanskaya and Slabakova 2019, Li and Akram 2024 among others). Perhaps that was why García (2014) refers to pronouns as foreign language students’ “worst enemy” in her work on Spanish. Nonetheless, it appears that with a little more effort from teachers and learners, it is indeed possible for foreign language learners to use target languages’ pronouns accurately. Yoruba is not an exception to this. With the appropriate guidance, foreign language learners of Yoruba can use its pronouns accurately. The Yoruba pronoun system appears to be straightforward. Indeed, it sometimes appear to be easier than the pronoun systems in languages like English because it does not require us

to specify for gender.¹ Same pronouns are used for male and female in subject and object positions. It does not require us to specify for animacy either. Same pronouns are used for animate and inanimate participants in a sentence. However, there are exceptions in the Yoruba pronoun system that language learners must remember to use the language fluently. Yoruba pronouns come in two forms, monosyllabic pronouns and disyllabic pronouns². Both pronouns can occur in similar positions in a Yoruba sentence. In foreign language classes, teachers encourage students to use monosyllabic pronouns more because of the nuances of the disyllabic pronouns. I support this idea as well. However, several of the exceptions that Yoruba has on when and how to use its pronouns implicitly involve the monosyllabic pronouns. My proposal is for Yoruba language teachers to systematically highlight these exceptions upfront to reduce potential errors. They should be introduced in different contexts as students begin to learn the language. For example, first person pronouns and their exceptions should be introduced to the students when they are learning how to introduce themselves and how to talk about themselves.

My students wonder why the examples in (1), (2), and (3) are correct while the example in (4) is not grammatical nor acceptable in Yoruba. A somewhat simple answer is that (4) is an exception to the rule that Yoruba speakers can use the third person singular monosyllabic subject pronoun **ó** in the subject position in the language.

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. O máa lọ New York. | ‘You will go to New York.’ |
| 2. Ó máa lọ New York. | ‘He will go to New York.’ |
| 3. O yóò/ó lọ New York. | ‘You will go to New York.’ |
| 4. *Ó yóò/ó lọ New York. | (For ‘He will go to New York.’) |

Thus, a student who uses (4) on the strength of the knowledge that (1) to (3) are acceptable will have errors in his speech. However, the example of the exception in (4) is not alone. There are several other instances in Yoruba in which a student would expect that he can generalize the use of pronouns only to discover that there are exceptions. It is our goal in this paper to highlight this and other exceptions in a way that will give our students upfront information to avoid the missteps that would lead to errors.

The paper is organized as follows. In section two, we highlight the Yoruba pronoun system. Section three explores exceptions in the Yoruba pronoun system. Section four attempts to explain the reasons for the exceptions. Section five is the conclusion.

Yoruba Pronouns

Numerous scholars have worked on Yoruba pronouns (See Bamgbose 1967, 1990,

¹ See Antón-Méndez (2010) for how Spanish speakers learning English as a foreign language struggle with gender pronouns in English.

² In this paper, to promote simplicity, we use monosyllabic pronouns for what has been traditionally referred to as weak or short pronouns while we use disyllabic pronouns for words that have been sometimes referred to as strong or long pronouns (Bamgbose (1990), Awobuluyi (2021).

Awobuluyi 1978, 2021, Pulleyblank 1986, Manfredi 1987, 1995, Akinlabi and Liberman 2000, Adesola 2010, Dechaine 2001, Dechaine and Witschko 2002, and Ajiboye 2003, among others). What all the sources have in common is that Yoruba pronouns come in two forms: weak and strong pronouns. And that, the two kinds of pronouns have important morphological and syntactic similarities and differences. Weak pronouns are sometimes referred to as short pronouns while strong pronouns are sometimes referred to as long pronouns. These alternate terms are based on the structures of the pronouns. With specific reference to their structures and for simplicity, we will refer to weak/short pronouns as monosyllabic pronouns and we will refer to strong/long pronouns as disyllabic pronouns in this paper.

Examples of monosyllabic pronouns are: *mo* ‘I’, *o* ‘you’, *ó* ‘he/she/it’, *a* ‘we’, *ẹ* ‘you (plural)’, and *wón* ‘they’. Examples of disyllabic pronouns are: *èmi* ‘I’, *ìwọ* ‘you’, *òun* ‘he/she/it’, *àwa* ‘we’, *ẹ̀yìn* ‘you (plural)’, and *àwọ̀n* ‘they’. Yoruba pronouns can also be classified based on number: singular and plural pronouns. Singular pronouns are used for one person, while plural pronouns are used for two or more people. Examples of singular pronouns include: *mo* ‘I’, *o* ‘you’, *ó* ‘he/she/it’, *èmi* ‘I’, *ìwọ* ‘you’, and *òun* ‘he/she/it’. Examples of plural pronouns include: *a* ‘we’, *ẹ* ‘you’, *wón* ‘they’, *àwa* ‘we’, *ẹ̀yìn* ‘you (plural)’, and *àwọ̀n* ‘they’. Yoruba pronouns can also be reclassified based on the person referred to by the pronoun: first person or speaker, second person or hearer, and third person or another person. We can also classify Yoruba pronouns based on where the pronoun is used in the structure of a sentence: subject position, object position and as an adjective or modifier.

Monosyllabic Pronouns

Most of what we will discuss in this paper would be on monosyllabic pronouns, which can be just a vowel or a consonant and a vowel. Examples of first person singular monosyllabic pronouns are in (**subject** position, 5) and (**object** position, 6).

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| 5a. <u>Mo</u> jẹ ọmọ ọdún méjìlélógún. | ‘I am twenty-two years old.’ |
| 5b. <u>Mo</u> lọ Boston. | ‘I went to Boston.’ |
| 6a. Bísádé rí <u>mi</u> . | ‘Bisade saw me.’ |
| 6b. Bísádé t̀n <u>mí</u> . | ‘Bisade deceived me.’ |

The underlined pronouns refer to the speaker. He uses ***mo*** ‘I’ in the subject position and ***mi*** ‘me’ in the object position. If a student was talking face to face with someone, he would use the second person singular subject pronoun ***o*** ‘you’ or the second person singular object position ***o/ẹ*** ‘you’ to refer to the person as in (7) and (8).

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 7a. <u>O</u> lè lọ New York. | ‘You can go to New York.’ |
| 7b. <u>O</u> fẹ̀ràn ìrẹ̀sì. | ‘You like rice.’ |
| 8a. Bísádé rí <u>o</u> ní New York. | ‘Bisade saw you in New York.’ |
| 8b. Bísádé rí <u>ẹ</u> ní New York. | ‘Bisade saw you in New York.’ |

As seen in (8), Yoruba uses either ọ or ẹ as the second person object pronoun. They are in free variation³. Yoruba uses ó as the third person singular subject pronoun (Bamgbose 1990) (9). The vowel of the verb is used as the third person singular object pronoun whenever the verb is monosyllabic (10). The genitive pronoun rẹ is used as the third person singular object pronoun whenever the verb has more than one syllable (12 below).

- 9a. Ó máa lọ New York. ‘He will go to new York.’
 9b. Ó fẹràn New York. ‘He likes New York.’
 10a. Bólájí rí ì ní New York.
 10b. Bólájí jẹ ẹ ní àárò.

Readers should note the fact that the second person object pronouns in (10) do not have the same form. Each pronoun has the form of the vowel of the verb that it follows. Teachers need to point it out to students that this is a general rule whenever the verb is monosyllabic, the third person object pronoun would always take the form of the vowel of the verb as in (11).

- 11a. Bólájí kà á . ‘Bolaji read it.’
 11b. Bólájí gé e . ‘Bolaji cut it.’
 11c. Bólájí fẹ ẹ . ‘Bolaji wants it.’
 11d. Bólájí kọ ọ . ‘Bolaji wrote it.’
 11e. Bólájí ẹ é . ‘Bolaji did it.’
 11f. Bólájí so ó . ‘Bolaji tied it.’
 11g. Bólájí tu ú . ‘Bolaji unwrapped it.’
 11h. Bólájí tàn án . ‘Bolaji deceived him.’
 11i. Bólájí fọ ọ . ‘Bolaji washed it.’
 11j. Bólájí kùn ún . ‘Bolaji painted it.’
 11k. Bólájí sọn ón . ‘Bolaji rinsed it.’

Teachers should also point it out to the students that two tones are possible on the third person singular object pronoun. It always has a high tone. However, it has a mid tone whenever the verb that precedes it has a high tone as in (11b and 11c) above. Furthermore, teachers need to point it out to the learners that the genitive pronoun rẹ is used as the third person singular object pronoun whenever the verb of the sentence has more than one syllable as in (12).

³ However, it appears that ọ is used more frequently than ẹ in the standard dialect of Yoruba. Moreso, if a view that monosyllabic pronouns are reduced forms of disyllabic pronouns is correct, then the second person object pronoun would more likely look like ọ rather than ẹ , since the disyllabic form for the second person object pronoun is iwo . Thus, if a Yoruba teacher needs to decide on which one to prioritize or teach first, I would recommend teaching ọ first and I would remind the teacher to remember to indicate that ọ occurs in free variation with ẹ as the second person object pronoun in the language..

- 12a. Bísádé gbàgbé rẹ̀. ‘Bisade forgot it.’
 12b. Bísádé rántí rẹ̀. ‘Bisade remembered it.’
 12c. Bísádé wàhàlà rẹ̀. ‘Bisade troubled him.’

Yoruba also uses genitive pronouns in the subject position or in the object position to indicate possession. For example, the first person singular genitive pronoun **mi** is used in the subject position in (13) while the first person singular genitive pronoun **mi** is used in object position in (14) to indicate possession.

- 13a. Bàbá **mi** rá ilé tuntun. ‘My father bought a new house’
 13b. Ilé **mi** ní ilẹ̀kùn mẹ́rin. ‘My house has four doors.’
 14a. Bísádé yá ìwé **mi**. ‘Bisade borrowed my book.’
 14b. Mo fẹ̀ràn kíláàsì **mi**. ‘I like my class.’

Yoruba uses **re/e** as the second person singular genitive pronoun in the subject position (15) and in the second person singular genitive pronoun in the object position (16).

- 15a. Màmá **re** ñ pè ọ́. ‘Your mother is calling you.’
 15b. Màmá **e** ñ pè ọ́. ‘Your mother is calling you.’
 16a. Gba ìwé **re**. ‘Collect your book.’
 16b. Gba ìwé **e**. ‘Collect your book.’

Yoruba uses **rẹ̀/ẹ̀** as the third person singular genitive pronoun in the subject position (17) and **rẹ̀/ẹ̀** as the third person singular genitive pronoun in the object position (18).

- 17a. Màmá **rẹ̀** rí Bísádé. ‘His mother saw Bisade.’
 17b. Màmá **ẹ̀** rí Bísádé. ‘His mother saw Bisade.’
 18a. Bísádé gé ìwé **rẹ̀**. ‘Bisade cut his book.’
 18b. Bísádé gé ìwé **ẹ̀**. ‘Bisade cut his book.’

All the examples of (monosyllabic) pronouns that we have seen so far are singular pronouns. Yoruba uses first person plural pronoun in cases when the speaker is a participant in the sentence. Yoruba uses **a** in the subject position (19) and **wa** is used in the object position (20).

- 19a. **A** lọ sí New York. ‘We went to New York.’
 19b. **A** fẹ̀ràn ẹ̀wà. ‘We like beans.’
 20a. Bísádé rí **wa**. ‘Bisade saw us.’
 20b. Bisade tàn **wá**. ‘Bisade deceived us.’

Yoruba uses **e** as the second person plural pronoun in the subject position (21) and

yín as the second person plural pronoun in the object position (22).

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 21a. Ẹ lọ New York. | ‘You went to New York.’ |
| 21b. Ẹ fẹràn ìṣìrò. | ‘You like mathematics.’ |
| 22a. Bísádé rí yín ní New York. | ‘Bisade saw you in New York.’ |
| 22b. Bísádé rán yín sí Túndé. | ‘Bisade sent you to Tunde.’ |

Yoruba uses **wọ̀n** as the third person plural pronoun in the subject position (23) and **wọ̀n** as the third person plural pronoun in the object position (24).

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 23a. Wọ̀n máa lọ New York. | ‘They will go to New York.’ |
| 23b. Wọ̀n fẹràn ẹ̀wà. | ‘They like beans.’ |
| 24a. Bísádé rí wọ̀n ní New York. | ‘Bisade saw them in New York.’ |
| 24b. Bísádé fẹràn wọ̀n . | ‘Bisade likes them.’ |

Furthermore, Yoruba uses **wa** as the first person plural possessive pronoun in the subject position (25) and in the object position (26).

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 25a. Bàbá wa fẹràn ẹ̀wà. | ‘Our father likes beans.’ |
| 25b. Ilé wa wà ní New York. | ‘Our house is in New York.’ |
| 26a. Bísádé yá iwé wa . | ‘Bisade borrowed our book.’ |
| 26b. Bísádé fẹràn ilé wa . | ‘Bisade likes our house.’ |

Yoruba uses **yín** as the second person plural possessive pronoun in the subject position (27) and in the object position (28).

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 27a. Màmá yín fẹràn ẹ̀wà. | ‘Your mother likes beans.’ |
| 27b. Màmá yín n pè ó. | ‘Your mother is calling you.’ |
| 28a. Ẹ gba iwé yín . | ‘Collect your book.’ |
| 28b. Ẹ wo Màmá yín . | ‘Look at your mother.’ |

Yoruba uses **wọ̀n** as the third person plural possessive pronoun in the subject position (29) and in the object position (30).

- | | |
|--|---|
| 29a. Màmá wọ̀n ti rí Bísádé. | ‘Their mother has seen Bisade’ |
| 29b. Màmá wọ̀n n bọ ní òlá. | ‘Their mother is coming tomorrow.’ |
| 30a. Bísádé fẹràn iwé wọ̀n púpọ̀. | ‘Bisade likes their book a lot.’ |
| 30b. Bísádé pe bàbá wọ̀n ní àná. | ‘Bisade called their father yesterday.’ |

See the table (31a) below for a summary of the pronouns seen in examples (5) to (30) above.

31a. **Yoruba Monosyllabic Pronouns**

| | | Monosyllabic Pronouns | | |
|---------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| | | Subject | Object | Possessive |
| First Person | S | Mo ‘I’ | Mí ‘me’ | Mi ‘my’ |
| Second Person | i | O ‘you’ | Ọ or Ẹ ‘you’ | Rẹ ‘your’ |
| Third Person | n g u l a r | Ó ‘he/she/it’ | rẹ or vowel of the verb ‘him/her/it’ | Rẹ ‘his/her/its’ |
| First Person | p l u r a l | A ‘we’ | Wá ‘us’ | Wa ‘our’ |
| Second Person | | Ẹ ‘you’ | Yín ‘you’ | Yín ‘your’ |
| Third Person | | Wọn ‘they’ | Wọn ‘them’ | Wọn ‘their’ |

Yoruba Disyllabic Pronouns

For each monosyllabic pronoun shown in (31a), Yoruba has a corresponding disyllabic form as shown in (31b) below. Scholars have referred to disyllabic pronouns as strong pronouns or long pronouns (Bamgbose 1990). Disyllabic pronouns have unique features and nuances about how they are used in Yoruba sentences. An important fact that readers should note is that disyllabic pronouns can occur in each of the examples where monosyllabic pronouns occur in (5) to (30). So, we will not be repeating the examples to show the occurrences of disyllabic pronouns in this paper. What we will do instead is to highlight exceptions, in which monosyllabic pronouns are involved in contrast to disyllabic pronouns. First, see a summary of Yoruba disyllabic pronouns in (31b).

31b. **Yoruba Disyllabic Pronouns**

| | Disyllabic Pronouns |
|--|----------------------------|
|--|----------------------------|

| | | Subject and Object Positions | Possessive |
|---------------|----------------------------|---|--|
| First Person | S | Èmi ‘I, me’ | Èmi ‘my’ |
| Second Person | i | ìwọ ‘you’ | ìwọ tàbí ìrẹ ‘your’ |
| Third Person | n g u l a r | Òun ‘he/ she/it, Him/her/it’ | òun tàbí tirẹ ‘his/her/its’ |
| First Person | P l u r a l | Àwa ‘we, us’ | Àwa ‘our’ |
| Second Person | | ẹyin ‘you’ | ẹyin ‘your’ |
| Third Person | | àwọn ‘they, them’ | àwọn ‘their’ |

Even though monosyllabic pronouns and disyllabic pronouns can potentially occur in the same structural positions in sentences (5) to (30), there are some structural positions where a disyllabic pronoun can occur where a monosyllabic pronoun is not allowed in Yoruba. We will include those instances under exceptions in section three below. Our suggestion is that learners should be encouraged to use monosyllabic pronouns in all instances except when a disyllabic pronoun is required until they are very comfortable with using Yoruba pronouns very well. That said, a monosyllabic and a disyllabic pronoun can occur together in a sentence. An example is with the particle *ti* ‘of’ as in (32).

- 32a. **Tèmi** ni, **tẹ** kọ. ‘It’s mine, it’s not yours.’
32b. **Tiwa** ni. ‘It’s ours.’

- 32c. Tàwa ni. 'It's ours.'
 32d. Tiè ni, toun kó. 'It's his, not hers.'

We turn to some of the exceptions that monosyllabic pronouns have in Yoruba in section 3 next.

Monosyllabic Pronoun Exceptions

Exceptions for the Third Person Subject Pronoun: Ó

The third person singular monosyllabic subject pronoun is **ó** 'he/she/it' as shown table (31a), and as established in the literature (Bamgbose 1990). Thus **ó** can be used in the subject position in Yoruba sentences (33).

- 33a. Ó lọ New York. 'He/She/It went to New York.'
 33b. Ó tètè jí. 'He woke up early.'

However, unlike other pronouns, **ó** cannot be used in the subject position when the negation marker '**kò**' is used (34c).

- 34a. O kò lọ New York. 'You did not go to New York.'
 34b. Wọn kò lọ New York. 'They did not go to New York.'
 34c. *Ó kò lọ New York. (for 'he did not go to New York.')

Instead of the ungrammatical (34c), the learner must be taught to delete **ó** before negation marker **kò** at all times to create an acceptable sentence as in (35).

35. Kò lọ New York. 'He did not go to New York.'

Perhaps related to that, and, unlike other pronouns, **ó** cannot be used either in the subject position when the future tense marker **yóò** 'will' or its reduced form **ó** is used (36c).

- 36a. O ó lọ New York. 'You will go to New York.'
 36b. A ó lọ New York. 'We will go to New York.'
 36c. *Ó ó lọ New York. (For 'He will go to New York.')

Instead of the unacceptable (36c), teachers would instruct learners to always delete the third person subject pronoun **ó** because Yoruba does not allow it to occur before the future tense marker **yóò** or its reduced form **ó**. Thus (37) is the acceptable sentence instead of (36c).

37. Yóò lọ New York. 'He will go to New York.'

Readers should note that the exception that applies to **ó** with the future tense marker **yóò/ó** in (36c) is no longer an issue when a different future tense marker **máa** ‘will’ is used. For example, all examples in (36) will become acceptable in Yoruba if **máa** ‘will’ is used instead of **yóò/ó** ‘will’ (38).

- 38a. **O** **máa** lọ New York. ‘You will go to New York.’
 38b. **A** **máa** lọ New York. ‘We will go to New York.’
 38c. **Ó** **máa** lọ New York. ‘He will go to New York.’

Exceptions for the First Person Subject Pronoun: **Mo**

Another monosyllabic pronoun that has an exception in how to use it in Yoruba sentences is the first person singular subject pronoun **mo** ‘I’. Unlike other pronouns, its occurrence with negation marker **kò** is also not straightforward. That is why (39c) is unacceptable.

- 39a. **O** **kò** lọ. ‘You did not go.’
 39b. **Wón** **kò** lọ ‘They did not go.’
 39c. ***Mo** **kò** lọ. (For ‘I did not go.’)

However, unlike the situation with the third person subject pronoun seen in (34) where Yoruba requires **ó** to be deleted as in (35), the resolution for the first person subject pronoun **mo** is variant substitution. A variant of **Mo** which is used only in special situations **N** ‘I’ is used to replace **mo** in (39c) to create an acceptable sentence as in (40).

40. **N** **kò** lọ. ‘I did not go.’

Furthermore, unlike other pronouns, the first person subject pronoun **mo** is not allowed to occur after the subjunctive marker **kí** in Yoruba. That is why (41c) is not acceptable in the language.

- 41a. E jé kí **wón** lọ. ‘Let them go.’
 41b. E jé kí **ó** lọ. ‘Let him go’
 41c. *E jé kí **mo** lọ. (for ‘Let me go.’)

Instead, the variant of **mo** ‘I’ which we saw in (40), **N** ‘I’ must be used to replace **mo** to create an acceptable sentences as in (42)

42. E jé kí **N** lọ. ‘Let me go.’

Similarly, unlike other pronouns, the first person subject pronoun **mo** ‘I’ is not allowed to occur before the negation marker **kò** in Yoruba. This is why (43c) is not acceptable.

- 43a. **Wọ̀n** kò wá ní àná. ‘They did not come yesterday.’
 43b. **O** kò wá ní àná. ‘You did not come yesterday.’
 43c. ***Mo** kò wá ní àná. (for ‘I did not come yesterday.’)

As in the other previous exceptions involving the first person subject pronoun *mo*, Yoruba also requires a substitution of *mo* with its variant *N* (which occur with *kò* or its reduced form *ò*) in this case to create an acceptable sentence like (44).

44. **N** ò wá ní àná. ‘I did not come yesterday.’

The examples that we have seen so far show exceptions for the monosyllabic subject pronouns for first person *mo* and the third person *ò*. There appears to be no exceptions for the second person monosyllabic subject pronoun *o*. It also appears that there are no exceptions for monosyllabic plural pronouns in Yoruba. However, there are some exceptions that apply to all monosyllabic pronouns in contrast with disyllabic pronouns. We turn to these in subsection 3.3 below.

Exceptions for the Monosyllabic Pronouns in General

As in many languages of the world, a conjunction can be used to conjoin two nouns or two pronouns. Yoruba also allows the same. Thus, the examples in (45) are acceptable.

- 45a. Iṣu àti eyin ‘yam and egg’
 45b. **Ìwọ̀** àti **èmi** ‘you and I’

However, there are exceptions to the rule in Yoruba, two monosyllabic pronouns cannot be conjoined with a conjunction. This is why the examples in (46) are not acceptable.

- 46a. ***O** àti **mo** (for ‘you and I’)
 46b. ***Wọ̀n** àti **E** (for ‘they and you’)

Yoruba requires the use of disyllabic pronouns instead of monosyllabic pronouns in order for examples such as (46) to become acceptable (47).

- 47a. **Ìwọ̀** àti **Èmi** ‘You and I’
 47b. **Àwọ̀n** àti **èyin** ‘They and you’

Furthermore, like many other languages, Yoruba pronouns can occur in place of nouns including before a copular verb. Thus, the examples in (48) which involves copular verb *ni* ‘be’ are acceptable.

- 48a. **Òun** ni ògá. ‘He is the boss.’
 48b. **Àwọ̀n** ni òrẹ̀ Tùndé. ‘They are the friends of Tunde.’

However, there are exceptions. Monosyllabic pronouns cannot be used in the subject position of the copular verb *ni* ‘be’ in Yoruba. This is why the examples in (49) are not acceptable in Yoruba.

- 49a. ***Ó** ni ògá. (for ‘He is the boss.’)
 49b. ***Wón** ni òrẹ́ Túndé. (for ‘They are the friends of Tunde.’)

Furthermore, like in many other languages, Yoruba pronouns can occur before the adverb *náà* ‘also’ as in the examples in (50).

- 50a. **Òun** náà lọ New York. ‘He also went to New York.’
 50b. **Àwa** náà fẹ̀ràn ẹ̀wà. ‘We also like beans.’

However, monosyllabic pronouns cannot be used before the adverb *náà* ‘also’ in Yoruba. That is why the examples in (51) are not acceptable.

- 51a. ***Ó** náà lọ New York. (for ‘He also went to New York.’)
 51b. ***A** náà fẹ̀ràn ẹ̀wà. (for ‘We also like beans.’)

Next, we turn to how to explain the exceptions that we have identified in section 3.

Managing the Exceptions: Size Matters

Looking at all the exceptions that we saw in section three at once could be a bit daunting to learners of the Yoruba language as a foreign language. So, it is our hope that Yoruba teachers can ease into them gradually based on contexts without minimizing the importance of mastering them. While doing that, some curious students might want to know more about why monosyllabic pronouns are so restricted when they are supposed to be equal to their corresponding disyllabic counterparts. Perhaps there is not an obviously easy way to explain all of them especially since Yoruba language learners are not really in a linguistics class. The easiest possible way to explain all the exceptions is to say that that is simply the way the Yoruba language wants the monosyllabic pronouns to be used. Whatever is acceptable is the optimal choice among competing choices of how to use Yoruba pronouns.

However, the explanation of simply saying that that is what the language allows may not ultimately satisfy some curious students. My suggestion is for Yoruba teachers to take a moment to explain the exceptions by appealing to the size of the pronouns. Disyllabic pronouns are able to do all that they do because they have at least two syllables like the Yoruba nouns that they replace. On the other hand, Yoruba monosyllabic pronouns are deficient in comparison to Yoruba disyllabic pronouns because they have only one syllable. The size of Yoruba monosyllabic pronouns is one of the reasons they have been called clitics in Yoruba linguistics literature (Akinlabi and Liberman 2000). Yoruba teachers

can refer the students to Pulleyblank, D (1986) and Akinlabi, A and Liberman, M (2000) for a detailed explanation on Yoruba monosyllabic pronouns as clitics. Yoruba grammar books including Bamgbose, A (1990) have also noted a distinction between the pronouns by referring to monosyllabic pronouns as short pronouns and disyllabic pronouns as long pronouns. Perhaps this is why some other works including Dechaine and Wiltschko (2002), Ajiboye, O. (2003), and Adesola, O. (2010) have also referred to monosyllabic pronouns as weak pronouns and disyllabic pronouns as strong pronouns. Some Yoruba language teaching books including Shleicher, A (1993) and Mosadomi, F. (2012) refer to the monosyllabic pronouns as regular pronouns and the disyllabic pronouns as emphatic pronouns. These and related materials can be assigned as reading assignments so that the discussion would not take much class time.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the exceptions that Yoruba requires with respect to how to use monosyllabic pronouns in the language. We noted that many of the exceptions apply to the third person singular subject pronoun *ó* 'he/she/it' and the first person singular subject pronoun *mo* 'I'. While the exceptions with *ó* is resolved with deletion, the exceptions with *mo* is resolved with a substitution. We also showed that some exceptions apply to monosyllabic pronouns in general. We noted that it is the responsibility of the Yoruba language teacher to point these exceptions out to the learners upfront. Our proposal is for language teachers to explain the exceptions in a way that will minimize the amount of time used to explain why and focus more on how to use the pronouns correctly. The teacher can recommend some of the numerous works on Yoruba linguistics that examine the distinctions between monosyllabic pronouns and disyllabic pronouns. With that, Yoruba teachers can use the available class time optimally to improve on students' proficiency in the language without neglecting the desired explanation on why Yoruba uses monosyllabic pronouns the way it does.

Another point that we need to re-emphasize as we conclude this paper is how best to introduce the exceptions that we have highlighted above to the students so that it would be easier for them to understand. One way to do this would be to introduce all the pronouns and their exceptions at once. Unlike the nouns that they are used to replace, pronouns are finite. They are in a closed class. New nouns can be derived, but new pronouns cannot be derived. The number of Yoruba pronouns in table (31a) above cannot be increased. So, teaching the students all the pronouns at once may not be a bad idea. However, since our goal is to make it stress free, a different approach may be more productive. Instead of introducing all the pronouns at once, Yoruba teachers can introduce the pronouns based on the contexts or the topics that the students are learning in class⁴. For example, Yoruba teachers can begin with first person pronouns and their exceptions when learners are learning how to introduce themselves and how to talk about

⁴ The comment of an anonymous reviewer encouraged me to recommend this approach. I agree.

themselves. Then, they can teach second person pronouns and third person pronouns and their exceptions as learners expand their conversations to include their classmates, friends, other people, and their families. Later on, the instructors can introduce plural pronouns and their exceptions as learners engage in discussions about groups of people, friends' families, and the society or communities. Instructors can use this content-based approach to simplify the teaching process. It could enhance retention because it is systematic. And, it can also help learners to manage the complexity of the Yoruba pronoun system more effectively and efficiently.

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Yoruba Proverbs as a Useful Resource in Heritage Language Acquisition

Adebimpe Adegbite

Abstract

Acquisition of Yoruba language and culture by heritage speakers is complicated and often requires multiple frameworks beyond instruction provided by trained teachers or planned classes in academic institutions. Such frameworks can utilize the existing motivation of parents of heritage Yoruba speakers to facilitate the Yoruba language and culture acquisition of their children. This paper examines the literature on the importance of Yoruba proverbs and its capability to facilitate the teaching of Yoruba language and culture to heritage learners. In addition, as evident in the Ile-Ife study, where increase in the knowledge of Yoruba proverbs was positively correlated with increase in Yoruba language and culture competence (Adegbite, 2025a; 2025b), proverbs instruction when situated within a strict pro-Yoruba family language policy and facilitated by parents tends to increase the competence of heritage learners and their excitement at continuing to learn Yoruba language. The paper further suggests action steps for parents in using proverbs as a tool for the Yoruba heritage instruction of their children. The study concludes that Yoruba proverbs as tools for heritage language acquisition is part of the indigenous knowledge systems that are required for an optimal Afrocentric education of heritage Yoruba language and culture learners.

Keywords: Yoruba proverbs, heritage language acquisition, family language policy (FLP), language acquisition framework

Introduction

Language education and acquisition are highly complex linguistic phenomena (Butler, 2013), where acquisition of a language includes not only linguistic competence, but also performance socially and culturally. Heritage speakers of a language usually require more effort and time in learning their heritage language compared to the language of their immediate environment. Adegbite (2024) posits that language is of germane importance to the enhancement of an individual's identity which conveys their codified cultural make

up and genetic origin. Parents of Yoruba children born abroad increasingly desire their children to acquire their heritage language and culture despite the deficit in access to human and material resources for the purpose.

Most teaching and acquisition frameworks for heritage speakers of Yoruba language in the diaspora have necessitated the employment of trained teachers or planned classes in academic institutions. Despite the efforts of teachers and scholars in this regard, there is still a huge gap in the desire of parents for their children to learn Yoruba language and the actual competence of children in the language and culture. There is need for a complementary alternative to structuring the teaching of Yoruba only for academic institutions and by trained teachers (Adegbite, 2025b). This research explores the literature on Yoruba proverbs and its importance in the acquisition of Yoruba language and culture. As justification for the proposal of a proverbs framework for teaching Yoruba language and culture to heritage language learners, the paper examines the Ile-Ife study, an experimental study of children learning Yoruba language and culture using proverbs in the Yoruba city of Ile-Ife, southwest Nigeria. The current author argues that the effectiveness of proverbs in teaching Yoruba language and culture in the Ile-Ife study can be transferable to heritage language learners of Yoruba language and culture in diasporic contexts such as the United States.

This study contributes to the knowledge of how Yoruba language and culture can be systematically taught by parents within the home with little or no professional assistance. Furthermore, the framework explicated in the study provides an additional teaching methodology for scholars interested in language learning, bilingualism, and indigenous language preservation.

Heritage Language Maintenance

According to Fishman (1978), heritage language loss typically takes place across three generations: (i) immigrant-bilinguals, (ii) limited bilinguals, and (iii) monolinguals. Nesteruk (2010) affirms that in the United States, for example, children from various national origins and backgrounds become monolingual or English-dominant by the time they reach adolescence. In cases where immigrant-parents have high levels of education and income, studies have shown that this raises the probability that their children would speak only English language (Alba et al, 2002; Bills et al., 1995). However, if the first generation, with the help of conducive linguistic and social factors are successful at making the second-generation balanced bilinguals in the heritage and host languages, it becomes easier for the third generation to acquire the heritage language.

The family is “the most common and inescapable basis of mother tongue transmission, bonding, use and stabilization” (Fishman, 1991 p. 94). There are various factors that lead to language loss ranging from government policies to natural disasters (Adegbite, 2020), but the primary domain of intergenerational language loss is the family. To put more concretely, “the loss of natural intergenerational transmission was recognized as the key marker of language loss, and it occurred within the family” and for the reason

which “family was added to the state as a domain relevant to language policy” (Spolsky, 2008 p. 2). The reversing language shift model theory provides a framework to retain or recreate minority languages within the family, community and state. As Fishman (2001) affirms, efforts within this framework are not anti-majority language(s) but rather enable effective globalization through the optimality of multilingualism. Adegbite (2025b) further propounds the Family Reversing Language Shift framework which establishes the home as the primary ground for Yoruba language acquisition, and children and parents as the major stakeholders in the process. Intergenerational language transmission is best achieved when parents and children use an indigenous/ethnic language in the home since the family and community are critical for the maintenance of ‘home’ language. Small cultures can inform, to a large extent, the language choice of members in a way that eventually informs their larger community. This approach is a bottom-top one, and has, as its core actors, parents and their child(ren) in a bilingual home.

Proverbs as a Vital Tool for Yoruba Communication and Instruction

According to Akporobaro & Emovon (1994), the proverbs that a community or group of people use is otherwise their ethnography and often reveals their way of life, social values, moral truths, philosophy, and criticism of life. They facilitate the transmission of culture, social morality, philosophy, and values intergenerationally (Owomoyela, 2005). The brevity of proverbs makes them efficient tools that can be utilized in the transfer of coded information to the exclusion of non-interlocutors or present individuals who do not possess mastery of the language and culture. Ademowo and Balogun (2014, p.6) posit that proverbs are “models of compressed or forceful language that make people behave according to norms and mores of the land.” Subsequently, Adegbite (2024) affirms that some proverbs are difficult to fully interpret until they are situated within their context of creation. Proverbs are carefully crafted with meticulous selection of terms, concepts, and grammatical combination; this is sometimes layered with specific reference to a historical event. In spite of the simplicity yet complexity of proverbs, competent Yoruba speakers who are knowledgeable in the culture and the construction of proverbs can form new ones for their unique situation.

Proverbs are, according to the International Reading Association (2003) cited in Adegbite (2024), (a) passed down through time with little change in form, (b) mostly used metaphorically which necessitates the need to understand their nature to unravel their meanings, and (c) often use rhetorical devices such as rhyme, parallel structure, repetition, imagery, and alliteration to make them more memorable. In terms of communication and the sociocultural relationship among people in the Yoruba culture, the proverb: *Òwe ni ẹ̀sìn ọ̀rẹ̀, bí ọ̀rẹ̀ bá sọ̀nù, ọ̀we la fi ní wa*—“Proverb is a horse (commuter) for words; in the case words are lost, proverbs are used to search them out”—conveys that Yoruba proverbs are a key part of understanding the language and culture. This makes its use in heritage language instruction even more essential. Adegbite (2022) highlights some proverbs and

their functions in Yoruba language and culture acquisition:

1. *A kì í jẹ mèjì ní abà Àlàdè; ènì kan kì í jẹ iṣu kí ó tún jẹ iyán.*
 “We do not eat two things in Àlàdè’s village; one person does not eat yam and also pounded yam”
 (Proverb on warning, caution, and advice)
2. *A kì í torí pé ònà jìn kí á padà sáyìn.*
 “One does not because a distance is far turn back”
 (Proverb on sympathy and encouragement)
3. *Bí a ó ti tó kì í jẹ kí á hu ìwà burúkú; bí a ó ti mọ kì í jẹ kí á hu ìwà rere.*
 “One’s potential high achievements prevent one from behaving badly; one’s potential stagnancy prevents one from behaving in a good way.”
 (Proverb on reproach and punishment)
4. *Ènì tí kò bá mọ ọ jọ kì í jìnà sí onílù.*
 “One who does not know how to dance does not stay far away from the drummer.”
 (Proverb on cooperation and care for others)
5. *Adìyẹ funfun kò mọ ara rẹ ní àgbà.*
 “A white fowl does not recognize itself as superior.”
 (Proverb on responsive leadership)

Early childhood education is crucial to an individual’s emotional, social, and mental development (Osanyin, 2002). As stated by Abidogun and Adebule (2013, p. 267), it constitutes “the most impressionable years as they lay the foundation for the development of the human personality.” Despite several merits of Yoruba being the primary language of instruction for Yoruba children in southwestern Nigeria, English is prioritized in public and official spheres which has translated to a reduction in Yoruba as a primary language in Yoruba homes (Adegbite, 2025b). Largely speaking, in Nigeria, “indigenous languages suffer neglect and are most restricted to their domains or regions of use” (Adegbija (2004) cited in Abidogun and Adebule (2013, p. 268)). Proverbs as a tool for Yoruba language instruction and acquisition is justified by numerous arguments in the literature for the need to employ perspectives and teaching frameworks that are indigenous to children in the facilitation of a system of education for them (Friere, 2004, 1973; Merriam, 2010). In agreement, Avoseh (2012, pp. 236-237) posits that “every aspect of a community’s life and values in indigenous Africa provide the theoretical framework for education... the framework provided by proverbs affirms the ancestors as the real theorists of Afrocentric education”. The employment of proverbs as a tool for teaching means the whole community as the classroom and everyone being a teacher or the student depending on context. In short, learning with Yoruba proverbs is more holistic and less confined to the four walls of the classroom (Adegbite, 2025b). Children additionally learn culture and social integration in addition to their language acquisition. Boahene (2006) cited

in Adegbite (2024) identifies five reasons proverbs are important in children's language and good citizenship development from within the home: (i) proverbs provide different points of view not amplified by textbooks, (ii) proverbs provide insights into events or personalities and poses exciting questions to children, (iii) proverbs help to explain and illustrate the complexity of cultures, (iv) proverbs encourage children to use thinking skills and strengthen their analytical ability, and (v) proverbs help bridge the cultural values gap between African and other western cultures in an ethnically and racially diverse world

Family Language Policy and Planning

Family language policy is a codified procedure that is overt and explicit in relation to language use in the home and among family members (Lanza, 2007; Schiffman, 1996; Shohamy, 2006). Family language policy is often established based on how a family perceives social and political structures within the society in addition to directions of language shift or change (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Zhang & Tsung, 2019). This is unlike language policies on a national scale, which are typically enacted and executed to influence and/or change processes and structures of the political and social terrain of a state. Family language policies are determined through a family's view of the language combination that will support the social standing of the family in addition to improving the same, based on the changing linguistic situation of their context. This view is pursued through actions in three areas which Zhang and Tsung (2019) describe as status planning, corpus planning and acquisition planning. With a consideration that is connected to the success of the children in school in addition to unconscious and implicit factors that make them emotionally involved in their initial resolution to combat or fit into societal language maintenance or shift, parents map out whether and when to use particular language(s) with their children and consciously evaluate the success of their decision in the cognitive and social development and advancement of their children within the society (King & Fogle, 2008; Schwartz and Verschik, 2013; Tannenbaum, 2012; Zhang and Tsung, 2019).

Within the field of Family Language Policy (FLP), the family is at the central position for preserving languages. The family is regarded as a community of practice that has "its own norms for language use" (Lanza, 2007, p.47) such as its "own ways of speaking, acting, and believing" (Schwartz and Verschik, 2013, p.1). FLP is thus essential to the preservation of minority languages. As the basic unit of any society, the family is the space for the development of a positive or negative language ideology in addition to an active or passive method of acquiring or learning a language. According to King and Fogle (2013), the emphasis of FLP is on the balance in the use of languages within the family. To this end, FLP facilitates bi/multilingual homes. In other words, family language policies are essential tools especially in bi/multilingual homes to maintain their more than one language in equilibrium or reasonable proportion. Spolsky (2004) examines three areas in which a family language policy can be examined: (i) language ideology (goals, plans, intentions, and beliefs concerning language development), (ii) language practices (intra-family language communication), and (iii) language management (ways of regulating

linguistic development). The interaction in FLP is primarily between the parent(s) and the child(ren). The role of parents is key for consistency because they are facilitators of the family language policy and often determine the language use pattern in the family domain (Wang, 2017).

Family language policies can be implicit or explicit. Implicit language maintenance strategies include actions like repeating what the child said in a majority language in their mother tongue and employing their mother tongue for the rest of the conversation; however, there are no specific instructions to the children on which language to speak and when. Explicit family language policies are more prescriptive for children, especially when they are young. Actions could include parents telling children to speak only their mother tongue while at home. Adegbite (2025) describes the result of explicit language practices by children and their parents in his study of 51 children aged 7-13 in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. After the three-month study, these children were more positively disposed to and used Yoruba language more at home, in school, and in other places. This is similar to Schwartz's (2008) finding where the positive attitude of surveyed Russian-Hebrew parents' children and their explicit family language policy practices resulted in more competent knowledge of the vocabulary of their mother tongue. Research has suggested various methodological tools that can enhance Yoruba language acquisition within family language policies. These include folk songs (Ayoola, 2023), folklores (Ajayi, 2019), personal names (Akinyemi, 2005), greetings (Schleicher, 1997), proverbs (Adegbite, 2020; 2022; 2025), and outdoor games (Adegbite and Elton, 2019).

FLPs can also be defined based on the ideological orientation of parents which can be observed in their beliefs, attitudes, and practices for the development and sustenance of their children's L1 and L2. Adegbite (2025) in his Family Reversing Language Shift Framework categorizes FLP types, based on Altman's (2014) categorization, as (a) Strict Pro-Minority (SPM), (b) Mild Pro-Minority (MPM), and (c) Pro-Bilingual (PB) with "minority" to mean the language which is dominated or under threat of being dominated by the more accepted or government sanctioned language, irrespective of the number of speakers. Table 1 below shows two of the 3 types of FLPs listed above and their characteristics, modified to specifically refer to Yoruba as the minority language and English as the majority language:

| Yoruba Language Acquisition Frameworks | Characteristics |
|---|---|
| Strict Pro-Minority | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parent(s) believe that Yoruba language should be preserved. - Parent(s) believe only Yoruba language should be spoken at home. - Parent(s) forbid the use of English language at home, but make very few exceptions (e.g., expressions only accessible in English language). - Parent(s) employ some ‘reversing language shift’ techniques such as rebukes for using English language and rewards for increased competence in Yoruba language. - Parent(s) encourage and facilitate participation of children in pro-Yoruba language contexts outside the home. |
| Mild Pro-Minority | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parent(s) think that Yoruba language should be preserved. - Parent(s) do not forbid the child’s use of English language at home. - If English language is encouraged, it is instrumental, for example, teaching literacy to prepare for school. - Parent(s) speak Yoruba language but may codeswitch themselves. - Parent(s) encourage participation of children in Yoruba language contexts outside the home. |

Table 1: strict and mild pro-Yoruba language acquisition frameworks and their characteristics

Adegbite (2025) employed proverbs as a methodological tool in the family language policy of children and their parents in the study of 51 participant conducted in Ile-Ife, Nigeria (The Ile-Ife Study). This was done within the Family Reversing Language Shift framework which advocates the SPM family language policy type (see table 1 above) as essential to achieving sustainable results in language rejuvenation and/maintenance. By the end of the study, most parents of children in the experimental group had employed either the SPM or the MPM policies which led to a significant increase in the motivation and proficiency of their children. The Ile-Ife Study is described below.

The Ile-Ife Study

The Ile-Ife study (see Adegbite, 2025a; 2025b) was an experimental study conducted in Ile-Ife southwest Nigeria, comprised of 51 participants, thirty in the experimental group and 21 in the control group. They were aged 7-13 and in classes that ranged from Primary four to Junior Secondary School (JSS) three. Indirect participants in the study were parents of the children who were participants in the study. These parents were recruited to facilitate the teaching of their children Yoruba proverbs using a Yoruba proverbs book, *Awíyè Òwè Yòrùbá* (Adegbite, 2022), which the current author published for the research. Other facilitators besides the research team and parents were neighbors, friends, and the schoolteachers of the children.

Participants in the experimental group were taught Yoruba proverbs by the research team for 12 weeks (one to two hours, twice a week). *Awíyè Òwè Yòrùbá* was well designed for home study so that parents reported no problem using it to facilitate Yoruba proverbs lessons at home. Children reported asking questions or clarifying concept/issues from their parents, friends, neighbors, and Yoruba teachers in school. Participants in the control group did not receive any intervention from the research team. However, they were given all materials used by the experimental group including the proverbs textbook at the end of the study. Evaluation of both experimental and control groups were conducted simultaneously before and after the 12-week Yoruba proverbs instruction and facilitation sessions. For a credible result at the end of the study, results of the study were based off of data from (a) a study-tailored questionnaire with sections that elicited demographic information, use of Yoruba language, knowledge of Yoruba proverbs, and attitude to Yoruba language and culture, (b) pre- and post-study listening, speaking, reading, and writing tests, (c) attendance and participation in study sessions, (d) completion of assignments from the resource textbook, and (e) ethnographic notes that included conversation with children, parents, teachers, and family members.

Findings of the study justified the previous studies (see Agbaje, 2002; Banjo, 1979; Avoseh, 2012) that the brevity, wisdom, and stored experience in Yoruba proverbs can facilitate the acquisition and learning of Yoruba language and culture. At the end of the research, children in the experimental group were more competent in Yoruba language than children in the control group. Also, their knowledge of Yoruba culture had significantly increased compared to that of the children in the control group. They were able to use Yoruba proverbs more, produce new proverbs, and were more knowledgeable in general history, norms, and ideology of the Yoruba. Furthermore, the children in the experimental group had an increased motivation to continue to acquire and learn the Yoruba language and culture, and that motivation had a direct effect on the motivation of their parents who began to employ a family language policy that prioritized Yoruba in their homes.

The Ile-Ife study was a response to several calls in the literature to decolonize and diversify African education system (Megbowon & Uwah, 2021). Scholars on African languages and cultures including Yoruba have emphasized the need to employ the home as an important foundation for language and culture acquisition in addition to employing indigenous knowledge systems such as stories, proverbs, and metaphors (Adegbite 2022;

2024; Avoseh, 2012; Baloyi & Ramose, 2016; Banga et al., 2015; Kaya, 2013; Megbowon & Uwah, 2021). Other suggested indigenous language systems specific to Yoruba but also applicable to other indigenous languages are games (Adegbite and Elton, 2019; Ibitoye and Olaifa, 2018), folk songs and folklore (Ajayi, 2019; Ayoola, 2023), Yoruba personal names (Akinyemi, 2005), and greetings (Schleicher, 1997). The Ile-Ife study has proven that when indigenous knowledge systems are employed within an applicable framework, Yoruba language and culture can be competently acquired even in a diasporic or heritage context.

Using Proverbs for Yoruba Heritage Language and Culture Acquisition

In the Ile-Ife study, the use of proverbs within a structured framework improved the competence and motivation of children in the experimental group in spite of all the factors responsible for the endangerment of Yoruba language and culture in Nigeria (see Adegbite, 2003; Afolabi and Igboanusi, 2023; Balogun, 2013; Crystal, 2000; Fabunmi and Salawu, 2005). These factors similarly cause the loss of Yoruba language and culture in diasporic and heritage contexts. For this reason, the framework applied in the Ile-Ife study would prove highly efficient in the revitalization and maintenance of Yoruba language for heritage learners.

Most parents of heritage learners employ language acquisition frameworks that are pro-bilingual or pro-majority language with emphasis on the major language of their context such as the English language for most Yoruba parents in the United States. A strict pro-minority language framework is suggested for parents and their heritage learners in order to achieve sustainable competence in Yoruba language revitalization and maintenance. Adegbite (2025) found that strict and mild pro-Yoruba language and culture acquisition frameworks (see Table 1 above), especially the strict version, when employed by parents in the acquisition process of their children, led to a significant increase in the motivation and proficiency of children in Yoruba language and culture.

Table 1 above can be contrasted with Table 2 below which exemplifies a pro-bilingual Yoruba language acquisition framework which Adegbite (2025) affirms does not result in desired competency in Yoruba language and culture:

| Yoruba Language Acquisition Framework | Characteristics |
|--|---|
| Pro-Bilingual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parent(s) think English-Yoruba bilingualism should be developed. - Parents invest in both languages and expose children to both environments with English language maintaining dominance. - Parent(s) may codeswitch at home. - Parent(s) encourage only pro-English and pro-bilingual language contexts outside the home. |

Table 2: Pro-bilingual language acquisition framework and its characteristics

To facilitate competence in Yoruba language and culture in a heritage learning context, determining factors may be human or non-human. Human factors are the actors, who may be primary or secondary, whose actions (or inactions) influence the language choice or ideology of a heritage learner. These include parents, relatives, friends, neighbors, community members, school administrators, and the government. From the above, Adegbite (2025) notes that parents and their children are the primary stakeholders, and their ideology and set action steps matter most. Non-human factors include home linguistic context, ideology, location, language resources, and community linguistic terrain. The interconnection of factors in family language acquisition frameworks make it important to advocate for a strict pro-Yoruba version. To use proverbs to teach heritage Yoruba children learning the language, the strict pro-Yoruba family language framework must be observed. In addition, parents should take the actions below as reported by parents in the Ile-Ife study who witnessed a rapid positive shift in the Yoruba language and culture competence of their children by the end of the study:

1. Outline at least an hour each day for children to learn new proverbs or discuss proverbs that have been prior learnt.
2. Increase the use of proverbs in communicating with children. Be ready to provide the meaning of such proverbs, and challenge children to communicate their thoughts with proverbs as well by framing situations like those of proverbs they have prior learnt.
3. After children become familiar with some proverbs, have them discuss the local and global implications of the messages within the proverb.
4. Children should keep a vocabulary journal. Parents should do occasional tests on their knowledge of words in this journal with treats or gifts as a reward for excellence.
5. Similarly, children should have a journal for the collection of proverbs. Parents should supervise the correct classification of these proverbs into correct functional categories.

6. Parents should provide historical and contextual information of proverbs.
7. Having games and activities that exemplify the use of proverbs will also aid the interest of the children. Role play activities would fit this description. For example, the elderly can use a proverb like *B'òmòdè bá ní aṣò bí àgbà, kò lè ní àkísà bí àgbà* “Even if a child has more clothes than the elderly, they cannot have as much rags” while children in the roleplay use proverbs like *Qmòdè gbòn, àgbà gbòn la fi dá Ilẹ̀ Ifẹ̀* “The joint wisdom of children and adults was employed in the creation of the land of Ife”.
8. Proverbs should be extended to practical fields such as Physics: *lálá tó r'òkè, ilẹ̀ ló ní bọ̀* “whatever goes up must come down”; Agriculture: *ògèdẹ̀ ló wo kòkò yè, kó tó di igi burúkú* “The banana tree saw the cocoa tree to maturity before it became a bad tree”; and Technology: *ogún odún tí rélúwèè ti ní rìn, iwájú ni yó ma bá ilẹ̀* “No matter the number of years the train keeps moving, the ground shall continuously be before it”

Conclusion

The current study employs a review of literature and the Ile-Ife study to affirm the importance and great potentials embedded in using Yoruba proverbs to teach Yoruba language and culture to heritage Yoruba children. The study also suggests steps in facilitating the language acquisition process in English-majority language contexts such as the United States of America. However, if optimal results must be achieved, the suggested steps in teaching Yoruba language and culture to heritage learners must be situated within a strict pro-Yoruba family language framework. The method and steps suggested in this study mirror the framework employed in the Ile-Ife study which resulted in increased competence and motivation for children-participants and increased motivation to facilitate Yoruba language acquisition for their parents. The current study is a theoretical foundation upon which other scholars can build experimental studies that prove or disprove the exemplified framework as workable in diasporic contexts. An arising question is how the framework and steps exemplified in this research can be executed if parents of heritage learners are not proficient in Yoruba proverbs or the language itself. This is a limitation of the current study that calls for further research.

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Navigating Unshared Sounds: Challenges and Strategies in English Speakers' Acquisition of Arabic Emphatic and Pharyngeal Phonemes

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Abstract

This study investigated English-speaking learners' acquisition of Arabic emphatic and pharyngeal phonemes that are absent from English. Through a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from undergraduate students through perception tasks, production recordings, and written assignments. The results showed significant challenges with accurately producing and perceiving Arabic phonemes, which were frequently replaced with similar English sounds. Integrating VoiceThread and recorded instructional videos, however, appeared to help learners acquire emphatic /d^ʕ/, the only target sound fully acquired in both perception and production data. Additionally, digital tools appeared to support perception more than production, as evidenced by the higher perception accuracy rate (61.55%) compared to production accuracy (40.17%). High accuracy in writing tasks demonstrated phonological awareness of these unshared sounds, correlating with perception task results. These findings underscore the role of auditory discrimination in phonological acquisition and suggest that integrating perceptual training with digital tools could enhance learners' articulation skills. As such, this study has pedagogical implications for language instructors.

Introduction

The demand for Arabic instruction has increased globally for diplomacy, business, and cultural studies. However, it has a very different sound system from English and other languages from Europe (Shehata, 2015), and it presents specific challenges for learners, including diglossia—where learners must navigate standard forms and regional dialects (Albantani & Madkur, 2019). Additionally, the Arabic sound system may be challenging for English speakers to acquire due to it having sounds at places of articulation that are less frequent in the world's languages, such as uvular, pharyngeal, and glottal (Al

Mahmoud, 2013). Modern Standard Arabic's consonant inventory is presented in Table 1, taken from Al Mahmoud (2013, p. 268).

Table 1: Consonant Inventory of Arabic

| | Stop | Affricate | Nasal | Fricative | Trill | Approximant |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-------------|
| Bilabial | b | | m | | | w |
| Labiodental | | | | f | | |
| Interdental | | | | θ | ð | |
| | | | | <u>ð</u> | | |
| Dental | t d | | | | | |
| | <u>t</u> <u>d</u> | | | | | |
| Alveolar | | | n | s z | r | l |
| | | | | <u>s</u> | | |
| Palatoalveolar | | dʒ | | <u>ʃ</u> | | |
| Palatal | | | | | | j |
| Velar | k | | | | | |
| Uvular | q | | | χ | ʁ | |
| Pharyngeal | | | | ħ | ʕ | |
| Glottal | ʔ | | | h | | |

Note. Underlining represents emphatic consonants. Phonemes to the left in pairs are voiceless.

Arabic has 28 consonants, including eight stops (/b, t, d, t^ɕ, d^ɕ, k, q, ʔ/), 13 fricatives (/f, θ, ð, ð^ɕ, s, s^ɕ, z, ʃ, χ, ʁ, ħ, ʕ, h/), the affricate /dʒ/, the nasals /m/ and /n/, the lateral /l/, the trill /r/, and the semi-vowels /w/ and /j/ (cf. Watson, 2002). Nine consonants in Arabic have no equivalents in English (i.e., /t^ɕ, d^ɕ, ð^ɕ, s^ɕ, χ, ʁ, q, ħ, ʕ). Of particular difficulty are the pharyngeal (/ħ, ʕ/) and pharyngealized (emphatic) consonants (/t^ɕ, s^ɕ, d^ɕ/), which have a primary articulation in the interior vocal tract and a secondary articulation in the pharynx.

This study sought to examine the acquisition of emphatic and pharyngeal sounds by English-speaking learners of Arabic, focusing on how these sounds are perceived, produced, and represented in writing. Understanding these patterns could inform targeted pedagogical strategies in Arabic language instruction.

Challenges in the Perception and Production of Arabic Consonants

Binasfour et al. (2017) found that L2 learners struggled with the secondary articulation involved in perceiving and producing the emphatic sounds /s^ɕ, ð^ɕ, d^ɕ, t^ɕ/. One reason for this difficulty could be the acoustic and auditory similarities to their plain counterparts /s, ð, d, t/, which exist in more languages (Abu-Rabia & Sammour, 2013). Furthermore, emphatic sounds affect adjacent vowels (Watson, 1999). Huthaily (2008) found that learners often replaced unfamiliar sounds that do not exist in their first language (L1) with English equivalents, aligning with Al Mahmoud's (2013) findings that emphatic sounds are often misidentified by L2 learners due to their lack of familiarity. Additionally, Al Mahmoud explored learner perceptions of Arabic contrasts; learners were able to discriminate contrastive sounds with English equivalents, such as /t/-/d/

and /θ/-/ð/, but found novel contrasts more difficult to detect, such as /χ/-/ʁ/, /ħ/-/h/, and /χ/-/ħ/. Huthaily (2008) recommended that an instructor should have linguistic training and provide students with explicit training. Shehata (2015) investigated English-speaking L2 learners' perceptions of the difficulty of Arabic consonants. Participants reported frequently misperceiving emphatic consonants, often failing to differentiate between plain and emphatic sounds in listening tasks. This aligned with Al Mahmoud (2013), who observed American learners struggle with perception and production tasks. Learners considered the voiceless pharyngeal /ħ/ the most challenging Arabic phoneme to distinguish. In the present study, English-speaking learners of Arabic were expected to face similar difficulties due to their L1 phonological system, which lacks emphatic sounds. This research investigated whether learners would exhibit the same substitution patterns when acquiring Arabic phonemes as seen in previous studies that found unshared phonemes presented unique difficulties for learners. Such studies highlight the need for a pedagogical focus on perception training, which this study explored through the use of digital tools.

The acquisition of emphatic and pharyngeal sounds has been shown to improve with proficiency level, with higher proficiency correlating with better production accuracy (Alwabari, 2013). Other researchers have similarly noted that exposure to L2 phonology and practice can improve learners' articulation of unfamiliar sounds (Major, 2008). These studies underscore the importance of phonetic training for instructors and learners alike, with a focus on increasing phonological awareness and exposure to Arabic phonology outside the classroom. By employing targeted teaching strategies, learners can gradually develop a more accurate understanding and articulation of Arabic consonant features.

Transfer in Second Language Acquisition

Transfer is a central concept in second language acquisition and is extensively explored through the contrastive analysis hypothesis introduced by Lado (1957). According to this hypothesis, elements from a learner's L1 will influence the acquisition of an L2. Saville-Troike and Barto (2017) noted that "transfer from L1 to L2 phonology occurs in both perception and production and is thus in both listening and speaking" (p. 151). Linguistic transfer can be positive or negative (Major, 2008). Positive transfer occurs when similar linguistic features exist in both languages (such as similar word order patterns), facilitating their acquisition. In contrast, negative transfer, or interference, happens when L1 and L2 structures differ significantly, causing errors or difficulties. Learners often interpret and produce L2 sounds through the lens of their L1 phonology, which can lead to mispronunciations or incorrect phonological processing. This type of transfer is particularly pronounced when learners encounter phonetic elements in the L2 that are absent from their L1.

Theoretical Perspectives on Transfer

The acquisition of Arabic phonetics by English speakers can be understood through several theoretical models. Bohn and Flege (1992) and Flege's (1995) speech learning model posits that sounds perceived as entirely different from L1 sounds are more likely to form new phonetic categories, while those perceived as similar are often assimilated into existing L1 categories. This framework helps explain why American learners struggle with Arabic sounds that are phonetically distinct from English. Conversely, sounds perceived as similar are often assimilated into existing L1 categories, increasing the likelihood of transfer errors. This notion of "equivalence classification" suggests that similar sounds can be particularly challenging due to their perceived sameness.

Another key framework, the markedness differential hypothesis, addresses how marked and unmarked features affect L2 acquisition (Eckman, 1977). This hypothesis predicts that in second language acquisition, unmarked phenomena are acquired before marked phenomena. Markedness refers to the relative rarity or complexity of phonetic features in human language. According to the hypothesis, unmarked, or more common, phonetic features are typically acquired more easily than marked ones. This helps explain why learners often struggle with phonological elements that are less common or more complex than those found in their native language.

Finally, the theory of interlanguage phonology posits "the existence of a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a [target language] norm" (Selinker, 1972, p. 214). This suggests that L2 learners develop an intermediate phonological system that differs from the L1 as well as the L2 but is influenced by both. This theory explains why learners may exhibit phonological patterns that are unique to their interlanguage, as they attempt to reconcile differences between L1 and L2 phonetic systems.

These theories were chosen for this study because they provide a comprehensive framework for understanding why English-speaking learners struggle with specific Arabic phonemes. The speech learning model (Flege, 1995) explains how learners categorize new sounds, the markedness differential hypothesis (Eckman, 1977) predicts which phonemes will be more challenging, and interlanguage phonology (Selinker, 1972) explains the development of unique phonological patterns among learners. These theories align with the research questions (see Section 1.6) by explaining the perceptual and production difficulties learners face and the role of transfer in shaping these difficulties. For example, according to the speech learning model, learners are more likely to replace Arabic emphatic and pharyngeal sounds with English equivalents if they perceive them as similar rather than distinct (see Research Question 3). Regarding the markedness hypothesis, Arabic emphatic and pharyngeal consonants are considered more marked because they are less common across the world's languages and thus more difficult for learners to acquire, thereby helping address Research Question 1. Interlanguage phonology explains patterns of substitution and approximation when producing Arabic phonemes, helping address Research Question 2. By adopting these theories, the current study sought to explain why some Arabic phonemes were more difficult to acquire and how learners could try to approximate them.

Empirical Findings on Phonological Transfer

Research on phonological transfer has provided ample evidence of how an L1 influences L2 pronunciation. Major (2008) synthesized various studies on segmental transfer (consonants and vowels) and suprasegmental transfer (stress, intonation, and rhythm) indicating that similar sounds tend to be more difficult than dissimilar sounds for L2 learners to acquire. Lubua's (2023) study on Swahili-speaking learners of English demonstrated L1-induced segmental and prosodic errors. The study examined interference in three phonological dimensions—sound system, syllabic structure, and stress pattern—and found that these elements influenced the learners' pronunciation of English. This highlights how L1 interference can manifest across multiple phonological levels, further complicating L2 acquisition. The study aligned with earlier findings that learners often struggle to produce and perceive L2 phonetic contrasts that do not exist in their L1 (Al Mahmoud, 2013). Segmental transfer is observed when specific L1 sounds affect L2 pronunciation. For example, English speakers learning Arabic may replace certain Arabic sounds with their closest English equivalents, such as using /t/ for Arabic /t^h/, which does not exist in English. This sound substitution, as outlined by Weinreich (1953), is a common form of transfer.

Factors Influencing Phonological Transfer

It is important to understand the various factors that influence phonological transfer in order to improve L2 language instruction. By identifying which phonemes are difficult, instructors can develop strategies for teaching Arabic in terms of both perception and production, such as explicit articulatory training and digital perceptual tools, thereby enhancing phonetic accuracy. This study's findings thus have direct implications for language pedagogy, specifically in designing instructional approaches that could help English speakers overcome challenges with Arabic emphatic and pharyngeal sounds.

Several factors influence the extent and nature of phonological transfer in L2 learners, including age, proficiency level, phonetic similarity, and frequency of L2 exposure. Major (2008) asserted that “all types of transfer in L2 phonology are correlated with age and experience” (p. 71). The critical period hypothesis posits that learners who begin acquiring an L2 after puberty, around age 12, are less likely to achieve native-like pronunciation, as their ability to develop new phonetic categories diminishes over time (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). It claims that a person must be exposed to a language (L1 or L2) during a specific period of time (before 13 years of age) in order to acquire it natively. In support of this, Major (2008) noted that older learners often retain traces of their L1 accent, whereas younger learners are more likely to acquire the phonological features of the L2 more accurately. Phonetic similarity between L1 and L2 sounds also significantly impacts transfer. Research has shown that learners are more likely to transfer sounds perceived as similar, as these are often assimilated into L1 categories (Bohn & Flege, 1992). Conversely, dissimilar sounds may lead to the creation of new categories,

which can help learners more accurately distinguish L2 phonetic features.

Proficiency level and exposure to L2 are also important (Major, 2008). Learners with higher levels of proficiency and greater exposure to the L2 typically exhibit less transfer over time. The more frequently they use the L2 and reduce their reliance on the L1, the more likely they are to develop accurate phonetic categories that minimize transfer effects (Alwabari, 2013; Major, 2008).

Phonological awareness—the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds within spoken words—is a foundational component of writing, which can be demonstrated by putting together a number of sounds to form a word (Wagner & Torgesen, 1987). Spelling, defined as “the encoding of linguistic forms into written forms” (Perfetti, 1997, p. 21), relies on both phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge (Sipra, 2013). According to Treiman (2013), phonological knowledge is one of the strongest predictors of spelling success, as it enables learners to decode and encode sounds into written symbols effectively.

Phonological awareness is essential not only for pronunciation but also for spelling accuracy (Treiman, 2013). Learners who internalize phonemic distinctions in their L2 tend to achieve better spelling outcomes. Phonological processing, defined as “the use of phonological information (i.e., the sounds of one’s language) in processing written and oral language” (Wagner & Torgesen, 1987, p. 192), plays a critical role in this development. By segmenting sounds, blending them to form words, and recognizing phonetic patterns, learners enhance their reading and writing skills. Phonological recoding—whereby learners link sounds to written symbols—serves as a fundamental process during early reading acquisition. This skill helps learners establish connections between phonetic patterns and lexical items, which ultimately supports their mastery of the language’s sound structure and contributes to accurate spelling skills.

This paper examined how American L2 learners of Arabic acquired “unshared sounds,” i.e., Arabic phonemes that lack equivalents in English. By analyzing these sounds using naturally produced data, the study sought to understand the relationship between perception and production. Additionally, it explored how production and perception were correlated with students’ written representation of these sounds. By investigating the extent to which learners could accurately produce and perceive these unfamiliar sounds—and how these skills manifested in writing—this study sheds light on the broader challenges involved in L2 phonological acquisition. Insights from this study are particularly relevant for language instructors seeking to address the unique phonological challenges of Arabic, thereby improving student outcomes in pronunciation and comprehension.

Research Questions

To meet the objectives outlined above, this study sought to answer the following questions related to English speakers’ acquisition of Arabic emphatic and pharyngeal sounds:

1. What are the acquired sounds among English speakers learning Arabic in terms of perception and production?
2. Is learner interlanguage characterized by contrasts between emphatic and plain sounds?
3. To what extent do learners replace unacquired Arabic sounds with similar English sounds?
4. Are the same strategies used in the production and perception of these sounds?
5. Is writing affected by Arabic sounds that are not fully acquired?

Methodology

The sample consisted of 14 undergraduate students at the University of Kansas. All were native English speakers enrolled in an elementary-level Arabic course, ensuring they had a similar linguistic background. The sample size was based on the availability of students enrolled in the instructor's class. While the sample was relatively small, it aligned with prior studies on phonological acquisition that have used controlled participant groups to analyze sound perception and production (e.g., Al Mahmoud, 2013; Shehata, 2015).

Data were collected from assignments posted on Canvas at the University of Kansas, including listening assignments, recordings, and writing assignments. The researcher got approval from the IRB to use data for research. Participants did not know they were tested for a study. They received their full points by recording their production regardless of pronunciation errors. The importance of naturally produced data has been long documented in linguistics research (Labov, 1966; Tannen, 1989). Production data were obtained from VoiceThread recordings of 10 students, focusing on the target sounds. Perception data were gathered from a multiple-choice auditory task completed by the same 10 students after they listened to Arabic recordings on Canvas. This task was designed to determine which phonemes the students could distinguish and to enhance their perception skills. Additionally, I collected writing samples, which I transcribed and entered into an Excel spreadsheet. These samples were taken from the same 10 participants from the perception/production tasks (none of whom were heritage speakers of Arabic) and an additional four students who were heritage speakers. The heritage speakers were excluded from the perception and production tasks to control for prior exposure.

The class instructor, a trained linguist, explicitly taught the unshared sounds, comparing them to their English equivalents and providing articulatory training for sounds not present in English. In addition to in-class articulatory training, the course incorporated digital technology to support the acquisition of these sounds. Students were provided with weekly recorded videos where they could watch the instructor demonstrate the pronunciation of the target sounds. Students practiced listening and recording their production on Canvas, which reinforced their learning of the unshared sounds. The use of software such as VoiceThread allowed students to practice sound discrimination and

articulation independently, refining their production skills. A sound was considered to be acquired if it was produced accurately 80% of the time. A paired-samples *t*-test was used to compare perception and production scores, with significance determined at $p < 0.05$. The correlation between perception and production accuracy was calculated.

Results

Production

Based on the acquisition criterion of 80%, all participants acquired the emphatic stop /d^s/ and the uvular fricative /χ/. However, only 30% acquired the emphatic /t^s/, and none acquired /s^s/, /ð^s/, or /ħ/ (see Figure 1).

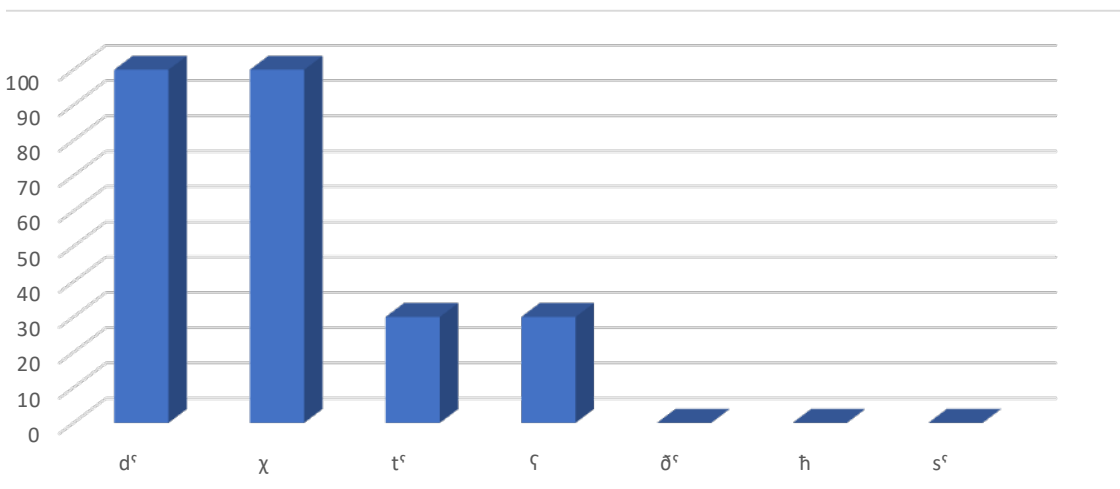


Figure 1: Acquisition of Unshared Sounds

The accuracy rate aligned with the acquisition rate. For example, the accuracy rates for /χ/ and /d^s/ were high, reflecting that both sounds were acquired by the participants. While 30% of participants acquired the emphatic /t^s/, its accuracy rate was 43.33%. In contrast, the accuracy rate was low for /ʕ/, at just 9.52%. Accuracy rates were also significantly lower for sounds not acquired by any participants, specifically /ð^s/, /ħ/, and /s^s/ (see Figure 2).

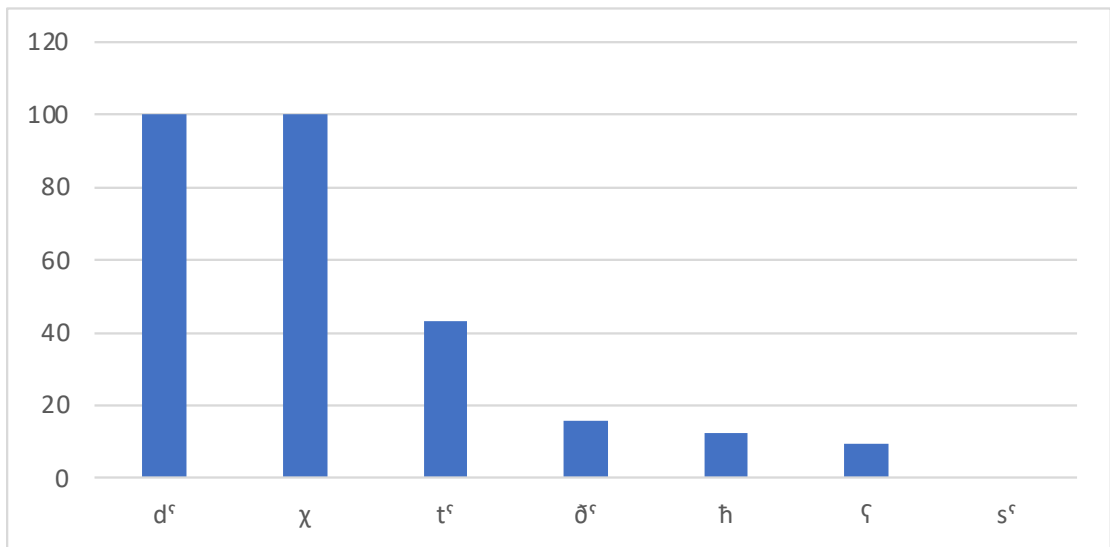


Figure 2: Accuracy in the Production Task

Strategies Adopted for the Production of the Unshared Sounds

Strategy Adopted for the Pharyngeal /ħ/

The results indicated that all participants acquired /χ/ but none acquired /ħ/. Instead, participants replaced /ħ/ with /χ/ (50%) or /h/ (50%), with no significant difference between the two options:

| | | |
|--------|---------------|------------|
| ħajati | hajati/χajati | “my thing” |
| ħut | hut/χut | “fish” |

Strategy Adopted for the Pharyngeal /ʕ/

Thirty students successfully acquired /ʕ/, while the remaining 70% replaced /ʕ/ with the English vowel [a]:

| | |
|--------|-------|
| ʕabbat | aabat |
|--------|-------|

Strategy Adopted for Emphatic Sounds

No participant acquired the emphatic /ɗʰ/. The accuracy rate for this sound was 15.87%; 82.53% of non-target-like productions replaced /ɗʰ/ with /d/, while 17.46% replaced it with /ð/:

| | | |
|------|-----|--------|
| ħaɗʰ | had | “luck” |
| ħaɗʰ | hað | “luck” |

Similarly, no participant acquired the emphatic /s^ʕ/; everyone replaced /s^ʕ/ with its plain counterpart /s/:

| | | |
|----------------------|--------|-----------|
| s ^ʕ abur | sabur | “patient” |
| s ^ʕ unduq | sunduq | “box” |

The emphatic /t^ʕ/ was acquired by 30% of participants, with an accuracy rate of 43.33%. Participants largely replaced /t^ʕ/ with its plain counterpart /t/:

| | | |
|----------------------|-------|---------|
| t ^ʕ ajjib | tajib | “kind “ |
| lat ^ʕ if | latif | “kind “ |

Participants clearly distinguished between /d/ and /d^ʕ/, successfully acquiring the contrast between emphatic /d^ʕ/ and its plain counterpart. However, they did not acquire the contrasts between /s^ʕ/, /t^ʕ/, and /ð^ʕ/ on one hand and their respective plain counterparts on the other.

Perception Results

The perception results confirmed the acquisition of /d^ʕ/ and /χ/. Additionally, the results indicated that the emphatic sounds /t^ʕ/ and /ð^ʕ/ posed challenges for L2 students, with acquisition rates of only 28.57% and 14.28%, respectively. No participants acquired /s^ʕ/ or /ħ/. Overall, both emphatic and pharyngeal sounds proved challenging in terms of production and perception (see Figure 3).

The accuracy rate in the perception task was higher than in the production task (see Figure 4). For instance, the accuracy for /t^ʕ/ was 70%, compared to 47.22% for /ð^ʕ/, 47.61% for /s^ʕ/, and 36% for /ħ/. No participant acquired the pharyngeal /ħ/ in production, with an accuracy rate of 36%. Among non-target-like responses, 84% replaced /ħ/ with /h/, while 18.51% replaced it with /χ/. The accuracy was higher for emphatic /t^ʕ/, at 70%, with non-target-like responses substituting its plain counterpart /t/. For emphatic /s^ʕ/, the accuracy rate was 46.61%, with a common strategy of replacing /s^ʕ/ with plain /s/. The accuracy rate for emphatic /ð^ʕ/ was 47.22%, and 73% of the non-target-like forms replaced it with plain /ð/.

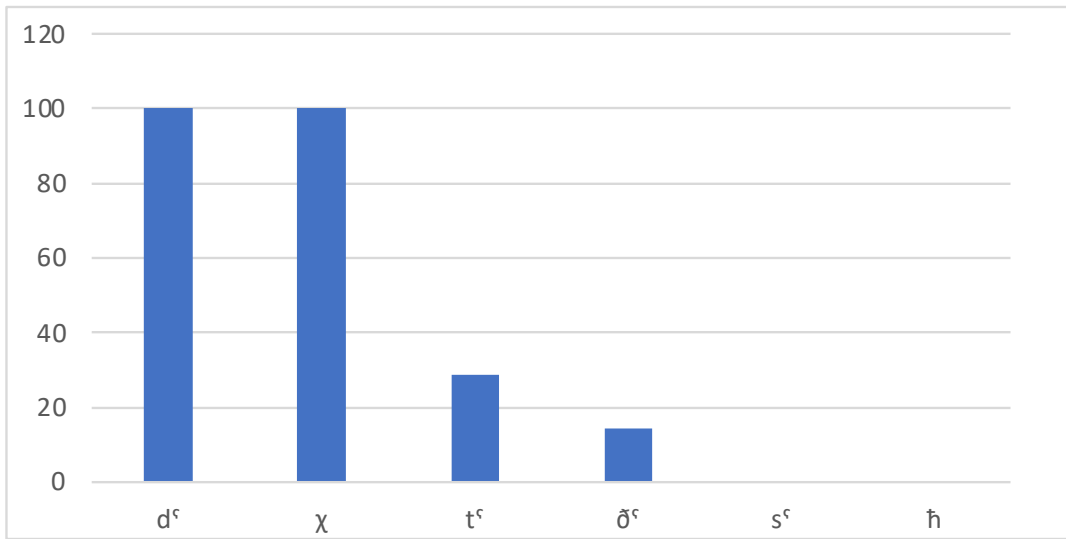


Figure 3: Acquisition Rates for Target Phonemes

The substitution patterns observed—such as replacing /h/ with /h/—demonstrated interference from English, as participants tended to use similar, more familiar sounds from their L1 phonology.

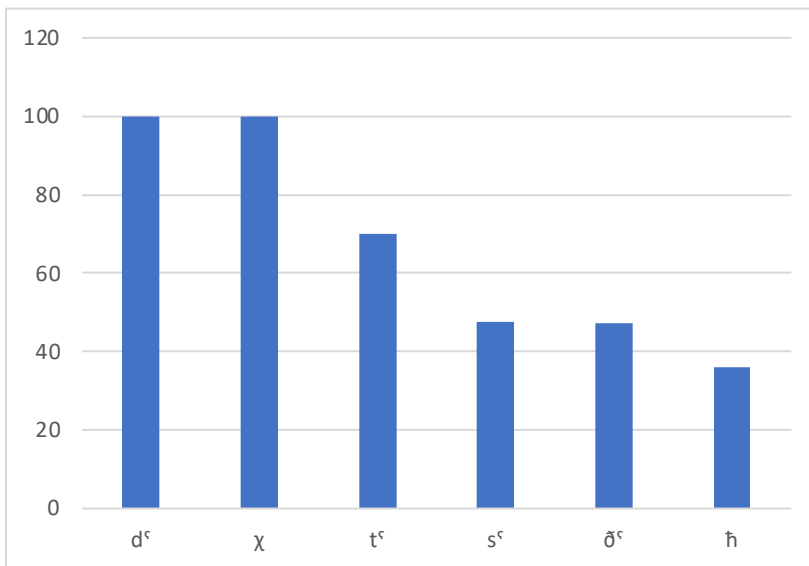


Figure 4: Accuracy Rates for Target Phonemes

Comparison of Production and Perception Results

A comparison of the production and perception results showed that perception accuracy was high (see Figure 5):

| | | |
|----------------------|--------|--------------|
| ħut | hut | “fish” |
| baħit | bayit | “researcher” |
| s ^ʕ abr | sabr | “patience “ |
| s ^ʕ unduq | sunduq | “box” |
| s ^ʕ abur | sabur | “patient “ |
| ð ^ʕ alam | ðalam | “to oppress” |
| t ^ʕ aʕir | tajr | “bird” |

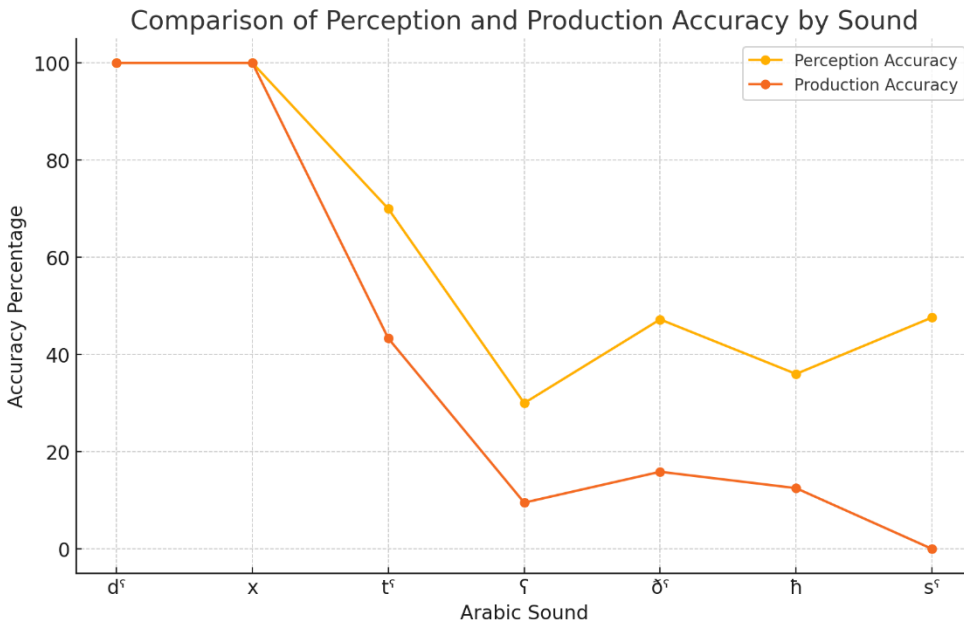


Figure 5: Comparison of Perception and Production Accuracy by Sound

The average perception accuracy rate across all target sounds was 61.55%, while the average production accuracy rate was 40.17%. To determine whether this difference was statistically significant, a paired-samples *t*-test was conducted, comparing perception and production accuracy scores across participants. The results showed a significant difference between perception and production accuracy, $t(9) = 3.16$, $p = 0.016$. This suggested that learners generally performed better at perceiving the target Arabic sounds than producing them, reinforcing the need for targeted production training alongside perceptual training.

Writing Results

Fourteen writing samples from elementary Arabic students were analyzed to study the target sounds. Table 2 shows the number of tokens isolated from these samples and transcribed into an Excel spreadsheet, including pharyngeal and emphatic sounds. Students achieved an impressive 100% accuracy rate in representing the target sounds

in their writing (see Figure 6), despite lower accuracy in the perception (61.55%) and production (40.17%) tasks. This highlights the critical role that phonological awareness plays in orthographic accuracy. These results are consistent with previous research suggesting that learners can be aware of phonemic distinctions even when they find it challenging to perceive or articulate them (e.g., Treiman, 2013). This finding supported the idea that writing facilitates a more deliberate cognitive process, allowing learners to draw on memorized spellings rather than relying solely on immediate auditory discrimination or articulatory skills.

Table 2: Number of Tokens from Sample

| Sounds | s ^ʕ | ʕ | ħ | d ^ʕ | t ^ʕ |
|--------|----------------|----|----|----------------|----------------|
| Tokens | 18 | 54 | 16 | 3 | 16 |

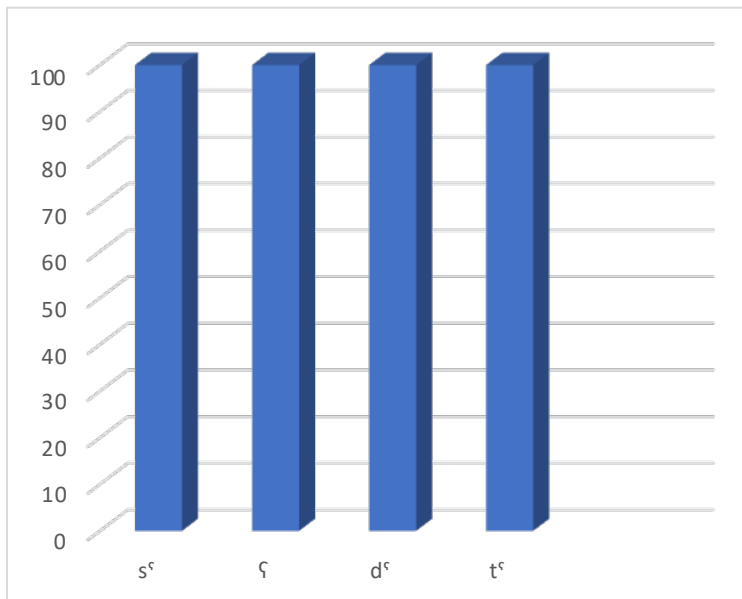


Figure 6: Accuracy Rate in Elementary Writing

Discussion

This research sheds light on the acquisition of Arabic sounds that are absent from the L1 phonology of English-speaking learners. Participants did not acquire all of the target unshared sounds. Notably, all participants acquired /d^ʕ/ and /χ/ in the perception and production tasks. However, only 30% acquired emphatic /t^ʕ/ and /ʕ/ in production tasks, while none acquired /s^ʕ/, /ð^ʕ/, or /ħ/. A small number of participants acquired /t^ʕ/ and /s^ʕ/ in perception tasks. Both perception and production tasks revealed that pharyngeal and emphatic sounds (/ħ, t^ʕ, s^ʕ, ð^ʕ/) presented major challenges for L2 learners, underscoring the difficulty of acquiring Arabic phonology.

These findings were partially consistent with Shehata (2015), who identified /d^s/ as a challenging sound for American students. In her study, most American university students agreed that the voiceless pharyngeal /ħ/ and the emphatic consonants /d^s, t^s, s^s, ð^s/ were the most difficult to acquire, with /ħ/ being particularly challenging. This aligned with the current study, as none of the participants acquired /ħ/, highlighting its difficulty at both a perceptual and production level. Participants' difficulties with the emphatic sounds likely arose from the acoustic and auditory similarities to their plain counterparts /s, ð, t/. This study supported previous findings (e.g., Binasfour et al., 2017; Shehata, 2015) that emphatic sounds are challenging for L2 learners, who face difficulties in their perception and production. In the present study, emphatic sounds were typically replaced with their plain counterparts, indicating that participants did not acquire the contrast between emphatic sounds and their plain counterparts, similar to Binasfour et al. (2017). Additionally, the results aligned with Al Mahmoud (2013), who found that emphatic and pharyngeal sounds were particularly challenging for L2 learners, especially pharyngeal sounds, as no participants acquired the pharyngeal /ħ/, usually replacing it with /h/. Therefore, this phonemic contrast was not attested in the data.

The substitution patterns found in this study reflected L1 interference, in keeping with the literature on various language pairs. For example, Lubua (2023) examined L1 interference in the acquisition of English phonology by Swahili-speaking learners. Participants exhibited prosodic and segmental errors induced by their L1, largely due to L1-L2 vowel differences, often replacing English vowels with their Swahili equivalents. Similarly, Japanese learners of English struggle to distinguish between /l/ and /ɾ/, as this contrast does not exist in Japanese phonology (Lambacher, 1999). When languages share phonological similarities, such as Hebrew and Arabic, this can facilitate acquisition. Uni (2024) concluded that L2 Arabic knowledge significantly facilitated Malaysian students' learning of Hebrew.

Relationship Between Production and Perception

The average perception accuracy rate across sounds (61.55%) was significantly higher than the average production accuracy rate (40.17%). A particularly interesting finding was the strong correlation (0.978) between perception and production accuracy, suggesting that participants who accurately perceived unshared sounds in Arabic also tended to produce them more accurately. This relationship was evident in the consistent challenges faced with pharyngeal and emphatic sounds, which were not acquired in either task. Similar strategies were adopted across perception and production tasks, with participants consistently replacing unfamiliar sounds with phonetically similar ones from their L1. This pattern supported the idea that learners apply similar strategies across tasks, highlighting the influence of their L1 on L2 acquisition (Flege, 1995; Lubua, 2023; Major, 2008).

The findings aligned with the speech learning model, which posits that when L2 sounds are difficult to distinguish from L1 sounds, learners often replace them with the

closest familiar L1 sounds, leading to inaccurate discrimination and production (Flege, 1995). This suggests that perception serves as a prerequisite for accurate production, reinforcing the idea that enhanced perceptual skills can improve production ability. Moreover, Best's (1995) perceptual assimilation model claims that learners initially categorize L2 sounds based on their closest L1 equivalents, which can hinder accurate production. As learners refine their perceptual discrimination over time, they may adjust their articulation to more accurately produce these new sounds. This aligns with the current findings, as students frequently replaced emphatic sounds with their plain counterparts, suggesting a perceptual foundation for their production patterns. The finding was also in line with the markedness hypotheses, as pharyngeal and emphatic sounds are more marked and were challenging in this study.

The finding that perception accuracy generally surpassed production accuracy aligned with several key theories in second language acquisition. According to Krashen's (1982) natural order hypothesis, simpler perceptual distinctions are acquired before more complex articulatory skills. This implies that learners first perceive new sounds before they can consistently produce them. Similarly, articulatory phonology (see Browman & Goldstein, 1992) underscores the close link between perception and production, positing that learners must first recognize the articulatory gestures associated with sounds to replicate them accurately. These theories collectively support the idea that learners typically acquire perceptual accuracy before they achieve production accuracy.

Practical Implications for Teaching

In line with previous research (e.g., Huthaily, 2008; Shehata, 2015), the findings of this study showed the importance of explicit articulatory training for Arabic teachers and learners. Prioritizing listening exercises before moving on to production practice may enhance students' ability to distinguish and accurately produce challenging sounds. Given the higher perception accuracy observed, a focus on refining auditory discrimination skills could be particularly beneficial. These findings suggest that Arabic instructors might benefit from emphasizing contrastive pronunciation exercises, focusing on the distinction between emphatic and plain consonants and contrasting the pharyngeal sounds with phonetically similar sounds early in the curriculum to address perceptual challenges.

Incorporating digital and online technology into training could further support learners' perception and production ability. Tools such as VoiceThread and other recording platforms allow for targeted practice and feedback, enabling students to solidify their phonetic categories and improve production accuracy. These platforms can provide learners with consistent exposure to challenging sounds, ultimately strengthening their phonological skills in Arabic. Traditional methods, in contrast, have been insufficient in meeting the diverse needs of modern learners, especially considering the lack of training in innovative teaching methods (Almelhes & Alsaïari, 2024; Soliman & Khalil, 2022). Such technology can be an asset by exposing students to a rich environment in terms of perception and production. The increasing demand for Arabic instruction

globally necessitates more effective pedagogical strategies that cater to learners' varied backgrounds and experiences (Berbeco, 2017).

The use of digital technology in language learning, particularly for phonological acquisition, has garnered attention for its potential to facilitate learning outside the classroom. Thomson (2011), for instance, examined how speech recognition software improved the pronunciation of English vowels among non-native speakers. The participants were trained to better discriminate 10 Canadian English vowels. Thomson claimed that “Computers can and should be more than tools that allow learners access to language knowledge and practice beyond the classroom” (p. 759). Furthermore, computer-assisted pronunciation training “should offer targeted teaching of language features in ways that traditional classrooms are unable to provide” (p. 759). Assisted pronunciation training might have facilitated the acquisition of two unshared sounds in the present study, as the instructor depended on VoiceThread for production and perception training. Liakin et al. (2017) found that mobile text-to-speech synthesizers enhanced the teaching of L2 pronunciation, and Levis (2007) stated that “For any teacher who thinks that pronunciation is essential, [computer-assisted pronunciation training] is immensely promising” (p. 196). He noted that computer-assisted pronunciation training offered opportunities to address diverse individual needs, promoting learner autonomy in pronunciation practice—a critical aspect of language acquisition. Levis emphasized that both technology and the instructor play crucial roles in enhancing pronunciation skills. The present study indicated that an emphasis on distinguishing and producing pharyngeal and emphatic sounds could be valuable, as these were consistently challenging across perception and production tasks. Individualized feedback focusing on these sounds may also help students overcome their reliance on L1 equivalents. Such targeted interventions could potentially bridge the gap between perception and production, ultimately improving learner proficiency.

The analysis of writing samples revealed a 100% accuracy rate for the target unshared sounds, indicating that students had developed a strong phonological awareness of these sounds. Previous research has highlighted phonological knowledge as a crucial predictor of spelling success (e.g., Treiman, 2013), further supporting the notion that participants in the present study had effectively internalized these unshared sounds in Arabic. Additionally, the higher accuracy in perception compared to production suggested that participants' phonological knowledge was well-established. This was evidenced by their ability to accurately spell these sounds, even if production was still challenging.

Overall, the findings revealed the complicated relationship between perception and production in the acquisition of Arabic sounds not found in English. The tendency to replace emphatic sounds with plain counterparts suggested learners struggled to establish clear phonemic distinctions between these categories. Future research could explore how different teaching methods, such as perceptual and articulatory training, affect the acquisition of these challenging sounds. Additionally, investigating the role of digital technology in phonological training could offer valuable insights into optimizing L2 Arabic instruction. There is also a need for more targeted research on L2 phonological

acquisition, particularly for languages like Arabic that feature unusual sound systems. Integrating computer-assisted pronunciation training into instructional frameworks, alongside an awareness of cross-linguistic influences, holds promise for overcoming L1-induced challenges in Arabic phonological acquisition. These findings underscore the importance of addressing both perceptual and articulatory aspects of L2 instruction, as this dual focus may enhance learners' ability to accurately produce sounds that are foreign to their native phonological framework.

Conclusion

This study explored the difficulties English-speaking learners of Arabic encountered when trying to acquire Arabic phonemes not present in English, specifically emphatic and pharyngeal sounds. Using a mixed-method approach involving production, perception, and writing tasks, the study highlights the difficulties English learners faced in acquiring these sounds and contrasting them with L1 sounds.

Emphatic and pharyngeal sounds posed a significant challenge for learners, showing the value of perceptual training to help learners distinguish emphatic sounds from their plain counterparts. The study also demonstrated the potential of tools such as VoiceThread to help learners improve their auditory and articulatory skills outside the classroom.

Based on the results, phonological awareness could be improved by explicit articulatory instruction and contrastive pronunciation exercises focusing on differences between emphatic and plain sounds. The high accuracy rates in writing tasks suggested that phonological awareness improved learning outcomes.

However, the study was limited by a small sample size, restricting the generalizability of the findings. Future research could include a larger, more diverse sample to provide a broader understanding of these acquisition challenges. Expanding the sample to include learners from different linguistic backgrounds, class levels, and proficiency levels could test whether the observed patterns would be observed in other groups. Additionally, a longitudinal approach tracking learners' progress over time would offer more profound insights into how phonological acquisition develops with increased exposure and training using technology.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into phoneme acquisition among English-speaking learners of Arabic and practical teaching implications. By integrating perceptual training, computer-assisted pronunciation training tools, and focused articulatory exercises, instructors can better support learners in overcoming the unique phonological challenges of Arabic, ultimately improving pronunciation and production for learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

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Language Imperialism and the Quest for National Identity: A Pedagogical Implications in ESL Setting

Moshood Zakariyah

Abstract

The interface between cultural orientation of non-native speakers of the English language, where it co-exists alongside indigenous languages and how this complex phenomenon impacts on teaching of the English language is the thrust of this paper. Resting on applied linguistic orientation, the paper examines how the English language displays imperialistic traits as a dominant language at the expense of the indigenous languages and the quest for non-native speakers of the English language to maintain their socio-cultural identity. Samples are drawn from lexical items that mean different things in both native and non-native contexts. Findings reveal that not all rules (grammatical and otherwise) of the English language in a second language settings are linguistic. Some of the rules, based on which notions such as correctness/incorrectness, appropriate/inappropriate, etc are imposed reflections of cultural practice, particularly of the native speakers of the language. The study concludes that cultural diversity of language users should be prioritised in determine what and how to teach the English language in second language setting to protect the cultural identity of the host communities.

Keywords: Linguistic imperialism, National identity, Teaching of English, English as a second language setting, Pedagogy

Background to the Study

Defining language is as difficult as defining life (Encyclopaedia of Language, p. 400). It is usually a daunting challenge which has remained the subject of linguistic enquiries to date. Consequently, there are avalanche of definitions of language but a few from the viewpoint of sociolinguistics are examined. Trager (1949) defines language as “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which the members of a society interact in terms of their total culture”. It is a complex system of communication that is shaped by social factors such as culture, context, and power dynamics. Language is not just a neutral medium for conveying information but is deeply rooted in the social context in which it is used. It is a means through which human socialization process takes place and a vehicle

of projecting the socio-cultural identity of its users. Language is also seen as a means of exercising power and control, with dominant groups often imposing their language on marginalized groups. Additionally, language can be used to resist oppression and assert identity.

Quoting Cook and Seidlhofer (1954), Adedimeji (2010, p.17) postulates that language is:

Man's all-in-all as a genetic inheritance, a mathematical system, a social fact, the expression of individual identity, the expression of cultural identity, the outcome of dialogic inheritance, a social semiotic, the intuitions of native speakers, the sum attested data, a collection of memorized chunks, a rule governed discrete combinatory system of electrical activation in a distributed network.

It is clear from the above definitions that there is a strong tie between language and society. This tie, which is often taken for granted, is multifaceted and dynamic in nature. The system and pattern of communication in multilingual societies such as Nigeria where the English language and several other indigenous languages co-exist deserve special research attention, particularly in relation to teaching and learning. This implies that the interface between the world view of the Nigerian people, mostly shaped by the provision of their indigenous linguistic choices, and the teaching and learning for which the English language is the medium of expression deserve a special place in language related research.

According to Whorf (1956), "Language shapes the way we think and determines what we can think about". It is an instrument of socialisation and a vehicle of cultural identity and values transmission. It is through language that values system of its users known, nurtured and protected. These values are passed down from one generation to another. However, construction of cultural values changes over time, particularly in multilingual societies. This is partly because the prevailing local language(s) and the foreign language (such as English, French, and Portuguese) do not project the same cultural reality and values.

It is worthy of note that both language and society influence each other. Hence, the study of how society influences language is called sociolinguistics, the study how language influences society is known as sociology of language. This study adopts a sociolinguistic perspective as aspect of sociology of language is not considered. Sociolinguistics studies how societal variables such as age, gender, status, and others, affect language. It is the branch of linguistics where attention is paid to how language reveals the identity of its users. It is a sub-field of applied linguistics devoted to the study of connection between language as determined by the cultural reality of its users. Attesting to this fact, Holmes (2008, p.365) posits that language users carry enormous cultural baggage along with them as they use language. This implies that language and culture are inseparable. Hence, language is often described as being culturally transmitted. This view is expressed in Wierzbicka (1991) and Zakariyah (2016).

Linguistic Imperialism

Linguistic imperialism refers to the process of promoting a dominant language at the expense of marginalized languages, often resulting in language shift, cultural erasure, and social inequality. It refers to instances where a code considered 'prestige' due to political, economic, social, and scientific influence dominates and controls the minority languages. This phenomenon is not limited to a particular language as there are many instances of such linguistic habit. Examples include Mandarin Chinese, English, French, Portuguese and other languages of global influence. Often, the dominant languages have numerical advantages over the dominated ones. For instance, Mandarin Chinese has the highest number of native users. English language has highest number of users in the world, comprising native users (inner circle), second language users (outer circle, and foreign language situation/setting (extended circle (Kachru 1985)). In addition, domineering languages are often associated with political influence as in the case of English over the territory colonized by Britain. The same thing could be said of French, Portuguese and Spanish. Furthermore, languages that dominate are economically viable than the dominated ones. The above reasons account for why some languages are considered more prestigious than others even though from the sociolinguistic even though from the sociolinguistic viewpoint, no language is superior to others.

The concept of linguistic imperialism is considered from two different dimensions in this paper, the macro-linguistic imperialism, and micro-linguistic imperialism. At the macro level, imperialism occurs when languages of global influence such as English, French and Chinese are imposed on users at the expense of indigenous languages. The micro level of linguistic imperialism obtains when a dominant language impacts negatively on the value system and norms of the host community. This pattern of dominance is initiated through changes in meanings of lexical components, a linguistic phenomenon also regarded as semantic shift and/ or semantic extension. This occurs when a domesticated version of an imposed language is threatened by certain changes in the 'prestige' version of the language. Such threats are non-linguistic as they reflect some aspects of the cultural norms of the users of the 'prestige' version. A good example of this is when expressions that conform with the indigenous cultural values are viewed as substandard, inappropriate, or better still; incorrect.

The Concept of National Identity

National identity refers to the sense of belonging, connection, and loyalty that individuals feel towards their nation, country, or state. It encompasses the shared values, beliefs, history, culture, language, and traditions that define a nation and its people. National identity is a complex and multifaceted concept that can be influenced by various factors such as history and heritage, language and literature, culture and customs, among others. National identity can shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and their place within the nation, influencing their sense of belonging, pride, and loyalty. It can also

impact how nations interact with each other and how they define their interests and priorities. National identity is not fixed and can evolve over time, adapting to different social, political, and cultural contexts.

Causes of Linguistic Imperialism

The following are some of the causes of linguistic imperialism.

1. Colonization: European powers imposed their languages on colonized territories, suppressing indigenous languages.
2. Globalization: English has become the global language of business, education, and science, marginalizing local languages.
3. Language policy: Governments promote dominant languages through education, media, and official language policies.
4. Economic power: Economic dominance leads to language dominance, as countries with economic power spread their languages.
5. Cultural hegemony: Dominant cultures promote their languages as superior, marginalizing local cultures.
6. Advancement in science and technology: Developed nations with robust education standard often have edge over less developed countries in science and technology. This advantage makes dominated languages to be subservient and marginalized

Features of Linguistic Imperialism

This phenomenon has been a hallmark of colonialism, globalization, and cultural hegemony. The features of language imperialism are multifaceted and far-reaching, affecting not only language but also culture, identity, and power dynamics. One of the primary features of language imperialism is the imposition of a dominant language as the language of power, prestige, and opportunity. This language becomes the medium of instruction in schools, the language of government and administration, and the language of business and commerce. As a result, speakers of marginalized languages are forced to adapt to the dominant language to access education, employment, and social mobility.

Another feature of language imperialism is the suppression of indigenous languages and cultures. The dominant language is often imposed at the expense of local languages, leading to language shift, language loss, and cultural erasure. This results in the marginalization of indigenous cultures, histories, and identities. It also perpetuates linguistic and cultural homogenization. The dominant language becomes the norm, and speakers of other languages are expected to conform to this norm. This leads to a loss of linguistic diversity, cultural diversity, and intellectual diversity.

Furthermore, language imperialism is often accompanied by cultural imperialism,

where the dominant culture is imposed over marginalized cultures. This results in the erasure of cultural identities, histories, and traditions. In addition, Language imperialism also perpetuates power dynamics, where speakers of the dominant language hold power and prestige over speakers of marginalized languages. This leads to social inequality, economic inequality, and political inequality.

Internationality of the English language and ESL Setting

English language is a second or foreign language in Nigeria as it is in many places where its users are non-native. The concepts of ESL/EFL are introduced to typify linguistic circumstances where people their code of communication before their contact with English language. In such circumstances, English is undoubtedly a foreign language to the locals but may be second or third language some individuals. For instance, people who acquired two or more indigenous languages before having contact with English cannot have English as their second language.

English originated from Indo-European language family. Most indigenous Nigerian languages belong to Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic (See Encyclopaedia of Language). Apart from the differences in their etymology, the languages differ in many respects in conformity with different ethnic identities which they project. As one of the languages with highest number of users across the globe (Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002), English has adapted to the prevailing social circumstances of its host communities. This is a case of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, South Africa, and Nigeria to mention but a few.

The conformist nature of the English language with the social reality of the Nigerian people aligns with Smith (1970) cited in Tan et al (2019)'s proposal of "English as an International Auxiliary Language (EIAL), defining an 'international language' as one which is used by people different nations to communicate with one another". He made several assumptions, one of which posits that non-native learners of English do not need to internalise the cultural norms of native speakers of English. The same sentiment is echoed by Tsuchiya (2016) cited in Alam (2022) acknowledging the diversity of speech and practices in different ethnic community in the world as a basis of determining how language is used.

Linguistic Imperialism: The Nigerian Example

The significance of the English language in Nigeria occupies a vintage position on any academic discourse regarding the subject matter. It has received commendable literary attention for making the socialization process in the country not only possible but simple to manage. One can only imagine what the chaotic linguistic and social situation in the country will be without English, judging by numerous ethnic nationalities and the high level of linguistic diversity of the Nigerian people. It is on this note that English language is considered as a treasured gem in the heart of Nigeria, a nation teeming with diverse ethnic groups and languages. It serves as a unifying force, bridging the communication gap among the country's vibrant cultures. English is the thread that weaves together the

tapestry of Nigerian society, fostering national unity and understanding.

As the official language, English language plays a vital role in government, education, law, and official ceremonies. It is the language of the legislature, the judiciary, and the executive, facilitating the smooth functioning of the government. In the educational sector, English is the medium of instruction, providing students with a window to the world, access to global knowledge, and opportunities. It is the language of business, commerce, and international trade in Nigeria, facilitating economic transactions and connections with the global economy. It is the language of the marketplace, the boardroom, and the financial sector, enabling Nigerians to participate in the global economic landscape. Beyond its practical applications, English language is a symbol of Nigerian 'national' identity, reflecting the country's history, culture, and aspirations. It is a reminder of the nation's colonial past, its struggles, and its triumphs. English is a language of opportunity, providing access to better education, jobs, and socio-economic advancement.

As evident in numerous functions of English mentioned above, the language is indeed a source of blessing to Nigerians in all walks of life. Because of its age-long presence and significance, its popularity in Nigeria and beyond has received some recognition which has given birth to a variety called Nigerian English. Nigerian English is a domesticated or nativized version of English language which some Nigerian socio-cultural and linguistic flavour or colouration. English language is a precious gift to Nigeria, fostering national unity, economic growth, education, global connectivity, and cultural exchange.

Its significance extends beyond communication to symbolize 'national' identity, social mobility, and opportunities for advancement. By embracing English as a treasured asset, Nigeria can unlock its full potential and take its rightful place on the global stage. However, despite the above mentioned numerous significant roles of English language in Nigeria, it is a case of 'not all that glitters is gold'. There are many angles through which the imposition of English as the official language in Nigeria has affected and still affecting the indigenous languages. The nature and implications of this imposition are examined.

Promotion of Gender Neutrality

In contemporary English, gender identity is being redefined in a way that people can be identified as they are pleased, often in flagrant disobedience of natural gender classification as encapsulated in all or nearly all indigenous cultures in Nigeria. That a male could be addressed as 'she/her' and vice versa is alien to Nigerian indigenous cultures. It is somewhat grammatically illogical to conceive that only a third person plural pronoun (they) should be used in places where he/him or she/her are supposed to be used. Consider the following examples:

- a. If **he or she** is coming to the concert, kindly inform me on time.
(inappropriate)
- b. If they are coming to the concert, kindly inform me on time. (appropriate)

That a person is entitled to be identified as wish or that a person chooses to conceal

his/her gender identity might be allowed in the West is not the contention. The point here is that there is nothing linguistic about the appropriateness or otherwise of the two sentences above. What determines their appropriateness or otherwise is not linguistic. While this practice is accepted and considered as standard in the Western world, its imposition on the generality of users of English in second language situations such as Nigeria amounts to flagrant disregard for cultural diversity of the Nigerian people. While this study does not challenge the validity of the acceptance among the native speakers of English, it is of the view that such linguistic imperialistic practice should be resisted in all ramifications. Such practice, if not checked, will lead to linguistic prescriptivism which does not have a place in the principles of modern linguistics.

Age as a Respect Marker

In most indigenous languages and cultures in Nigeria, age is an important social variable, and it plays special roles in meaning explication. In Africa generally, language use is gravely influenced by age of the users. Discussions between people of different age brackets in most languages and cultures in Nigeria are often laced with respect markers. This fact underscores the level of significance attached to age as a sociolinguistic variable. Examine the following examples:

- a. My **senior** brother who lives in Canada arrives tomorrow.
- b. My **older** brother who lives in Canada arrives tomorrow.

Grammatically, nothing is wrong with either of the above two sentences. The choice of use only depends on the cultural context of users, and since cultures differ from one place to another, there is bound to be standard variants of the same expression. Since language and thought are inseparable (see Yule, 1995, Coupland 2001), the semantic realisation of the above sentences cannot be the same because the lexical items that paradigmatically determined project different thought in the mind of language users. The word 'senior' culturally connotes sense of power/authority, while 'elder' implies mere difference of age. What this implies is that the meaning of the second sentence is subsumed in the first and there is no basis to label one appropriate and the other inappropriate under any guise of grammatical rules.

Negative Use of Inverted Comma

The pattern of using inverted comma with reference to certain words belonging to indigenous languages typified lowering or reducing the linguistic status of the languages. The use of certain indigenous lexis particularly in relation to diet/cuisine should be promoted to gain international recognition. Popular use of lexis by hundreds of millions of language users will automatically command international respect. The following are example of words highly popularised by their native users and eventually gained international respect as global values:

- a. Curry (Indian/Sri Lankan)
- b. Spaghetti (Italian)
- c. Pizza (Italian)
- d. Jollof (Senegal/Gambia)

It is amazing that none of the above cuisine related words are written with inverted comma in so called standard variety. They are accepted as appropriate despite their non-European etymologies. The same measure of success could still be achieved by other non-English lexis of many indigenous languages.

Family Ties

Kinship and family ties are projected differently from culture to another and the associated meaning to kinship related words do not project the same social reality. This implies that meaning explication is determined by choices made in terms of lexical items. Consider the following examples:

- a. Is Micheal your **half-brother**?
- b. Her **half-sister** has travelled abroad.
- c. They met their **stepmother** at the event.

The above examples do not project actual kinship reality that is not in line with the cultural practice of the Europeans. Half-brother and half-sister are alien, illogical, and contradicts the established cultural order. It should be borne in mind that kinship tie is strong generally in Africa, and in Nigeria in particular. The concept or reality of half-brotherhood is not known to most cultures in Nigeria. Therefore, this understanding of meaning realities must be learnt by or taught to any learners of an African indigenous language, specifically in Nigeria, so as not to directly impose or apply the English language semantics to it.

Pedagogical Implications of Linguistic Imperialism

Teaching English as a second language (ESL) has significant pedagogical implications that impacts the learning process and student outcomes. Effective ESL instruction requires a deep understanding of linguistic, cultural, and cognitive factors that influence language acquisition. One, to ensure clarity of concepts taught; the English language should be tailored in a way that conforms with native intelligence and world view. Examples provided should be culturally meaningful, understood and impactful in terms of values system of a speech community. This goes a long way in ensuring positive language attitude of learners and sustainability of their interest in learning.

Firstly, ESL teachers must recognize the diverse linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels of their students. This awareness enables teachers to tailor instruction to meet individual needs, fostering a supportive learning environment. Differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and feedback become essential strategies to promote language

development. Recognition of cultural diversity, respect of individual differences and the need to promote the concept of global citizenship which recognises the significance of all cultures should be made a bedrock for the teaching of English all second or foreign language situations. This implies that cultural sensitivity and awareness are crucial in ESL teaching. Teachers must acknowledge the cultural nuances and values that shape students' language use and behaviour. By incorporating culturally relevant materials and activities, teachers can build bridges between students' prior knowledge and new language skills. This further implies that derogatory remarks regarding certain cultural practices due to cultural diversity, as a matter of necessity, must be avoided. This is because Africans attach so much importance to their language and culture.

In addition, ESL instruction must address cognitive factors, such as learning styles, motivation, and prior knowledge. Teachers should utilize a range of instructional methods, including visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic approaches, to engage students and facilitate language acquisition. Instructional methods should vary in recognition of diverse nature of the learners and as a weapon to measure their level of understanding. Concerted efforts must be made to ensure that inadequacies, incompetence or inappropriateness on the part of learners should not be seen as a single determinant of intelligence level of learners. This is imperative as teachers often erroneously use competence in language as a basis of determining learners' level of intelligence. Research have proven otherwise.

Also, technology integration can enhance ESL instruction, providing access to authentic materials, interactive resources, and communication tools. This enables students to develop digital literacy and global connectivity. This provides a veritable platform for showcasing different cultural practice, ensuring easy access to information, foster unity across the world. It is also a strong basis to create wealth through tourism and recreation activities. Thus, it provides economic advantages for many African countries where the English language co-exists, albeit, as a dominant language. This could further impact positively on the communicative competence of the local people in the English language, as they stand the chance of coming in close contact with the native speakers through tourism.

Furthermore, assessment and evaluation in ESL contexts require careful consideration. Teachers must use a variety of assessment tools, including diagnostic, formative, and summative measures, to accurately gauge language proficiency and inform instruction. The basis for this approach is to be dynamic in teaching and be efficient in assessment to ensure accuracy. This is to ensure a correlation between language proficiency and cognitive development premised on the socio-cultural reality of the users.

Lastly, ongoing professional development and collaboration among ESL teachers are essential for staying current with best practices, sharing effective strategies, and supporting student success. Exposing students/learners to international standard while appreciating the local content should be encouraged. The concepts of local acceptability where expressions that are culturally meaningful and relevant are recognised, while the international intelligibility is equally promoted. This affords the users of English as a second language the opportunity to function efficiently in the above two linguistic instances. Thus,

teaching English as a second language demands a nuanced understanding of linguistic, cultural, cognitive, and technological factors. By acknowledging and addressing these pedagogical implications, teachers can create inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environments that foster language development and student achievement.

Other Implications of Linguistic Imperialism

Linguistic imperialism has far-reaching implications that affect not only language but also culture, identity, power dynamics, and social justice. The dominance of a single language over others leads to linguistic and cultural homogenization, suppressing the diversity of languages and cultures. One of the significant implications of linguistic imperialism is language shift and language loss. As the dominant language becomes the language of power and opportunity, speakers of marginalized languages are forced to abandon their languages and cultures to access education, employment, and social mobility. This results in language loss, cultural erasure, and the marginalization of indigenous cultures.

Linguistic imperialism also perpetuates cultural imperialism, where the dominant culture is imposed over marginalized cultures. This leads to cultural homogenization, erasing cultural identities, histories, and traditions. The dominant culture becomes the norm, and marginalized cultures are forced to conform to this norm. The implications of linguistic imperialism also extend to power dynamics. Speakers of the dominant language hold power and prestige over speakers of marginalized languages, perpetuating social inequality, economic inequality, and political inequality. This leads to a lack of representation, marginalization, and exclusion of speakers of marginalized languages from decision-making processes and resources.

Furthermore, linguistic imperialism has implications for social justice. Language is a fundamental human right, and the suppression of languages is a violation of this right. The dominance of a single language over others perpetuates linguistic and cultural homogenization, leading to social injustice and cultural erasure. In addition, linguistic imperialism has implications for education, employment, and economic development. The dominance of a single language in education perpetuates language shift and language loss, limiting access to education and employment opportunities for speakers of marginalized languages. This perpetuates economic inequality and limits economic development.

Finally, linguistic imperialism has implications for global communication and understanding. The dominance of a single language perpetuates linguistic and cultural homogenization, limiting global communication and understanding. This leads to a lack of understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures and languages, perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, linguistic imperialism has far-reaching implications that affect

language, culture, identity, power dynamics, social justice, education, employment, economic development, and global communication. This is particularly true of places or situations where English is either a second or foreign language. It is essential to recognize and challenge linguistic imperialism to promote linguistic diversity, cultural diversity, and social justice. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to sensitise all stakeholders in education sector to the need to develop and sustain a robust symbiotic relationship between English and Nigerian local languages. This is achievable when we leverage on the advantages of the multilingual and diverse ethnolinguistic nature of the country.

In order words, it is to awake the linguistic consciousness of language users not only to aspire to attain the competence of international standard but also to retain their indigenous socio-cultural and linguistic identity. This is important particularly in the era of erosion of indigenous cultural values dues to globalisation and widening economic and technological gap between the dominant and dominated cultures. Premised on the above submission, conscious and systemic efforts should be put in place through proper language policy to mitigate both the immediate and remote consequences of linguistic imperialism. In a more succinct way, the following recommendations are postulated.

The Nigerian people irrespective of class, gender, religion, and level of educational attainment should be sensitised on the need for socio-cultural and linguistic identity. People who have aversion for their indigenous language should be educated. Several advantages of speaking different languages such as economic, security and social relevance should be emphasised. Several international job opportunities where polyglots are needed are enough evidence to drive home this point. Taking some advantages of contrastive analytical approach to language study, language experts should be charged with the responsibility of producing instructional materials for students/learners of English in ESL setting, bearing in mind the multilingual and diverse ethnic composition of the Nigerian linguistic topography. All the above measure should be put in place to ensure habitable language ecology for the English language and Nigerian indigenous languages, particularly in this era of digital literacy and globalisation.

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Kannywood Films as Tools for Teaching Hausa Language and Culture

Nura Abubakar

Abstract

This paper explores the pedagogical practice of utilizing Kannywood films to teach Hausa language and culture to American college students. It argues that films, as dynamic educational resources, effectively animate cultural contexts and enhance intercultural competence among learners. With their diverse themes and complex characters, films vividly capture not only the general attributes of Hausa society but also its nuanced intricacies. By humanizing the Hausa-speaking world, this approach aims to deepen students' cultural awareness and linguistic proficiency. Nevertheless, films alone are insufficient as standalone instructional materials. Thus, this article discusses the educator's rationale behind course design and instructional methods, emphasizing how these films have reshaped students' perceptions. The instructional approach outlined involves, firstly, recognizing foundational cultural norms and their historical origins within Hausa society; secondly, establishing a coherent cultural framework and thematic context; and thirdly, using films strategically to illustrate contemporary social issues and behavioral patterns. The selected films referenced herein serve merely as representative examples, rather than exhaustive illustrations, of how cinematic resources can effectively humanize and enrich understanding of a diverse and multifaceted culture.

Introduction

In recent times, the Hausa language and culture have frequently been subjected to negative stereotypes, underscoring the need for educational interventions aimed at fostering a deeper and more nuanced understanding of this complex society. One effective educational approach involves the integration of films into language and cultural instruction. Films are dynamic teaching resources that not only illustrate broad cultural concepts but also reveal subtle intricacies and complexities inherent within a society. By presenting diverse, authentic narratives, films help challenge and counteract existing stereotypes, promoting intercultural competence among students.

As digital communication continues to facilitate global interaction, the United

States is experiencing unprecedented levels of multicultural exchange. However, this increased connectivity has not necessarily translated into greater harmony among diverse communities domestically or internationally. Given the heightened awareness of cultural diversity within the U.S. and ongoing tensions between American and Muslim communities, cultivating intercultural competence has emerged as a critical educational goal. According to Lopez-Littleton (2018), cultural competence involves an individual's ability to respect, appreciate, and effectively engage with people from different cultural backgrounds, addressing factors such as race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, religion, and more.

Enhancing intercultural competence through education can significantly contribute to reducing misunderstandings, particularly those fueling Islamophobia (Green, 2015). A comprehensive understanding and appreciation of Hausa culture could thus facilitate improved interactions and relationships, notably for U.S. scholars and students participating in study-abroad programs in northern Nigeria, where millions speak Hausa. Consequently, employing Hausa films as pedagogical tools can help students develop cultural empathy and prepare them to effectively navigate cross-cultural situations.

The Need to Teach Hausa Culture beyond Language Textbooks

Teaching Hausa language and culture at the college level in US universities takes place mainly through language departments. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) promotes the teaching of culture as one of the components of the five Cs: “communication, culture, connections, comparisons, communities.” (Standards for Foreign Language Learning, 2006). ACTFL views cultural understanding as an essential part of world language education.

However, it is challenging to teach the diverse and complex aspects of a culture solely through language textbooks, as they are constricted linguistically and lexically by the respective proficiency level. Due to the constraints of language levels, many Hausa language textbooks tend to generalize facts and highlight the most favorable characteristics. For example, the most widely used Hausa language textbook in the USA, *Mu Zanta Da Harshen Hausa* (2008), simplifies Hausa culture by focusing mainly on a host of elite and highly educated characters, who can be easily assimilated to life in the USA and command admiration from US learners. As Hausa language textbooks are generally conducive to a favorable presentation of Hausa men and women, they have little room for including the complexities of society, history, and politics that are detrimental to understanding the thinking and behavioral trends in the Hausa society. Developing intercultural competence, the learner needs to supplement language learning with other classes in politics sociology history and culture.

To teach the culture of the Hausa people in US institutions, it is imperative that teachers highlight not only similarities, but also differences. The practice of minimizing the differences between cultures does not promote real understanding of the Hausa world. Hofstede (2011), in his famous comprehensive study on cross-cultural psychology, warns

against such a practice. Despite the evidence that groups are different from each other, Hofstede believes “that deep inside all people are the same. In fact, as we are generally not aware of other countries’ cultures, we tend to minimize cultural differences. This leads to misunderstandings and misinterpretations between people from different countries” (Hofstede’s Academic website, n.d.). In teaching foreign language and cultures, it is customary to highlight the commonality of the human condition. However, this would not be enough to establish an understanding between two societies that have recently experienced tribal conflicts and security challenges. Aiming to promote tolerance, it is mandatory to, also, clarify differences and analyze their causes. As Hofstede put it, “Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy. Cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster” (Hofstede’s Academic Website, n.d.). Such a potential conflict can be best counteracted by proper education, which promotes the understanding of human beings in their diversity. Such objectives often serve as the mission of liberal art universities and colleges of Humanities. There is a wide variety of methods for teaching language and culture across curricula. This article, however, contends that teaching Hausa language and culture requires more than language classes and language textbooks. Offering a film component about a contemporary Hausa society is a useful way of showing the human complexity within the variables of Hausa societies.

Teaching Hausa Language and Culture through Film

Film serves as an invaluable tool in assisting educators to convey cultural contexts effectively. The recent security challenges in Northern Nigeria have significantly contributed to widespread misconceptions about the region, often causing it to be perceived as inherently dangerous, even within other parts of Nigeria. However, films have the unique capacity to humanize and contextualize complex global issues, with Northern Nigeria being no exception. As noted by Fawna (2023), empathetic characters in films deliver the emotional depth necessary to complement factual historical and political narratives. This emotional connection fosters empathy, providing learners with numerous opportunities to internalize and appreciate the cultural frameworks of societies different from their own.

In examining the pedagogical benefits of film as a teaching resource, Mallinger and Rossy (2003) emphasize that effectively teaching culture requires engagement with both rational and non-rational, as well as explicit and implicit elements. They further argue that films uniquely present not just the broad outlines of culture but also its inherent complexities, including the subtle ambiguities and paradoxes found within intercultural interactions (Mallinger & Rossy, 2003, p. 613). This viewpoint aligns with findings by Herron, Cole, Corrie, and Dubreil (1999), who suggest that films enhance language acquisition by providing authentic linguistic contexts and fostering critical cultural insights. Furthermore, Sherman (2003) supports this assertion by highlighting that film-based instruction significantly increases students’ motivation and cultural awareness, thus enriching the overall language learning experience. Incorporating such academic

insights underscores the potential of Kannywood films as robust tools for teaching Hausa language and culture, effectively challenging stereotypes and facilitating deeper intercultural understanding.

Objectives of Teaching Hausa Language and Culture as a Foreign or Second Language

The primary objectives of this course include providing students with an authentic representation of contemporary Hausa communities by exploring their values, cultural practices, social dynamics, aspirations, and the challenges faced by individuals within Hausa-speaking societies. Utilizing Kannywood films as instructional tools, the course facilitates immersive exposure to cultural narratives, enabling learners to critically engage with and reflect upon cultural content. According to Sherman (2003), films are particularly effective in language education because they expose students to real-life language use and cultural contexts, thereby significantly enhancing learners' intercultural competencies.

Additionally, classroom discussions based on these films stimulate critical thinking and deepen students' cultural awareness. Mallinger and Rossy (2003) note that "films effectively illustrate the ambiguities and paradoxes inherent in cultural interactions, providing rich opportunities for students to critically analyze and appreciate diverse cultural perspectives" (p. 613). Herron et al. (1999) also affirm that the visual and emotional engagement provided by films significantly bolsters students' understanding and retention of linguistic and cultural information.

Ultimately, this approach equips learners not only with linguistic proficiency but also with nuanced cultural literacy, enabling them to interact empathetically and knowledgeably with Hausa-speaking communities.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, classroom-based research approach to examine the effectiveness of Kannywood films as pedagogical tools for teaching Hausa language and culture to American college students. The methodology combines curriculum design, classroom observation, student feedback, and content analysis of selected films to assess how cinematic narratives enhance linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence. The following steps outline the research process:

Course Design and Instructional Framework

The study was implemented within an undergraduate Hausa language and culture course offered in a U.S. university setting. The course was structured over a 12-week semester, integrating both foundational readings on Hausa culture and weekly film viewings. A thematic framework was established to guide teaching, focusing on:

Language acquisition: Vocabulary, expressions, and sentence structures embedded in authentic conversational settings within films.

Cultural understanding: Social norms, traditions, gender roles, honor systems, and daily interactions as portrayed in Kannywood Hausa films.

Critical thinking: Addressing stereotypes, comparing cultural values, and engaging students in analytical discussions about the complexities of Hausa society.

Selection of Film Materials

Three Kannywood film series—Dadin Kowa, Labarina, and Kwana Casa'in—were chosen based on their popularity, cultural richness, and representation of diverse social issues such as gender dynamics, family structures, morality, religion, and modernization. The selection criteria included:

1. Use of authentic Hausa language and dialect variations.
2. Depiction of real-life cultural practices (greetings, cuisine, dressing styles, social interactions).
3. Representation of both urban and rural Hausa communities.
4. Potential to challenge stereotypes about Northern Nigeria and Islam.

Classroom Implementation

Students engaged with the films through a three-stage process:

1. Pre-viewing activities:
2. Background lectures introducing key cultural and historical context.
3. Discussion prompts to activate prior knowledge and guide observations (e.g., “What greeting styles are used?” “What meals are shown?” “How do gender roles appear in family and community life?”).

Film Viewing:

Weekly independent or in-class film sessions, where students watched assigned episodes or clips, taking notes on language usage and cultural elements.

Post-viewing Discussions and Activities:

Small-group discussions, instructor-led analysis, and class presentations comparing cultural observations to their own experiences.

Written reflections and short essays analyzing themes from the films using provided guiding questions.

Data Collection

To assess the impact of this teaching approach, data were collected from:

1. Student reflections and essays: These provided insights into how learners interpreted cultural elements and improved their linguistic skills.
2. Classroom discussions: Recorded observations of students' engagement, questions, and evolving perspectives.
3. Language assessments: Oral and written evaluations measuring the acquisition of Hausa vocabulary, phrases, and cultural etiquette introduced through films.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis was conducted to identify:

1. Recurring themes in students' reflections that indicated increased understanding of Hausa cultural values.
2. Language acquisition outcomes demonstrated through vocabulary usage, sentence formation, and culturally appropriate expressions.
3. Changes in perceptions of Hausa society, including reductions in stereotypes and improved empathy toward cultural differences.

Ethical Considerations

All student contributions were anonymized to maintain confidentiality. Participation in research-related data collection (beyond normal coursework) was voluntary, ensuring no negative impact on academic grading.

Rationale for This Methodology

This methodology was chosen to:

1. Provide experiential, context-rich exposure to Hausa culture beyond textbooks.
2. Enable authentic language learning through real-life dialogue and scenarios.
3. Promote critical intercultural competence, preparing students for real-world interactions with Hausa-speaking communities locally and abroad.

By combining structured academic learning with immersive film-based experiences, this approach seeks to demonstrate the pedagogical value of Kannywood films as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical, lived cultural understanding.

Teaching Procedure

To achieve such goals, the course assigns the students with a reading list, together with various episodes from different Hausa movies series, which vary in the extent of cultural and linguistic content in both traditional and contemporary Hausa communities.

The suggested films, include Dadin Kowa (Arewa24, 2017, 2019) Labarina (Saira 2020), and Kwana Casa'in (Arewa24, 2020) As an instructor, I divide the class into three and assigned one film each

Discussing the culture of each region, the instructor gives a power-point presentation that surveys the necessary background information which is most influential in forming the culture. The preliminary lecture includes geographical, ethnographical, historical, political, and theological data. Besides, students are assigned to watch a random Hausa movie on YouTube to have some idea of the region and culture of Hausa people.

The following questions are given prior to watching the movies:

1. What are the most visible dressing styles identified in the film?
2. Identify names and ingredients of at least one meal from the film
3. How does the Hausa people exchange pleasantries across class, gender, and age?

These discussion questions progressively allow for defining basic concepts, explaining ideas, applying information in new setting, drawing connection among ideas, justifying a stand, and, finally, creating original work such as an essay or a final presentation. At this juncture, as an instructor dividing the class into small groups and prompts them to discuss, analyze and evaluate the excerpt for five minutes. Each group will then elect one student to share with the class the highlight of their findings or queries about certain phenomena. As an instructor I help by guiding the discussions, answering students' questions, and helping them draw parallels, comparisons, and contrasts with their own cultures. As students come up with their own questions and help each other answer them, they negotiate their initial attitudes and develop critical thinking.

At the regular interval, be it end of each three-week grading period, students may be required to write a short essay about a theme or a cultural issue encountered in the assigned films. Again, as instructor I gave students the liberty to choose one of many prompts and do the necessary research to produce a well-informed argument in an organized essay. The written reflections, class participation, and four essays are the tools that help me as an instructor in measuring the learning outcome, link it to the goals, and find ways for improvement for future semesters.

A film, however, is only a teaching tool and is by no means enough as class material. Some foundational knowledge must be established, such as, first, recognizing stereotypes and their origins, and second, delineating a cultural framework. Film analysis is the third stage by which theoretical knowledge can be applied and processed. The hope is that the following rationale and literature review will give fellow instructors structure and practical ideas for teaching Hausa and other African languages and cultures to the US colleges and beyond.

Recognizing and Addressing Stereotypes

A crucial initial step in teaching Hausa language and culture involves guiding students

to recognize and critically examine prevalent negative stereotypes concerning Northern Nigeria and their origins. At the outset of each semester, instructors may engage students in a brainstorming activity to uncover widespread stereotypes associated with the African continent, Nigeria in general, and Northern Nigeria specifically—stereotypes such as poverty, backwardness, illiteracy, terrorism, gender inequality, and disease prevalence. Understanding the roots of these biases is essential for fostering a nuanced perspective and facilitating meaningful intercultural dialogue.

Sources of such stereotypes frequently include mainstream visual media, literature, and social media platforms. To effectively address and counteract these misconceptions, instructors must encourage a critical examination of media portrayals to differentiate propaganda from reality. This analytical approach enables students to move beyond fear and rejection toward informed understanding and empathy.

To contextualize the historical emergence and reinforcement of these stereotypes, David Murphy's "Africans Filming Africa: Questioning Theories of an Authentic African Cinema" (2000) serves as an essential text. Murphy argues that Western cinematic representations often portray Africa stereotypically as primitive, exotic, dangerous, and morally corrupt, and demonstrates how these portrayals have influenced contemporary African filmmakers (Murphy, 2000). Similarly, Erap (2006) asserts that Western media consistently depict Africa negatively, reinforcing the continent's image as inherently hazardous or uninviting. These portrayals, embedded within colonial and post-colonial discourses, reinforce a cycle of misinformation and marginalization.

To effectively counteract such misrepresentations, instructors should utilize authentic media sources and literature that offer an insider's perspective. The selected films for this course highlight the internal cultural and social struggles of Hausa communities and Africans broadly, presenting characters as multidimensional individuals navigating universal issues such as dignity, social justice, poverty, governance, insecurity, and education. These portrayals enable American learners to identify common human aspirations for security, dignity, and freedom, thus challenging and dismantling entrenched stereotypes by humanizing Hausa culture and emphasizing shared humanity. Ultimately, by presenting Hausa people neither as superior nor inferior, but as inherently equal, students develop a deeper, more empathetic understanding of cultural diversity.

Defining Cultural Framework

The second critical stage in teaching Hausa language and culture involves the development of a comprehensive and practical cultural framework that encompasses core values, belief systems, cognitive orientations, and behavioral patterns. Although originally conceptualized within business contexts, the notion of a cultural framework—extensively theorized by anthropologists—is highly adaptable to educational applications in the humanities. For example, Hofstede's seminal model identifies six dimensions through which national cultures can be analyzed: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, long-term versus

short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, 2011). In a similar vein, Mallinger and Rossy (2003) introduce the Integrated Cultural Framework (ICF), which synthesizes various theoretical models to examine culture through six dimensions: the ability to influence, tolerance for ambiguity, achievement orientation, individualism versus collectivism, time orientation, and spatial orientation (Mallinger & Rossy, 2003, p. 613).

Building upon these theoretical insights, instructors can develop a specialized cultural framework tailored specifically to the Hausa cultural context. Such a framework would enable students to critically contrast and connect Hausa cultural norms with those familiar in their own societies, particularly within the US context. Specific dimensions suggested for analyzing Hausa culture include piety versus secularism, moderation versus extremism, peace versus violence, abundance versus scarcity, femininity versus feminism, individualism versus collectivism, honor versus humiliation, and class distinction versus equity.

Consistent with the thematic content of selected films, this cultural framework is instrumental in defining Hausa cultural practices, encompassing traditions, values, belief systems, myths, and symbolic representations found across diverse Hausa communities. To enrich students' theoretical understanding, instructors can assign relevant chapters from Chekarau's (2008) detailed exploration of Hausa culture throughout the semester. Chekarau provides an insider's perspective on critical aspects such as modernization, social values, religious beliefs, gender roles, societal structures, etiquette, and tensions between moderate Islam and fundamentalism within Hausa society.

While employing generalizations or stereotypes in teaching culture may raise concerns about oversimplification, Osland (2000) acknowledges the pragmatic necessity of forming "sophisticated stereotypes," asserting that nuanced generalizations, when supported by detailed case studies, are valuable educational tools (Osland, 2000, p. 66). Mallinger and Rossy (2003) further support this pedagogical strategy, stating, "Stereotyping can facilitate student learning by making subtle cultural differences more obvious and easier to recognize. These characterizations can be especially useful in explaining broad theoretical constructs to students who have limited international experience" (Mallinger & Rossy, 2003, p. 613). Thus, it is recommended that instruction progressively moves from broad theoretical constructs toward more complex, illustrative examples presented within the selected film narratives, effectively grounding abstract concepts in relatable cultural experiences.

Film as a Case Study of Cultural Issues: Enhancing Learning Outcomes

In alignment with Mallinger and Rossy's (2003) pedagogical recommendations, films effectively highlight the nuanced variations and shared elements within and between cultures. They assert that film "addresses the more subtle variations and similarities within and between cultures," making abstract theoretical concepts tangible for students

(Mallinger & Rossy, 2003, p. 613). Films and movie clips offer dynamic instructional tools by enriching theoretical discussions with vivid visual elements and emotionally resonant human narratives, thus fostering active student engagement. McPherson (n.d.) emphasizes the pedagogical value of emotional appeal in films, noting its capacity to enhance students' retention of learned information, embedding it within their long-term memory, and motivating learners to critically examine preconceived cultural stereotypes (McPherson, n.d., p. 1).

Furthermore, as outlined by Herron et al. (1999), film-based teaching not only aids linguistic acquisition but also deepens students' cultural insights through authentic language use and cultural scenarios. Sherman (2003) similarly underscores film's unique ability to captivate students' interest and facilitate deeper emotional and cognitive engagement with cultural content. The specificity offered by case studies presented through films allows learners to contextualize broader theoretical frameworks while simultaneously grasping the intricacies and uniqueness of human behaviors across different cultural settings (Osland, 2000).

Experiential cognition achieved through films integrates seamlessly with theoretical knowledge, fostering intercultural competence and enabling learners to more effectively negotiate cross-cultural interactions (Lopez-Littleton, 2018). Films from Kannywood, which creatively depict authentic narratives and cultural expressions of Hausa communities, are particularly valuable resources in facilitating this process. Such cinematic experiences bridge theoretical frameworks and practical cultural understanding, thereby cultivating nuanced cultural literacy among students.

The students, divided into various groups, successfully addressed the preliminary questions posed earlier, and after comparing their responses, several commonalities emerged:

- a. The traditional mode of dress among the Hausa typically comprises three distinct articles of clothing: trousers (*wando*), a shirt (*riga*), and a flowing gown (*babban riga*), accompanied by a hat or cap (*hula*). Specific styles and accessories may vary depending on age and social context.
- b. The ingredients and dishes identified by students varied according to the time of day. For breakfast, all three groups consistently mentioned *koko* (millet porridge) and *kosai* (bean cakes). Additionally, *tuwo shinkafa/masara* (rice or corn flour balls) served with an assortment of soups such as *kuka* (baobab leaves), *kubewa* (okra), and *alayyahu* (vegetable) were frequently cited as common meals.
- c. Greetings within Hausa communities are largely uniform and frequently influenced by Islamic and Arabic traditions. Common greetings include "Salam Alaikum," to which the standard response is "Wa Alaikum Salam." Additionally, "Ina kwana?" is commonly used in the morning, equivalent to

“Good morning” or “How did you sleep?” In the afternoon, greetings shift slightly to phrases such as “Barka da rana” or “Ina wuni?” which correspond to “Good afternoon” or “How is your day?”

The cultural attributes and films highlighted in this discussion exemplify but do not exhaustively represent the rationale and methodologies applicable to teaching Hausa language and culture effectively. These cinematic resources, combined with informed theoretical grounding, enhance pedagogical practices, equipping students with critical analytical skills and cultural empathy essential for global competence.

Hausa Men, Women, Family, and Society

As the course aims to teach the target language and culture, replace prevalent stereotypes with a nuanced cultural understanding, examining the status and roles of women in Hausa society provides rich material for dynamic classroom discussions. The class endeavors to present a balanced depiction of both the privileges and challenges experienced by women across the diverse northern Nigerian regions where Hausa speakers predominate. Students are encouraged to critically analyze the societal and familial roles of both men and women. Selected Kannywood films serve to illustrate various overlapping issues related to gender dynamics and feminist perspectives specific to Hausa culture.

One prominent Hausa film series that effectively explores feminist themes is *Manyan Mata* (The Influential Women, 2023). This series portrays women from both urban and rural settings, highlighting their significant social skills and roles as societal leaders. Through its narrative, the film argues compellingly that women often possess superior capabilities for leadership and conflict resolution compared to their male counterparts, who are frequently depicted as inclined toward irrational and oppressive behaviors. Within the narrative, women skillfully mediate and resolve domestic conflicts, showcasing their vital role in maintaining social cohesion. In the fictional small communities depicted, escalating political rivalries and violence threaten community harmony. It is the intervention of women in *Manyan Mata* that successfully reconciles men—husbands, brothers, and sons—to move beyond minor disputes. United in their stand against social injustices, women in the series significantly contribute to reintegrating out-of-school children into educational systems, transforming street violence into peaceful interactions, and empowering other women through skill-acquisition programs aimed at fostering economic self-sufficiency. Although the storyline is fictional, its realistic depiction of gender relations and societal dynamics provides students with valuable insights into contemporary Hausa communities, including religious coexistence between Muslims and Christians and the influential roles women hold as mothers and community leaders.

When exploring the status of women more deeply within Hausa society, the series *Labarina* (Saira, 2019) and *Dadin Kowa* (Arewa24, 2020) offer profound insights into gender relations and social structures within conservative Hausa regions. *Labarina* specifically dissects class distinctions, gender roles, and the individual’s relationship to family and

society, enabling students to experience an authentic representation of Hausa community life. Classroom discussions based on this series reveal to students that both men and women are often constrained by traditional social norms that limit personal freedoms. Moreover, these films provide rare, intimate glimpses into domestic life, highlighting the complex dynamics of gender interactions and societal values. Such vivid portrayals make these films exceptionally effective educational tools for illustrating women's unique privileges and persistent struggles within Hausa society's often segregated gender roles.

Conversely, the series *Kwana Casa'in* presents a nuanced perspective on how women attain status through class advantages and strict adherence to established social codes. In a straightforward narrative, the character Hajiya Rabi, the first lady of the fictional Alfawa state, mentors and supports a village girl named Rayya, who subsequently becomes a first lady herself as the governor's wife. This storyline highlights the significant ways in which women within predominantly patriarchal contexts strategically support each other's ascent to positions of power and influence, emphasizing female solidarity within constrained societal frameworks (Green, 2015).

Collectively, these films effectively illustrate the multifaceted roles of Hausa women, their influential societal contributions, and the intricate dynamics of gender and familial relationships, thereby enriching students' cultural competence and analytical skills.

Morality, and Chastity Among Hausa People

The binary concepts of honor and chastity constitute essential components in teaching Hausa language and culture effectively. Although textbooks provide straightforward definitions, it is through films that students more vividly comprehend the emotional and social significance of these concepts. Nydell (2006) underscores this importance, noting, "A person's dignity, honor, and reputation are of paramount importance in Hausa society, and no effort should be spared to protect them. Honor or shame is often viewed as collective, pertaining to the entire family or group" (Nydell, 2006, p. 15). Such values are repeatedly depicted in Hausa films, which allow students to internalize the profound societal importance placed on maintaining honor and avoiding shame.

Films from Kannywood consistently portray honor as central to individual and collective identities. The imperative to preserve one's honor, integral to upbringing and daily social interactions, is prominently featured across selected Kannywood films. Characters constantly navigate public scrutiny, striving to project an image of respectability and moral integrity. For instance, scenes set in public spaces such as marketplaces, courtyards, or streets in series like "Labarina" and "Kwana Casa'in" vividly illustrate societal expectations and pressures related to maintaining personal and family honor.

The profound significance of honor further emerges in the narratives of economically disadvantaged characters in the series "Dadin Kowa" (Arewa24, 2018), where individuals such as Ibrahim, Iliya, and Sallau continuously struggle against adversity while steadfastly maintaining their moral reputation and dignity. This portrayal aligns with the findings of

Green (2015), who emphasizes that within Hausa society, honor and morality are deeply intertwined with economic and social survival. The maintenance of chastity and moral rectitude, therefore, extends beyond individual reputation, profoundly influencing social relationships, family dynamics, and community perceptions (Green, 2015).

By engaging with these cinematic representations, students gain critical insights into the nuanced ways honor, chastity, and morality inform behavior, shape social interactions, and reinforce communal norms within Hausa culture, thus enhancing their intercultural competence and depth of understanding.

Shortcomings of Using Hausa Films in Teaching Foreign Language and Culture in Class, and Recommendations

While films significantly contribute to humanizing cultures and presenting ideologies vividly, they also have inherent limitations in educational settings. One notable drawback is the length of films, which students frequently report as too extensive for viewing outside class hours, thereby limiting their preparedness for in-depth class discussions. According to Sherman (2003), films must be carefully selected and aligned with curricular demands to ensure student engagement and effective learning outcomes. To mitigate this issue, syllabi should clearly communicate the expectation of students' commitment to watching films outside class and require written reflections, reinforcing the importance of active participation and preparedness as graded components of the course. Additionally, instructors might enhance student engagement by organizing regular, bi-weekly movie night events on campus, thus integrating an enjoyable social experience with the academic curriculum (Herron et al., 1999).

Another critical shortcoming involves the risk of inadvertently replacing one stereotype with another. Students often tend to generalize cultural attributes based on limited portrayals or characterizations depicted in films. As Osland (2000) suggests, instructors must proactively challenge oversimplified generalizations by facilitating critical, nuanced class discussions that underscore the complexity and diversity inherent within any culture. Films typically aim to convey specific themes or narratives and may not accurately represent the comprehensive realities of the cultures they depict (Mallinger & Rossy, 2003). Therefore, instructors should possess thorough cultural knowledge to effectively distinguish factual information from fictional portrayals and dramatic embellishments.

To address these challenges, instructors must implement structured pedagogical approaches that promote critical thinking and analytical rigor. Assigning supplementary background readings relevant to each film enhances students' contextual understanding and critical perspective. Requiring reflective writing assignments before class discussions further prepares students for meaningful dialogue. In-class discussions should be student-centered and strategically guided by questions progressively elevated through Bloom's Taxonomy, from basic comprehension to higher-order analysis and synthesis (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Moreover, regular written essays, submitted at three-week intervals,

should demonstrate students' capacity to synthesize and critically analyze themes from various films and academic resources, encouraging them to create original, insightful work (Bean, 2011).

In sum, while Hausa films serve as powerful instructional tools for teaching language and culture, careful selection, structured support, critical engagement, and rigorous instructional methods are essential to maximize their educational effectiveness and minimize potential pedagogical shortcomings.

Conclusion

Teaching Hausa language and culture through films offers significant educational benefits, considerably outweighing any limitations associated with this method. Although films are inherently fictional representations, they vividly illustrate societal complexities and provide valuable insights into diverse cultural worlds. Effective study of a language and culture begins with identifying common linguistic expressions, stereotypes, and essential cultural traits. Consequently, establishing clear criteria by which Hausa cultural norms can be systematically examined and contrasted with students' own cultural backgrounds is fundamental. To achieve this, the instructor first provides a robust theoretical foundation outlining the key themes, values, challenges, social norms, and behavioral patterns essential for class discussions. Furthermore, a comprehensive survey of the historical, geographical, and political contexts of each region under study enriches students' understanding and prepares them for deeper cultural engagement.

Films, given their visual, emotional, and intellectual resonance, significantly enhance students' abilities to engage creatively, retain information, and foster critical thinking skills. Therefore, coursework involves students engaging with foundational reading materials related to regional contexts, viewing assigned films independently, and submitting reflective responses guided by initial questions designed around the lower-order cognitive skills of Bloom's taxonomy, such as recall and comprehension. In-class sessions further deepen students' learning through interactive, student-centered discussions utilizing prompts crafted to stimulate higher-order thinking skills, including application, analysis, and critical evaluation. The culmination of this learning process occurs when students demonstrate creative thought and analytical skills through independently conducted research projects exploring chosen cultural issues. The instructor assesses the qualitative aspects of students' learning outcomes by evaluating these final research papers in comparison to initial reflective assignments, thus clearly tracking students' developmental trajectory.

Drawing on experience gained over a semester of teaching Hausa language and culture via films, it becomes evident that cinematic narratives significantly aid students in grasping both general cultural attributes and nuanced societal intricacies. Moreover, the empathetic portrayal of human experiences in Kannywood films effectively counters existing negative stereotypes, thereby fostering deeper intercultural understanding and greater appreciation of Hausa culture within Nigeria and the broader African context.

Ultimately, films represent invaluable pedagogical tools capable of cultivating meaningful cultural insight, intercultural empathy, and intellectual rigor among learners.

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Principles of Education in Yorùbá Proverbs

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Abstract

This study explores the educational principles embedded in Yorùbá proverbs and their relevance to modern pedagogy, particularly in Nigeria and the diaspora. Through a thematic analysis of ten carefully selected proverbs, due to their frequent usage, relevance to pedagogy and cultural weight the research highlights core values such as respect for elders, perseverance, and the transformative power of knowledge. The findings reveal how these traditional principles can enrich contemporary educational practices by fostering holistic development, cultural relevance, and ethical responsibility. The study advocates for the integration of Yorùbá proverbs into formal education to bridge indigenous wisdom with modern pedagogical approaches. Recommendations are provided for policymakers and educators to implement these principles in curricula, enhancing both cultural preservation and educational outcomes.

Keywords: Principles of Education, Yorùbá proverbs, Indigenous knowledge, Traditional education

Introduction

The Yorùbá people, as both a linguistic and ethnic group, are predominantly located in Nigeria, particularly in the South-West region, and extend across other countries in West Africa such as Benin and Togo. They are celebrated for their rich cultural heritage, which is deeply embedded in their traditions, beliefs, and linguistic expressions. The Yorùbá language, one of the most widely spoken in Africa, is a repository of wisdom, passed down through generations, with proverbs serving as a vital medium for encapsulating and transmitting knowledge. Among the various themes covered in Yorùbá proverbs, education occupies a central place, reflecting the community's deep regard for learning and intellectual growth. According to John T. Bendor-Samuel (2025), Yoruba is spoken by more than 20 million people in southwestern Nigeria and parts of Benin and Togo. It is also used widely as a second language in this area. Beyond their linguistic prominence, the Yorùbá people's cultural influence spans art, philosophy, music, and education, with their proverbs serving as a lens through which these values can be understood and

appreciated. Research questions guiding this study include: What educational principles are encapsulated in Yorùbá proverbs? How can these principles be integrated into contemporary educational systems?

This study about the educational value embedded within Yorùbá proverbs investigates ten (10) carefully selected proverbs due to their frequent usage, relevance to pedagogy and cultural weight. Each proverb is translated into English and analyzed to reveal its deeper meanings and insights. Emphasis is placed on their implications for modern education, highlighting how these traditional expressions remain relevant in addressing contemporary educational challenges and opportunities. To achieve this, an in-depth analytical approach is employed to interpret the proverbs within the context of educational principles. By exploring their core meanings and their practical applications, this work aims to bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and modern educational practices, offering a unique perspective on the enduring value of cultural heritage in shaping learning and development. Through this lens, the study not only preserves and promotes Yorùbá culture but also contributes to a broader understanding of the universal importance of education as a transformative force.

Review of Related Literatures

Avoseh (2013) emphasizes that proverbs and the spoken word are foundational elements in indigenous African education, particularly within Yoruba and Ogu communities. He argues that these oral expressions are crucial for conveying cultural knowledge and values, forming an essential part of the educational framework in these societies. Agbaje (2017) emphasizes that proverbs are integral to Yorùbá philosophy and education, stating that they represent people's philosophy and serve as instructions, fulfilling philosophical and educational functions in society.

Yorùbá Proverbs and Educational Philosophy

Adepoju (2018) emphasizes that Yorùbá epistemology values a continuum of knowledge acquisition that combines assimilation, reflection, and action. This approach underscores the importance of engaging both the intellect and the senses, fostering a comprehensive understanding that bridges theory and practice. This perspective aligns with modern educational principles that advocate experimental learning and skills acquisition to address real-world challenges.

Cultural Context and Relevance

The communal nature of Yorùbá society is reflected in proverbs like *Àjẹ́jẹ́ ọ̀wọ́ kan kò gbégbá dọ́rì* ("A single hand cannot lift up a full calabash to the head") conveys the necessity of cooperation to achieve significant tasks. Another example is *“Agbajọ ọ̀wọ́ la fi í sọ̀yà”* ("We use the entire hand to beat the chest"), which also emphasizes unity and collective effort. This proverb promotes collaboration and collective responsibility,

aligning with contemporary education's emphasis on teamwork, communication, and social-emotional learning (Olofinsao 2021).

Implications for Modern Educational Systems

The integration of Yorùbá proverbs into modern educational curricula has the potential to enhance cultural relevance and inclusivity in learning. Scholars such as Agbaje (2017) delves into how Yorùbá proverbs encapsulate philosophical concepts and educational principles, serving as tools for moral instruction and critical engagement. This aligns with constructivist approaches to education, which prioritize inquiry, analysis, and the application of knowledge over rote memorization.

Therefore, the principles of education embedded in Yorùbá proverbs provide timeless insights into effective learning and teaching practices. By analyzing these proverbs, modern educators can draw valuable lessons on discipline, perseverance, collaboration, and critical thinking. Thus, Yorùbá proverbs remain a critical resource for bridging traditional wisdom and modern educational ideals.

To move from theoretical discussions to practical application, this study adopts a qualitative analytical approach rooted in thematic interpretation. The analysis centers on ten carefully selected Yorùbá proverbs that encapsulate core educational principles. These proverbs were chosen for their frequency of use, pedagogical significance, and cultural resonance within Yorùbá communities. Each proverb is presented with its English translation, interpreted within its sociocultural context, and linked to relevant educational philosophies. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how traditional knowledge systems can inform and enhance contemporary educational practices, particularly through culturally responsive pedagogy. The following section provides an in-depth analysis of each proverb, drawing connections between traditional wisdom and modern educational theory.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing thematic analysis to examine ten Yorùbá proverbs. The proverbs were selected based on: Cultural significance and frequency in Yorùbá discourse. Relevance to educational themes such as respect, perseverance, and responsibility.

Data sources include oral interviews with Yorùbá elders and textual anthologies. Interpretations were validated through triangulation with existing scholarly works and consultations with cultural experts.

Analysis of Selected Proverbs

The First Proverb on: The Importance of Education in Yoruba Proverb

Proverb: *Ọmọ tí a kò kọ ní yóòḡ gbé ilé tí a kọ tà*

Translation: A child left untaught will eventually sell off the house that was built.

Meaning: This proverb emphasizes the importance of education in Yorùbá culture (Interview with H.K. Ayinla).

Education is broadly understood as the process through which individuals develop their capabilities, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that hold practical value in society (KGC College, n.d.). The Yorùbá proverb highlights that without proper education and guidance, individuals may fail to appreciate or sustain the resources or heritage entrusted to them, leading to their eventual loss.

This proverb serves as a profound reflection of the Yorùbá belief in the transformative power of education. It stresses the importance of education not merely as the acquisition of knowledge, but as the holistic development of practical skills, positive attitudes, and behaviors necessary for societal well-being. Education, as expressed in this proverb, is central to nurturing responsible individuals who can preserve and enhance the community's legacy.

The educational value of this proverb in a modern educational setting lies in its emphasis on holistic development and the societal impact of education. Key values include:

Holistic Development: The proverb highlights the need for education to go beyond academic knowledge, focusing on practical skills, character building, and fostering positive attitudes. This aligns with modern educational approaches that aim to produce well-rounded individuals prepared for real-world challenges.

Responsibility and Stewardship: By emphasizing the need to preserve and enhance the community's legacy, the proverb teaches the importance of responsibility and stewardship. Modern education can integrate these values by fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among students, encouraging them to contribute positively to society.

Cultural Relevance: Using culturally grounded proverbs like this one in educational contexts can enhance learners' understanding of their heritage and build a stronger sense of identity and cultural pride. It reinforces the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge into formal education to create a more inclusive and meaningful learning experience.

Societal Well-being: The proverb underscores education as a means of societal progress. Modern educational systems can draw from this by designing curricula that focus on social-emotional learning, ethical leadership, and community engagement, ensuring students are prepared to make a positive impact.

Sustainability and Value Preservation: The warning against "selling off the house" is a metaphor for losing valuable resources due to ignorance. In a modern context, this could translate to educating individuals on sustainability, resource management, and

the preservation of cultural and communal assets.

By embedding these principles into modern educational practices, the proverb becomes a tool for cultivating responsible, skilled, and culturally aware individuals equipped to face the challenges of the contemporary world.

The Second Proverb on: The Primary Agent and Source of Education

Proverb: *Ilé la ti ní kó ẹ̀sọ̀ ròde*

Translation: Charity begins at home.

Meaning: A man cannot give what he does not have; good or bad behavior reflects one's background (Interview with H.K Ayinla).

The Yorùbá proverb underscores the foundational role of the family in shaping an individual's behavior and character. It highlights the idea that people can only impart qualities and behaviors that they possess themselves, whether positive or negative. This reflects the significant influence of one's background, including family and societal factors, on their conduct and character development.

Furthermore, families that are actively involved in their children's education create a positive environment conducive to learning. Research emphasizes that emotionally secure individuals are nurtured by parents who show interest in their children's activities and education, fostering their emotional well-being and overall development (British School, 2023). Parental involvement not only builds a supportive home environment but also contributes to a child's sense of security and confidence, which are essential for academic and personal growth.

This proverb and its associated principles highlight the interconnectedness of personal behavior, family influence, and educational involvement. In modern educational settings, these insights underline the importance of engaging families as primary agents in creating environments that support holistic development and lifelong learning.

The educational value of this proverb, "*Ilé la ti ní kó ẹ̀sọ̀ ròde*" (Charity begins at home), in the modern educational setting, is profound and multifaceted. It underscores the foundational role of the family in shaping an individual's behavior, values, and readiness to engage in formal education. Key educational values include:

Foundational Role of the Family: The proverb highlights that education starts at home, where children learn foundational values, ethics, and behaviors. In modern education, this aligns with the emphasis on parental involvement as a critical factor in a child's academic and social success. Educators and policymakers can use this principle to encourage active family participation in education, fostering collaboration between schools and families.

Behavioral Modeling: The notion that "a man cannot give what he does not have" emphasizes the importance of role modeling by parents and guardians. Positive behaviors exhibited by adults at home serve as a blueprint for children, reinforcing the

idea that parents are their children's first teachers. Modern education can incorporate programs that educate parents on the importance of modeling constructive attitudes and habits.

Emotional Security and Learning Readiness: Families that create emotionally secure environments enable children to develop confidence and resilience, which are essential for effective learning. This aligns with contemporary educational psychology, which recognizes that emotionally supported students perform better academically and socially. Schools can integrate family engagement strategies to enhance emotional security and overall student well-being.

Holistic Development: The proverb suggests that education is not limited to formal settings but encompasses moral, emotional, and social development at home. This reflects modern educational priorities, such as holistic child development, which focuses on integrating academic skills with emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and moral values.

Community and Cultural Context: The proverb reinforces the idea that family and cultural background shape individuals, emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive teaching. Schools can draw on cultural wisdom like this to connect curricula with students' lived experiences, making learning more relevant and impactful.

Parent-Teacher Partnerships: The proverb's message supports the modern educational principle of collaboration between educators and families. By recognizing the family's foundational role, schools can foster stronger partnerships with parents, engaging them as active participants in their children's educational journeys. Incorporating the wisdom of this proverb into modern educational practices emphasizes the need for nurturing environments at home, active parental involvement, and a collaborative approach to education. By valuing and leveraging these insights, educational systems can support students in achieving holistic growth and success.

The Third Proverb on: The Principle of Perseverance

Proverb: *Onísùúrù ní yóò fún wàrà kìnìhún*

Translation: Only the patient one will milk the lioness.

Meaning: This proverb highlights the importance of perseverance, particularly in teaching or guiding difficult individuals (Interview with Alhaja Khadijat Ibrahim, personal communication, Málété).

The expression "Only the patient one will milk the lioness" underscores the necessity of patience and composure when dealing with challenging situations or individuals. It illustrates that perseverance is a critical trait, especially in teaching, where instructors often face resistance or difficulty in reaching certain learners. The proverb emphasizes that success in such contexts requires a calm, composed, and understanding approach.

As explained by Alhaja Khadijat Ibrahim, an 85-year-old trader, this saying reflects the wisdom acquired through a lifetime of experience. By comparing the act of teaching to milking a lioness, it vividly conveys the arduous and sometimes risky nature of educating

reluctant or resistant learners. The imagery serves to stress the level of patience and fortitude required to navigate these challenges effectively.

Research corroborates this perspective, noting that patience in teaching involves remaining calm, composed, and empathetic in the face of challenges, thereby creating an environment conducive to growth and learning (Everyday Speech, n.d.). This approach enables educators to support students as they overcome obstacles and progress at their own pace.

Ultimately, this proverb serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring value of perseverance in education. It suggests that by approaching even the most daunting tasks with patience and resilience, educators can achieve meaningful and transformative outcomes.

The educational value of the proverb “*Onísùúrù ní yóò fún wàrà kinnihún*” (Only the patient one will milk the lioness) in a modern educational setting lies in its emphasis on patience, resilience, and determination, particularly in challenging teaching and learning environments. Key educational values include:

Fostering Resilience in Educators: The proverb teaches that success in educating difficult or resistant learners requires persistence and mental fortitude. In modern education, this value encourages teachers to remain dedicated, even in the face of challenges, to understanding that progress often takes time and sustained effort.

Developing Empathy and Understanding: Patience requires understanding students’ unique needs and learning paces. This aligns with modern teaching practices that focus on individualized instruction and differentiated learning. Teachers are encouraged to approach each student with empathy, tailoring methods to address their strengths and weaknesses.

Creating a Positive Learning Environment: A calm and composed teaching approach helps establish a supportive environment where students feel safe to take risks, make mistakes, and grow. This mirrors modern educational psychology principles that emphasize the importance of emotional security in effective learning.

Role Modeling Perseverance for Students: By embodying perseverance, teachers serve as role models, instilling the value of persistence in their students. This is crucial in fostering resilience in learners, teaching them that challenges can be overcome with patience and consistent effort.

Navigating Complex Educational Challenges: The comparison to “milking a lioness” reflects the complex and sometimes daunting nature of modern educational challenges, such as addressing diverse learning needs, managing classroom behavior, or implementing inclusive practices. The proverb underscores that these challenges can be tackled effectively with sustained effort and a composed mindset.

Promoting Growth Mindsets: The principle of perseverance aligns with the growth mindset philosophy, which encourages educators and learners to view challenges as opportunities for development. This helps students develop confidence and resilience in their learning journeys.

Encouraging Collaborative Problem-Solving: Teaching often involves navigating obstacles in partnership with students, parents, and colleagues. The proverb reinforces the importance of collective perseverance, reminding educators that progress often results from collaborative and sustained efforts. Ultimately, the proverb serves as a timeless reminder of the transformative power of perseverance in education, inspiring educators and learners alike to approach challenges with patience and determination.

The Fourth Proverb on: The Principle of Reciprocal and Mutual Respect

Proverb: *Bi Eégún òlá bá ní òhun ò rí gòntò, gòntò náà a ní òhun ò rí Eégún òlá.*

Translation: If a big masquerade claims it doesn't see the smaller masquerade, the small masquerade will also claim it doesn't see the big masquerade.

Meaning: If an important man does not respect those less important than himself, less important men will, in turn, refuse to give him his due. (Interview with J.A Bawa - 2025).

The proverb emphasizes the principle of reciprocal respect, asserting that acknowledgment and respect should be reciprocal. It conveys that individuals in positions of authority or higher status must show respect to those of lower status to receive respect in return.

In the educational context, this proverb aligns with the value of mutual respect and care within the classroom. Educators are encouraged to adopt an asset-oriented perspective, valuing the unique contributions each student brings to the learning community. This perspective fosters an inclusive environment where every student feels recognized and respected (Ellerbrock, 2015).

In caring classroom communities, care and respect are reciprocal. Educators who demonstrate genuine care for their students often find that students reciprocate this care, leading to a positive and supportive learning environment. This dynamic enhances trust, collaboration, and mutual understanding, contributing to the overall success of the classroom community.

The application of this proverb in modern education underscores the importance of creating an inclusive and respectful environment where all individuals, regardless of perceived status or position, feel valued and supported. By fostering such an environment, educators can build strong, respectful relationships that enhance both teaching and learning.

Educational Value of the Principle of Reciprocal and Mutual Respect in Modern Educational Settings. The proverb *Bi Eégún òlá bá ní òhun ò rí gòntò, gòntò náà a ní òhun ò rí Eégún òlá* highlights the necessity of reciprocal respect in fostering productive and harmonious relationships. Its educational relevance in modern settings is profound and multifaceted, particularly in shaping classroom dynamics and promoting inclusive teaching practices.

Fostering Mutual Respect: The proverb teaches that respect must be mutual and reciprocal to create a positive and harmonious classroom environment. Educators who respect students' opinions, identities, and needs are more likely to gain students' respect and cooperation in return. This dynamic is essential for building trust and facilitating open communication.

Creating Inclusive Learning Environments: The emphasis on recognizing and valuing individuals regardless of their status aligns with modern education's focus on equity and inclusiveness. Educators are encouraged to adopt an asset-based approach, acknowledging and celebrating each student's unique strengths and contributions. This helps to build a classroom culture where everyone feels valued and empowered.

Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships: Demonstrating care and respect for students fosters strong, positive teacher-student relationships. When students feel respected, they are more likely to engage actively in learning and demonstrate respectful behavior toward their peers and educators. This creates a supportive learning atmosphere that benefits all participants.

Encouraging Collaboration and Empathy: Respectful interactions between teachers and students serve as a model for students to emulate in their interactions with peers. This encourages empathy, understanding, and collaborative problem-solving, which are critical skills in both academic and social contexts.

Reducing Behavioral Issues: When students perceive fairness and mutual respect in the classroom, they are less likely to exhibit disruptive behaviors. Respectful treatment promotes a sense of belonging and accountability, leading to improved discipline and classroom management.

Promoting Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): Reciprocal respect is a key component of social-emotional learning, which emphasizes self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills. By valuing and respecting every student, educators contribute to their social and emotional development, equipping them with skills that extend beyond the classroom.

Practical Applications in Education:

Modeling Respect: Educators can demonstrate respectful behavior by actively listening to students, acknowledging their perspectives, and addressing them with kindness and fairness.

Asset-Based Teaching: Recognize and incorporate students' strengths and cultural backgrounds into the curriculum to foster a sense of value and belonging.

Conflict Resolution: Use respectful dialogue to resolve conflicts, reinforcing the importance of understanding and empathy. The principle of reciprocal and mutual respect, as expressed in this Yorùbá proverb, is integral to modern educational practice. It underscores the need for educators to cultivate respect-based relationships that promote inclusivity, trust, and collaboration. By fostering an environment where all individuals feel valued and respected, educators can enhance the quality of learning and prepare

students for respectful engagement in diverse societal contexts.

The Fifth Proverb on: The Principle of Responsibility and Proactiveness

Proverb: *Àgbà kù wà lójà, kí orí ọmọ tuntun ó wọ.*

Translation: Elders cannot fold their hands in the market while babies are dying.

Meaning: Elders are expected to take action and fulfill their roles to prevent irreparable harm. J. A Bawa (2025)

The proverb underscores the principle that individuals in positions of authority or experience have a role to play when critical needs arise, particularly within their realm of influence. It stresses the importance of proactiveness and responsibility, especially from those in leadership roles, to safeguard the well-being of the vulnerable and address pressing issues before they escalate.

In education, this principle is reflected in the responsibilities of faculty members to foster students' cognitive, affective, and physical development within their areas of expertise. Faculty members are not only tasked with imparting knowledge but also with creating an environment that promotes holistic growth and learning. This includes providing support, mentorship, and guidance to students, ensuring their overall well-being and progress (Vancouver Island University, n.d.).

Additionally, avoiding harmful actions such as exploitation or discrimination is fundamental in protecting students' interests and fostering equity and inclusion. By recognizing and respecting the diverse needs, abilities, and backgrounds of students, educators can play a pivotal role in their development and success.

The proverb serves as a reminder that those in positions of influence, including educators, have an ethical obligation to actively engage in the protection, growth, and advancement of those they serve. It reinforces the importance of taking proactive and responsible actions to nurture and safeguard the development of students, ensuring a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Educational Value of the Principle of Responsibility and Proactiveness in Modern Educational Settings implies that the proverb *Àgbà kù wà lójà, kí orí ọmọ tuntun ó wọ* (Elders cannot fold their hands in the market while babies are dying) conveys a profound lesson about the moral and social obligation of individuals in positions of authority to take proactive and responsible actions to address critical issues. Its application in modern educational settings carries significant value, emphasizing the role of educators and leaders in ensuring the growth and well-being of students.

Active Engagement in Student Development: Educators have a responsibility to contribute actively to the holistic development of their students cognitively, emotionally, and physically. This means fostering not only academic excellence but also supporting students' personal growth, well-being, and emotional resilience. Proactivity in identifying and addressing students' challenges is key to this responsibility.

Safeguarding Equity and Inclusion: The principle emphasizes the importance of protecting students from harm, exploitation, and discrimination. Educators must create equitable learning environments where every student, regardless of their background or ability, is valued, respected, and given equal opportunities to succeed.

Leadership and Ethical Responsibility: Just as the proverb suggests that elders must act to prevent harm, educators are called to lead with integrity, taking responsibility for their students' development. This includes acting as mentors, role models, and advocates who inspire and guide students to reach their full potential.

Preventing Escalation of Issues: The proactive nature of the proverb encourages educators to address problems early before they escalate into more significant challenges. This can include intervening when students show signs of academic struggle, emotional distress, or behavioral issues, ensuring timely support and solutions.

Building a Supportive Learning Environment: By fulfilling their roles responsibly, educators contribute to a safe and nurturing educational space where students feel supported and valued. This environment fosters trust, collaboration, and a sense of belonging, all of which are essential for effective learning.

4.5.1 Practical Applications:

Mentorship and Guidance: Providing personalized support to students through mentorship programs or one-on-one interactions.

Early Intervention: Recognizing and addressing students' challenges promptly, such as identifying learning difficulties or emotional needs.

Promoting Inclusivity: Developing teaching practices that respect diversity and ensure all students feel included and empowered.

Ethical Leadership: Modeling responsible behavior and decision-making for students to emulate.

The principle of responsibility and proactiveness, as articulated in this Yorùbá proverb, underscores the vital role of educators in shaping the lives of their students. By embracing this principle, educators ensure that they not only impart knowledge but also safeguard the holistic development and well-being of their students. This commitment to proactive and ethical action fosters a more inclusive, supportive, and effective educational environment, ultimately preparing students for success in both academic and societal contexts.

The Sixth Proverb on: Principle of Motivation

The proverb *Kúúṣẹ̀ ní í mú orí ịṣẹ̀ yá*

Translation: (Well done motivates the workers) emphasizes the necessity of reinforcement and motivation in education. It suggests that recognizing and encouraging effort and achievement can inspire individuals to perform better and stay committed to their tasks (Lawyer T. Sanusi, personal communication, December 26, 2023).

Motivation in education plays a critical role in fostering student engagement and achievement. Students may be motivated intrinsically or extrinsically. Intrinsic motivation refers to an internal desire to learn or accomplish something for personal satisfaction, while extrinsic motivation involves external rewards such as praise, allowances, or gifts H.K Ayinla (2025).

The proverb aligns with this understanding, highlighting the value of positive reinforcement, which can serve as an extrinsic motivator to encourage students. At the same time, it acknowledges the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation by recognizing individual effort and fostering a sense of accomplishment. By balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, educators can create a supportive and enriching learning environment. This approach helps cater to diverse student needs, ensuring that all students feel encouraged and empowered to reach their potential. As the proverb suggests, acknowledgment and reinforcement are essential tools for driving effort and success in educational settings.

Educational Value of the Principle of Motivation in Modern Educational Settings implies that the Yoruba proverb *Kúúṣẹ̀ ní í mú orí ìṣẹ̀ yá* (“Well done motivates the workers”) underscores the significance of motivation and reinforcement in education. It highlights that recognizing efforts and achievement can inspire individuals to persevere, perform better, and remain committed to their goals (Lawyer T. Sanusi, personal communication, December 26, 2023).

In modern education, motivation is a cornerstone for fostering student engagement and academic success. Educators recognize that students can be driven by intrinsic or extrinsic factors. Intrinsic motivation stems from an internal desire to learn or accomplish tasks for personal satisfaction, while extrinsic motivation arises from external rewards such as praise, incentives, or tangible benefits (Study.com, n.d.). This proverb’s educational value lies in its alignment with these motivational principles, emphasizing the importance of positive reinforcement. When educators acknowledge students’ efforts, they activate extrinsic motivators that encourage learners to maintain their efforts. Additionally, this recognition can foster intrinsic motivation by helping students develop confidence and a sense of accomplishment.

Modern educational practices benefit from integrating these insights into teaching strategies. By balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, educators can create supportive and enriching environments that cater to diverse student needs. Positive reinforcement, as reflected in the proverb, is an essential tool for promoting resilience, fostering self-esteem, and driving academic and personal growth. Ultimately, the proverb serves as a reminder that motivation is fundamental in education. It advocates for acknowledgment and reinforcement as vital tools for empowering students to achieve their full potential in modern educational settings.

The Seventh Proverb on: Rationale for Peer Education

Proverb: *Egbé ẹyẹ ní ẹyẹ ní wọ̀ tọ̀*

Translation: Birds of the same feather flock together.

Meaning: This proverb forms the basis for peer group education.

Peer education operates on the premise that young people are more likely to be influenced by their peers than by external authorities, particularly adults. As the proverb “Birds of a feather flock together” implies, individuals naturally gravitate towards those who share similar experiences and perspectives. This principle highlights the effectiveness of peer education, which leverages shared experiences to foster relatable and impactful learning. By emphasizing the importance of strong peer relationships, this approach aims to create supportive and inclusive environments where young people can learn from and support each other in meaningful ways (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], n.d.).

The educational value of the concept of peer education, as highlighted by the proverb *Egbé ẹyẹ ni ẹyẹ ní wọ tọ* (“Birds of a feather flock together”), is significant in modern educational settings. It aligns with contemporary teaching strategies that prioritize collaborative, student-centered, and experiential learning. Key aspects of its educational value include:

Relatability and Engagement: Peer education acknowledges that young people are more likely to engage with and internalize information when it is presented by individuals they identify with. This relatability enhances their receptiveness, motivation, and willingness to participate in learning activities.

Empowerment and Agency: By involving peers as educators, this approach empowers students to take active roles in their own and others’ learning processes. It fosters a sense of agency, encouraging young people to contribute meaningfully to their community.

Collaboration and Social Skills: Peer education emphasizes the development of communication, collaboration, and interpersonal skills. Students learn to navigate group dynamics, resolve conflicts, and build supportive relationships, which are critical for lifelong success.

Fostering Inclusive Environments: By creating a space where shared experiences are valued, peer education promotes inclusiveness and diversity. It encourages mutual respect and understanding, essential for building cohesive learning communities.

Reinforcement of Knowledge: Peer educators reinforce their understanding of subjects by teaching others, a concept supported by research in cognitive psychology. Teaching peers deepens their mastery and retention of the material.

Cost-Effective and Scalable: In resource-constrained settings, peer education can be an effective and sustainable way to reach a broad audience. It reduces reliance on external facilitators while leveraging the existing social networks of students.

In summary, the proverb underscores a timeless truth: individuals learn best from those with whom they share common ground. Integrating peer education into modern educational practices can foster engagement, empowerment, and community, making learning more effective and inclusive.

The Eighth Proverb on: Principle of Equal Treatment

Proverb: Àparò kan kò ga ju òkan ló, àfi èyí tó bá gun orí ebè.

Translation: All fowls are equal except the one that climbs the heap

Meaning: This proverb is used to critique individuals who, among their peers, attempt to assert superiority without valid justification.

The proverb “All fowls are equal except the one that climbs the heap” highlights the idea of equality and caution against unwarranted claims of superiority. This aligns with the principle of equal treatment, as outlined by Blanden and Macmillan (2016), recognizes that individuals may face social and economic marginalization due to their social identities. The institution advocates for maintaining equitable, diverse, and inclusive learning and working environments, addressing systemic inequalities to create opportunities for all.

The principle of equal treatment, as illustrated by the proverb *Àparò kan kò ga ju òkan ló, àfi èyí tó bá gun orí ebè*. (“All fowls are equal except the one that climbs the heap”), holds significant educational value in modern settings. It provides a framework for fostering equity, inclusion, and a sense of community in educational environments. Key aspects of its educational value include:

Promoting Equality and Fairness: The proverb underscores the importance of treating all students equally, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities. It discourages undue favoritism or the assertion of superiority, fostering a culture of mutual respect and fairness.

Addressing Social Marginalization: As highlighted by Vancouver Island University (n.d.), recognizing and addressing social and economic marginalization is essential. By creating equitable learning environments, educators can ensure that students from marginalized groups are given the support and opportunities they need to thrive.

Encouraging Collaboration and Teamwork: The principle discourages competition based on superficial or unfounded claims of superiority. Instead, it promotes collaboration and teamwork, enabling students to work together to achieve common goals and celebrate collective success.

Enhancing Equal Opportunities: Research by Schütz, Ursprung, and Woessmann (2005) emphasizes that equality in educational outcomes is critical for achieving equal opportunities and intergenerational mobility. This principle aligns with modern educational objectives to reduce disparities and provide all students with an equal chance to succeed.

Building an Inclusive Culture: The emphasis on diversity and inclusion encourages educators and institutions to recognize the unique strengths and perspectives of each student. This helps create a learning environment that values all voices and fosters a sense of belonging.

Discouraging Elitism and Superiority Complexes: By criticizing unwarranted claims of superiority, the proverb encourages humility and self-awareness

among students. This is crucial for building respectful and supportive peer relationships. In modern education, the principle of equal treatment serves as a foundation for creating an environment where every student can succeed, collaborate, and feel valued, thus contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society.

The Ninth Proverb on: Principle of Honesty and Transparency

Proverb: *Bí inú bá ti rí ni obì n' yàn*

Translation: Intention determines the action

Meaning: Honesty is the best policy. A clear mind results in successful endeavors.

The quote “Intention determines the action” underscores the value of pure and honest intentions in achieving positive and successful outcomes. This aligns with the adage “Honesty is the best policy,” emphasizing the importance of transparency and clarity in decision-making and actions.

Education transparency is equally significant, as highlighted by Onah, Ogbaji, Eteng, and Unwanung (2021). It fosters collaboration among educators by enabling them to unpack standards, plan instruction, assess learning, analyze data, refine teaching strategies, and evaluate their impact. This iterative and collective approach enhances teaching effectiveness and promotes improved student outcomes, thereby raising the overall quality of education.

The principle of honesty and transparency, as expressed in the proverb *Bí inú bá ti rí ni obì n' yàn* (“Intention determines the action”), carries profound educational value in modern settings. This principle is fundamental for fostering trust, collaboration, and effective teaching and learning environments. Key educational benefits include:

Building Trust in Educational Relationships: Honesty and transparency between teachers, students, parents, and administrators foster trust. When educators act with integrity and communicate openly, students are more likely to feel secure and valued, enhancing their engagement and motivation.

Promoting Ethical Behavior: By emphasizing the importance of pure intentions and honest actions, this principle instills ethical values in students. It prepares them to act with integrity in academic, professional, and personal spheres.

Encouraging Accountability: Transparency in education ensures accountabilities for all stakeholders. Teachers can evaluate the effectiveness of their methods, and students can understand how their efforts contribute to their progress, creating a sense of shared responsibility for outcomes.

Fostering Collaboration: As Onah, Ogbaji, Eteng, and Unwanung (2021) note, transparency encourages educators to collaborate by sharing practices, analyzing data, and refining strategies. This teamwork strengthens the collective capacity to address challenges and improve educational quality.

Enhancing Decision-Making: Honest and transparent communication provides a clear foundation for making informed decisions. This clarity supports administrators, teachers, and students in addressing issues effectively and implementing solutions that are

just and equitable.

Improving Student Outcomes: Transparency in instructional planning and assessment allows students to understand expectations and align their efforts accordingly. This clarity reduces confusion and fosters an environment conducive to academic success.

Cultivating a Positive School Culture: A culture rooted in honesty and transparency nurtures respect and openness among all participants. It creates a supportive environment where students and teachers feel safe to express themselves and grow. By embedding the principle of honesty and transparency into modern educational practices, schools can build ethical, collaborative, and effective learning communities that empower both educators and students to achieve their best.

The Tenth Proverb on: Principle of Gradualism

Proverb: *Dìẹ dīẹ nīmú ẹlẹdẹ fi n wogbà*

Translation: Little by little is how the pig’s nose enters the yard

Meaning: This proverb emphasizes taking gradual steps to achieve success or addressing small problems before they become uncontrollable. (Interview with J.A. Bawa - (2025)

Gradualism is a philosophical and conceptual approach that underscores incremental change over time rather than sudden or abrupt transformations. This idea is reflected in the proverb, which serves as a reminder to approach tasks and challenges with patience and persistence. It highlights the importance of small actions, which, if left unattended, can lead to significant consequences. The concept of gradualism has ancient roots. Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, proposed that change is constant and occurs gradually, stating, “Everything flows; nothing stands still” (Microbe Notes, n.d.). This principle is foundational in various fields, including education, where gradual steps play a critical role in fostering progress and development.

By adopting gradualism, individuals and organizations can achieve long-term goals and address potential challenges methodically. Small, consistent efforts can lead to significant success while preventing minor issues from escalating into major problems. The principle of gradualism, embodied by the proverb *Dìẹ dīẹ nīmú ẹlẹdẹ fi n wogbà* (“Little by little is how the pig’s nose enters the yard”), holds substantial educational value in modern settings. Its focus on incremental progress and addressing issues early aligns with best practices in teaching, learning, and institutional development. Key benefits include:

Promoting Patience and Persistence: Gradualism teaches students and educators the importance of persistence and sustained effort. It encourages them to break complex tasks into manageable steps, reducing the pressure of achieving immediate results.

Fostering Incremental Learning: In education, gradual learning through scaffolding allows students to build knowledge and skills progressively. This aligns with the idea that small, consistent efforts lead to mastery and long-term success.

Encouraging Early Intervention: The principle emphasizes addressing minor issues before they escalate. In schools, this approach can be applied to identifying and supporting students with learning difficulties or behavioral challenges early on, ensuring better outcomes.

Supporting Curriculum Design and Implementation: Gradualism underpins the concept of progressive curriculum design. Educators can sequence content logically, helping students develop foundational knowledge before tackling more advanced concepts.

Guiding Institutional Development: For schools and educational organizations, gradualism promotes sustainable growth through phased changes. This ensures that reforms are well-planned and effectively implemented without overwhelming staff or students.

Encouraging Reflective Practice: Gradualism supports reflective teaching and learning. Educators and students can evaluate each step of their progress, adjust, and build on small successes to achieve broader goals.

Building Resilience: By focusing on incremental progress, gradualism helps students develop resilience. It teaches them to value effort and persistence over perfection, which is essential for long-term academic and personal growth.

In summary, the principle of gradualism cultivates an educational environment that values patience, persistence, and strategic planning. By emphasizing small, steady steps toward success, it fosters a culture of continuous improvement and sustainable progress in modern education.

Incorporating these proverbs into Yorùbá language curricula, both in Nigeria and the United States, can:

1. Foster cultural pride among students.
2. Enhance engagement through relatable content.
3. Promote moral and ethical learning alongside language acquisition

5.0. Tabular Analysis and Summary of the Proverbs

The ten proverbs are summarized below, with their themes and educational values.

Table 1: Summary of Yorùbá Proverbs and Their Educational Values

| S/N | PROVERB | TRANSLATION | THEME | EDUCATIONAL VALUE |
|-----|---|--|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | <i>Ọmọ tí a kò kọ̀ ní yóò gbé ilé tí a kọ̀ tà </i> | A child left un-taught will sell the inherited house | Importance of Education | Holistic development, stewardship |

| | | | | |
|----|--|---|--|--|
| 2 | <i>Ilé la ti ní kó ẹ̀sọ́ rode</i> | Charity begins at home. | The Primary Source of Education | Behavioral Modeling |
| 3 | <i>: Onísùúrù ní yóò fún wàrà kinnihún</i> | Only the patient one will milk the lioness | The Principle of Perseverance in Education | Fostering Resilience in Educators |
| 4 | <i>Bi Eégún nílá bá ní òhun ò rí gònṣò, gònṣò náà a ní òhun ò rí Eégún nílá.</i> | If a big masquerade claims it doesn't see the smaller masquerade, the small masquerade will also claim it doesn't see the big masquerade. | Reciprocal and Mutual Respect in Education | Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships |
| 5 | <i>Àgbà kii wà lójà, kí orí omọ tuntun ó wọ́.</i> | Elders cannot fold their hands in the market while babies are dying. | Responsibility and Proactiveness | Safeguarding Equity and Inclusion |
| 6 | <i>Kúuṣẹ́ ní í mú orí iṣẹ́ yá</i> | It motivates the workers | Principle of Motivation | fostering student engagement and academic success. Educators |
| 7 | <i>Egbé eye ni eye n wó tò</i> | Birds of the same feather flock together. | Rationale for Peer Education | Collaboration and Social Skills: |
| 8 | <i>Àparò kan kò ga ju òkan lẹ́, àfi èyí tó bá gun orí ebè.</i> | All fowls are equal except the one that climbs the heap | Equal Treatment | Addressing educational and Social Marginalization |
| 9 | <i>Bí inú bá ti rí ni obì n yàn</i> | Intention determines the action | Honesty and Transparency | Building Trust in Educational Relationships |
| 10 | <i>Dìẹ̀ dìẹ̀ nimú ẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ fi n wogbà</i> | Little by little is how the pig's nose enters the yard | Gradualism | Fostering Incremental Learning |

6.0. Conclusion

This paper underscores the profound educational principles embedded in Yorùbá proverbs, demonstrating their enduring relevance to modern education and their potential to enrich the Nigerian and United State of American educational system through Fostering cultural pride among students, enhancing engagement through relatable content and promoting moral and ethical learning alongside language acquisition.

By analyzing ten carefully selected proverbs, the study reveals the core values of respect for elders, perseverance, and the transformative power of knowledge as pivotal components of Yorùbá educational philosophy. These principles serve not only as cultural artifacts but also as tools for fostering moral and intellectual growth. The findings highlight the dual role of Yorùbá proverbs: preserving traditional values while offering insights into contemporary educational challenges. The respect for elders emphasized in these proverbs aligns with the broader need for fostering intergenerational respect and mentorship in modern education. Similarly, the principle of perseverance encourages resilience and determination, qualities essential for students in overcoming academic and life challenges. Lastly, the emphasis on knowledge reflects the timeless value of education as a means of personal and societal development. Moreover, the study demonstrates that integrating these principles into the Nigerian educational framework could enhance its cultural relevance and effectiveness. By drawing from the wisdom embedded in Yorùbá culture, educators can foster a learning environment that promotes holistic development, combining traditional values with modern pedagogical approaches.

Finally, this research contributes significantly to the discourse on Yorùbá education and culture. It advocates for the incorporation of culturally resonant principles into the Nigerian education system, enriching its philosophical foundation and fostering a more inclusive and effective approach to learning. Future research should further explore how these principles can be operationalized in classroom practices and educational policies to maximize their impact.

Recommendations

This study demonstrates the enduring relevance of Yorùbá proverbs in modern education. Therefore, by integrating these principles into curricula, educators can create culturally sustaining and inclusive learning environments. Future research should explore classroom-based implementations and comparative studies across African cultures. Developing teaching resources that incorporate Yorùbá proverbs is highly recommended alongside train educators on the cultural and pedagogical significance of proverbs. To cap it all, advocacy for policy change to include indigenous knowledge in national and international curricula is also a recommended step for the policy makers.

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Interview Transcripts

Alhaja Khadijat Ibrahim: 85 years old, female, mother of 9 children. Interviewed at her residence on 17th May 2023 at about 10:00am.

Ayinla, H. K. (2025, January 17): Yoruba language and cultural teacher and junior secondary school principal, Government Secondary School, Malete. Interview conducted in Malete, Moro Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Bawa, J. A. (2025, January 20): Farmer, itinerant malam, and commercial driver, Malete town, Kwara State. Interview conducted in Malete, Moro Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Taofiq Sanusi Esq. (2023, December 26): Personal communications.

***O-ní* Prefix Surname Markers among Ilorin-Yoruba People: A Socio-Onomastics Analysis with Implications for Yoruba Language Pedagogy**

Hafsat Omolola Olawuyi, Ridwan Akinkunmi Rabi, & Abdulrahman Aminu

Abstract

This study investigates the sociolinguistic variables involved in the derivation of “O-ní”-derived personal names among the Ilorin-Yoruba people, highlighting their role as identity markers within this community. The paper analyzes the convergence and divergence of naming practices among different sub-groups of the Yoruba tribe, employing qualitative research methods that draw on both primary and secondary sources. Utilizing the socio-onomastic theory of names, the research reveals that while “O-ní” related personal names are present across various Yoruba towns, they are particularly prevalent among Ilorin-Yoruba indigenes, serving as distinctive markers of identity. The findings indicate that these names facilitate historical construction and reconstruction, reflecting the social life of the Ilorin-Yoruba, including culture, religion, history, and intra- and inter-tribal relationships. The study classifies “O-ní” related Ilorin-Yoruba personal names into six categories: (i) material culture-derived, (ii) social status-derived, (iii) profession-derived, (iv) flora and fauna-derived, (v) religious items-derived, and (vi) historical accounts-derived. In conclusion, the research underscores the importance of indigenous names as a valuable cultural inheritance that must be treasured and preserved. The implications for Yoruba language pedagogy are significant, as understanding these sociolinguistic dimensions can enhance language education and cultural awareness among learners.

Keywords: Anthroponomastic, Sociolinguistics, Ilorin, Yoruba indigenous names

Introduction

Ilorin is a hybrid town whose indigenes are from nine different tribes. Katibi (2021, p.35) states that “the indigenes of this area (Ilorin) consist of Arabs, Baruba, Borno, Fulani, Hausa, Kemberi, Mali, Nupe and Yoruba”. This shows that no race or tribe can lay

claim to Ilorin. For example, while their monarchy system follows the Hausa-Fulani emirate pattern, their lingua franca is the Yoruba language which is a unifying factor for all the tribes in Ilorin. Some of the earlier sayings of Yoruba that are related to Ilorin are proverbs and proverbial expressions such as “ìgbà laṣọ ìgbà lẹ̀wù ìgbà kan lòdèrè kókó nílẹ̀ Ilorin” that is ‘everything has its time and season’. Also, a particular Islamic name which is seen as a symbol of Ilorin people as Muslims is “Bello” which is also used “Kí ni wọn ní kó Bello ṣe ní Ilorin.” This statement is a popular assumption that “Bello” is a very common name in Ilorin, although there is no empirical justification for it.

All these Yoruba sayings show Ilorin as a hybrid town with deep Yoruba history, folklore, and literature. Indigenes of Ilorin can be found in five local governments in two of the three senatorial districts of Kwara state i.e. Kwara Central and Kwara North. The five local governments where indigenes of Ilorin can be found are Ilorin South, Ilorin West, Ilorin East, Asa and Moro local governments. From existing literature the name Ilorin is derived phonologically through the process of vowel elision i.e. “i+lọ + irin” and the morphological process of prefixation. Katibi (2011) in his work explained the language and cultural mix of the Ilorin people, stating that, Ilorin is the only emirate headquarters that favors Yoruba as its lingua franca over Hausa. While situated in the northern political region of Nigeria due to its Emirate administrative system, its inhabitants predominantly speak the Oyo dialect of the Yoruba language.

Since the name or naming strategy of a particular town or city can be used to trace its history and philosophy, the research aim in this work is to examine Ilorin Yoruba personal names that are constructed with “O-ní” (an agentive prefix, described below) and analyze how the derivation of these names which is prevalent among Ilorin-Yoruba people shows the inter-tribal and cultural mix of the citizens of the city.

Research Methodology

This research adopts the qualitative method of data gathering. Data for this research work were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Our primary sources include informants such as family heads (Mògàǹjì), Aláńgùà (Village head), religious leaders, elders, teachers, civil servants, and artisans who are indigenes of Ilorin, most especially in three of the five LGAs in Ilorin. The local governments are Ilorin West LGA, Ilorin East LGA and Ilorin South LGA. This was carried out through the adoption of individual and focus group interviews. Our pool of secondary sources includes existing literature on Ilorin, the register of the youth wing of the Ilorin Emirates Descendants Progressive Union (IEDPU). Also, the intuitive knowledge of the researcher as an ideal native speaker of the Yoruba language helped in the analysis and classification of Ilorin-Yoruba O-ní derived personal names. Through a simple random sampling, seventy (70) O-ní related Ilorin-Yoruba personal names were examined and analyzed.

Literature Review

Literature abounds on the study of Ilorin in the field of literature and linguistics. Some of the earlier works on Ilorin onomastic include Katibi (2011) in his work titled

“Arabic and non-Arabic element in Ilorin dialect”. In this work, he highlights some names that have a history in Yoruba and Hausa languages and are exclusively bear by Ilorin indigenes. Some of these names include Dende, Dasuki, Amosa, Laaró, Lasiele, Olododo, Obalowu, Adamo, Ologele etc.

Jaiyeola (2020) in her work titled “Sociolinguistics Analysis of Surnames as Marker of Identity Among Ilorin Indigenes In Nigeria” classified Ilorin indigenes surnames into four categories, which are: Yoruba-based surnames such as *Şoḷagberú*, *Aláró*, *Ìdíàgbò*, etc; Hausa-Fulani surnames such as *Na’allah*, *Sulu-Gambari*, etc; foreign names such as *Gold*, *Cook*, etc. and Cleric adopted names such as *Sasili*, *Salati*, and *Jabata*. We observed that contrary to Jaiyeola’s (2020) claim that *Jabata* is a cleric-derived name, *Jabata* is a personal name derived from a place name whose history can be traced to Oyo. To date a place in present Oyo is known as *Jabata*. This suggests that seeing Yoruba Ilorin indigene names as Yorubanised names rather than Yoruba names is erroneous since these names are not foreign names but indigenous personal names of Yoruba Ilorin indigenes.

In addition, Jaiyeola and Daramola (2021) also did a multi-linguistics analysis of Ilorin personal names. They opine in their submission that Ilorin indigenes are patriarchal and give their children names that have positive meaning while they avoid names that are related to Yoruba gods and goddesses. We observed that though Jaiyeola (2020) lists some *O-ní* names as a category she classified under Ilorin-Yoruba names, little or no attention was given to the classification as well as the social importance of these names as instruments of historical construction and reconstruction, intra and inter-tribal relationship, religion, warfare, etc. This is the vacuum that we aim to fill with this research work.

Status of *O-ní* in Standard Yoruba

O-ní is an agentive prefix that is used in the derivation of nominal words in the Yoruba language through the morphological process of prefixation. There are three schools of thought on the status of *o-ní* in Yoruba morphology. The first school of thought is the unitary school which sees the word “*oní*” as a single morpheme. The second school of thought is the split hypothesis school of thought which sees “*o-ní*” as the combination of the prefix “*o-*” and the verb “*ní*” which means ‘to own or possess’. The third school of thought is the duality approach school of thought that sees “*o-ní/ oní*” as both a split i.e. two morphemes and a unit (a single morpheme).

Some of the proponents of the unitary school of thought include Bamgbose (1990), Taiwo (2006), Arokoyo (2017), etc. Their position according to Owolabi in Shada (2017) is that “the prefix *oní* can occur in both agentive and non-agentive nominal position”. Scholars under the split hypothesis school include Awobuluyi (1992, 2008, and 2016). According to Awobuluyi, the verb “*ní*” ‘to own or have’ can take any vowel as a prefix and still denote the same information. He gave the examples of:

- | | | |
|-------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1(a). | <i>A-ní kú lápó</i> | ‘we have death in our pouch’ |
| | (b). <i>O-ní kú lápó</i> | ‘You have death in your pouch’ |

(c). Ó- ní kú lápó. ‘he/she has death in his or her pouch’

According to Awobuluyi (2016), these examples show that the vowel ‘o-’ is just a prefix attached to the main morpheme “ní” ‘to have or own’ rather than being a single entity”. In addition, some scholars such as Taiwo (2011) and Shada (2017) relying on their duality approach adopt a bridge model approach by morphing the two previous schools of thought arguments into one. They explain that there are two types of “oní” in Yoruba language which are the split “o-ní” and the single entity “oní”. Our observation on the literature above is that relying on morpho-phonological proof which shows that all prefixes in the Yoruba language are mono-syllabic i.e. a single syllable buttresses the claim of the split hypothesis school that “o-ní” is a split morpheme in Yoruba which combine the prefix “o-” and the free morpheme “ní” to form “oni” which means ‘owner’. From the evidence established so far “o-ní” will be analyzed as two separate morphemes in the course of our analysis of “o-ní” related Ilorin Yoruba personal names henceforth IYPN.

Socio-Onomastic Theory

Names play a pivotal role in business branding and rebranding. The study of name in any form is referred to as onomastic while the study of language in relation to society is known as sociolinguistics. Socio-onomastic which is the theoretical framework adopted for this work is a bi-discipline approach to the study of names through the lenses of sociolinguistic variables. Zakariyah (2024) explains that “sociolinguistics studies how societal variables such as age, gender, status, and others affect language. It is the branch of linguistics where attention is paid to how language reveals the identity of its users”.

Redmonds (2007) defines names as “special words that we use to identify a person, an animal, a place, or a thing, and they all have meaning”. In many cases, that meaning will lie concealed in the name’s history, but in others, it will still be transparent”. The term “Onomastics comes from the Greek ‘onoma’ which means name. Onomastics thus is the study of proper names” (Osijek 2012). This suggests that Onomastics has to do with the study of name (proper) place names, names referring to languages as well as names that refer to nationalities/ethnic groups.

Lisa Berglund (2017) asserts that socio-onomastic has been developed as a systemic perspective on the dynamic analysis of names and naming whereas, Onomastics traditionally has largely focused on the etymology and typology of names. It can be deduced from the above that socio-onomastics is an interdisciplinary field of study that combines sociology, linguistics, and anthropology to explore the social, cultural and situational aspects of names. Overall, socio-onomastic captures the breadth and depth of the sociological study of proper names which offers valuable insights into the complex social and cultural dynamics surrounding names and their derivation. Socio-Onomastics is a fascinating field of study that examines the social and cultural aspects of names. It explores how names are used, perceived, and valued in different social contexts, cultures, and languages.

There are some key aspects explored in the field of socio-Onomastics. These key

aspects provide valuable insights into the complex social and cultural dynamics surrounding names, thereby revealing the intricate or complex relationship between language, culture, and society. The focus of this paper is to examine sociolinguistic intricacies embedded in the derivation on O-ní derived Ilorin-Yoruba personal names using a theory that captures both study of names as well as sociolinguistics which is socio-onomastic theory.

Data Presentation

It has been observed that names serve as identification among the Yoruba people. This is because, through name, one can determine or guess the city or town of origin of a particular individual. While we observe that “O-ni” ‘owner’ derived Yoruba personal names can be found in every town and city in Yoruba land, the researcher observed that its usage is more prominent and pronounced among Ilorin-Yoruba people. Some of the O-ni-derived personal names that were collected among the Ilorin-Yoruba people include the following examples, with a full list in Appendix I:

| SN | BASIC FORM | Ilorin-Yoruba Personal Name (IYPN) | MEANING |
|----|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | O + ní + àáyá prefix have bullet | Aláàáyá | ‘bullet merchant’ |
| 2 | O+ní + abéré prefix have needle | Alábéré | ‘tailor/doctor’ |
| 3 | O+ní + àdá prefix have cutlass | Aládàá | ‘owner/seller of cutlasses |
| 4 | O+ ní + àdĩ prefix have black oil | Aládĩ | ‘seller/owner of black oil’ |
| 5 | O+ní + adìe prefix have chicken | Aládìe | ‘seller/owner of chicken’ |

Socio-Onomastics Classification of O+ ní Derived IYPN

It has been observed in previous research on Yoruba personal name that name can be described as the Yoruba people’s social security or national identification number through which every distinguishing detail about an individual can be known. Noah et al (2014, p. 188) explain what a personal name encompasses in Yoruba society. They opine that “in a typical traditional Yoruba society, the name an individual bears would reveal his or her socio-economic and cultural characteristics, his family background, family occupation, his place of origin and his political and economic class. In this section, we conduct analyses of Ilorin-Yoruba personal names (IYPN) using the socio-onomastic theory of onomastic as our theoretical framework.

A. O-**ní** + Culture-Derived Ilorin-Yoruba Personal Names

Culture and tradition are the total way of life of a particular race or tribe. UNESCO (2001) in Adéyemí (2013, p. 74) explains that culture can be defined as:

The set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectually and emotional features of a society or a social group, encompassing, in addition to art and literature, lifestyle, ways of living together, value systems, tradition and belief.

Sapir (1929) in Zakariyah (2016, p.79) explains the relationship that exists between language and culture as a symbiotic one, he opines that “there is a close relationship between language and culture to the point that one could not understand or appreciate one without the knowledge of the other”. IYPN to be examined under this sub-chapter falls under material culture. Material culture is the branch of culture that can be seen, felt and touched, and are human-made rather than nature-endowed. Material culture is the aspect of social reality grounded in the objects and architecture that surround people. It includes the usage of consumption, creation, and trade objects as well as the behaviour, norms and rituals that the objects create. Examples of material culture to be examined include the three most basic needs of humans which are food, clothing and shelter and other aspects of material culture.

i. **Food**

It has been observed that human beings and animals cannot survive without food. It is one of the basic needs of man. Some of Yoruba thoughts that give credence to this assertion include “*oúnjẹ lòrẹ̀ àwò*” ‘food nourishes the body’, “*bi ebi bá kúrò nínú ìṣẹ̀, ìṣẹ̀ bùṣẹ̀*” ‘with food poverty is bearable. In this work, O-**ní** derived food-related personal names are classified into traditional food and foreign food-derived IYPN.

ia. **Traditional Food O-**ní** Derived Ilorin Yoruba Personal Names**

These are names that are derived from Yoruba locally-made food. The researcher observed these names emanate from the day-to-day profession of the forebears of the bearers of the names today. Some of these names include:

| | | |
|------------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| (i). O+ní + èkọ | Èlẹ̀kọ | ‘corn meal seller’ |
| (ii). O+ní + ẹja | Èlẹ̀ja | ‘fish seller’ |
| (iii). O+ní + oyin | Olóyìn | ‘honey seller’ |
| (iv). O+ní + ẹfọ | Èlẹ̀fọ̀ | ‘vegetable seller’ |
| (v). O+ní + ọkà | Ọlọkà | ‘yam flour seller’ |
| (vi). O + ní + àkàrà | Alákàrà | ‘bean cake seller’ |
| (vii). O + ní + gùgùrú | Onígùgùrú | ‘pop-corn seller’ |

ib. **Foreign Food O-ní** Derived Ilorin Yoruba Personal Names

These are foods that are borrowed from other tribes such as the Hausa and Fulani settlers in Ilorin. Foreign foods derived from IYPN give credence to Katibi's (2011) assertion that Ilorin is a cosmopolitan city that houses more than nine distinct and independent but cohesive tribes. Examples of this foreign food-derived IYPN include:

| | | |
|----------------------|----------|--------------------|
| (i). O+ní + mágó | Onímágó | 'mago seller' |
| (ii). O+ní + làbídùn | Alábídun | 'date-palm seller' |
| (iii). O+ní + mọ̀sà | Onímọ̀sà | 'mọ̀sa seller' |
| (iv). O+ní + túwó | Onítúwó | 'tuwo seller' |
| (v). O + ní + lúúru | Onílúúru | 'luuru seller' |
| (vi). O + ní + kàngú | Oníkàngú | 'kangu seller' |

ii. **Household Instruments O-ní**-Derived Ilorin Yoruba Personal Names

These are materials that are used within the house and in the kitchen. They are the class of things that are categorized under material culture. Examples of O-ní derived IYPN that are related to household instruments are:

| | | |
|------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| (i). O+ní + àdá | Aládàá | 'owner of cutlass |
| (ii). O+ní + abéré | Alábéré | 'medical practitioner' |
| (iii). O+ní + awo | Aláwo | 'cow skin owner' |
| (iv). O+ní + aró | Aláró | 'dye-cloth maker' |
| (v). O+ní + òróró | Olóròró | 'vegetable seller' |
| (vi). O+ní + epo | Elépo | 'palm-oil seller' |
| (vii). O+ní + ata | Aláta | 'pepper seller' |
| (viii). O+ní + kánhún | Oníkánhún | 'potash seller' |
| (ix). O+ní + àdĩ | Aládĩ | 'black-oil seller' |
| (x). O + ní + àlùbọ̀sà | Alálùbọ̀sà | 'onion seller' |

iii. **Cloth O-ní** Derived Ilorin Yoruba Personal Names

Cloth is one of the three basic needs of man, the other two being food and shelter. The importance of cloth to the Yoruba people, Ilorin Yoruba speakers inclusive can be gleaned from this popular saying "kẹ̀kẹ̀ ta dídùn; aṣọ̀ lèdídí ènìyàn" that is 'the weavers loom adroitly; the cloth is the coverlet for man'. Clothes are used generally to cover human nakedness and to beautify the body. Some of cloth related "O-ní" derived IYPN include:

| | | |
|---------------------|-----------|------------------------|
| (i). O+ní + aṣọ̀ | Aláṣọ̀ | 'cloth maker/seller' |
| (ii). O+ní + èwù | Èlẹ̀wù | 'cloth maker' |
| (iii). O+ní + ẹ̀tù | Èlẹ̀tù | 'gun-powder seller' |
| (iv). O+ní + bàntẹ̀ | Onibàntẹ̀ | 'men-underwear seller' |

| | | |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| (v). O+ní + kǐjípá | Oníkǐjípá | ‘the owner of work cloth’ |
| (vi). O+ní + àrán | Alàrán-án | ‘the owner of velvet cloth’ |

B. Social Class-Derived Ilorin-Yoruba Personal Names

The Yoruba people believe that though birth is equal, the economy as well as social status of the people is not equal. For this reason, members of the community can be grouped into three categories which are “olówó and ọlórò” the upper class, “bòròkìní and kòlákòsagbe ‘middle class or bourgeoisie’ and “mẹkúnnù and tálákà” the poor and the downtrodden. Some of the O-ní derived IYPN that reflect and show class and status include:

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------|
| (i). O+ní + ọrò | Ọlórò | ‘the wealthy one’ |
| (ii). O + ní + owó | Olówó | ‘the rich one’ |
| (iii). O + ní + ẹrú | Ẹlẹrú | ‘slave owner’ |
| (iv). O + ní + odù + owó | Olódù-owó | ‘the wealthy one’ |
| (v). O + ní + ọmọṣba | Ọlọmọṣba | ‘the one from the royal lineage’ |
| (vi). O+ ní + ilú | Onílùú | ‘the owner of the town’ |

We observed that these names are used to denote the indigene status of a particular individual in society. The name can be categorized under Yoruba proverbial names according to Ogunwale (2014). The name is a shortened form of the Yoruba proverb that says “onílùú ò ní fẹ́ ó tú; àjòjì a tẹ̀tẹ̀ gírìgírì” that is an indigene always protects his town while a foreigner will not care for the town to be destroyed.

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|--|
| (vii). O+ní + ẹwù-ẹtù | Ẹlẹwù-ẹtù | ‘the owner/seller of dark-blue cloth (a revered traditional type of cloth that is used during important celebration). |
| (viii). O + ní + ilé + márùn-un | Onílé-márùn-ún | ‘the owner of five houses’ |
| (ix). O+ní + òdodo | Olódodo | ‘the truthful one’ According to Katibi (2011), this name is usually given as a nickname to people that bear “Abubakar”. |
| (viii). O + ní + ẹrù + kan + filà | Ẹlẹrùkan-filà | ‘the one with the special cap’ |

C. Profession-Derive Ilorin-Yoruba Personal Names

Profession is a trade or art an individual partake in to provide goods or services to

mankind and earn money in return. The Yoruba sees working as the getaway to success that is “*ìṣẹ̀ lòògùn ìṣẹ̀*”. For this reason, both men and women and young and old in Yorubaland are encouraged not to be lazy and be hard working. Some of O-ní derived IYPN that are related to profession or trade include:

| | | |
|------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| (i). O+ní + kòkó | Oníkókó | ‘cocoa farmer/seller’ |
| (ii). O+ní + èwù-ẹ̀tù | Èlẹ̀wù-ẹ̀tù | ‘the owner of ẹ̀tù cloth’ |
| (iii). O+ní+ ọ̀kọ́-ńlá | Ọ̀lọ̀kọ́-ńlá | ‘the commercial farmer’ |
| (iv). O + ní + àgbèdẹ | Alágbèdẹ | ‘the blacksmith’ |
| (v). O+ní + àgúnmu | Alágúnmu | ‘maker/seller of powder medicine’ |
| (vi) O + ní + ilú | Onílù | ‘drummer’ |
| (vii). O+ní + gbàjámò | Onígàjámò | ‘barber’ |
| (viii). O+ ní + abẹ̀rẹ | Alábẹ̀rẹ | doctor/tailor |

D. Flora and Fauna-Derive Ilorin-Yoruba Personal Names

Yorùba people see plants and animals as an integral part of their society. They have close and friendly relationships with plants and animals in their environment. This is evident in the presence of animals and plants in different aspects of their literature and culture, most especially their oral literature which includes their songs, proverbs, similies, metaphors, idioms, panegyrics, folktales and naming. Examples of IYPN flora and fauna O-ní derived names include:

i. Fauna

| | | |
|----------------------|---------|------------------------|
| (i). O+ní + ẹ̀ṣin | Èlẹ̀ṣin | ‘horse owner’ |
| (ii). O+ní + adìẹ | Aládìẹ | ‘chicken seller/owner’ |
| (iii). O+ní + ewúré | Eléwúré | ‘goat owner/seller’ |
| (iv).O+ní + àkùkọ | Alákùkọ | ‘cock owner/ seller’ |
| (v).O+ní + oyin | Olóyin | ‘honey farmer’ |
| (vi). O + ní + ẹ̀ran | Èlẹ̀ran | ‘goat farmer/ butcher’ |

ii. Flora

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| (i). O+ní + obì | Olóbì | ‘kolanut farmer/seller’ |
| (ii). O+ní + atare | Alátare | ‘alligator seller’ |
| (iii). O + ní + ọ̀sàn | Ọ̀lọ̀sàn | ‘orange seller’ |
| (iv). O+ ní + àlùbòsà | alálùbòsà | ‘onion seller’ |

E. Religion Derive O-ní Derived Ilorin Yoruba Personal Names

Religion is the act of worshipping the Supreme Being (Olodumare) in one form or another. Since Ilorin is dominated by adherents of the Islamic religion, O+ní related

religion personal names have a relation to the Islamic religion. This is because Ilorin indigenes are predominantly Muslims. This researcher observes that religion-derived O-ni IYPNs are used to promote and propagate the religion of Islam. Examples of such names include:

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------|------------------------|
| (i). O+ní + wáàsí | Oníwàásí | ‘the preacher’ |
| (ii). O + ní + èhá | Èlẹ̀hàá | ‘the one in seclusion’ |
| (iii). O+ ní + wírìdǐ | wírìdǐ | ‘wiridi performer’ |
| (iv) O+ní + òjẹ̀ | Olójẹ̀ẹ̀ | ‘the masquerader’ |

Evidence from oral and written accounts shows that the deep structure of the name “Olójẹ̀ẹ̀” is “O- ní-òjẹ̀” that is ‘one who owns a masquerade’. Mumeen (2019) explains that the Olójẹ̀ẹ̀ community was led by a Yoruba man named Omololu, who hailed from a town called Aha, now known as Ojo Owode in the Oke Ogun area of Oyo State. The term Olójẹ̀ translates to «masquerade worshipers.» Before they migrated to Ilorin from Oyo, the community primarily practiced masquerade worship as their main religion. We observed that since the bearers of this name are now Muslims, the name was changed from “olójẹ̀” to “olójẹ̀ẹ̀” to steer clear of the masquerade origin of the name.

F. Historically- Derive Ilorin-Yoruba Personal Names

Naming is one of the sources through which the truth or falsity of a story can be authenticated. This is because personal names have been observed to start the test of time. Examples of O-ni-derived historical IYPN include:

| | | |
|---------------------|------------|------------------|
| i. O + ní + ọ̀mọ́dǎ | Ọ̀lọ́mọ́dǎ | ‘the good child’ |
|---------------------|------------|------------------|

According to oral tradition, the derivation of “Ọ̀lọ́mọ́dǎ” can be traced through this historical account, which narrates that:

Mallam Abubakar Bukar Biu who was a cleric as well as a warrior migrated from Biu, a town in Borno State. He was among the jihadists who follow Sheikh Alimi down to Ilorin. Mallam Abubakar had a son called Abdullahi Bukar Biu who was blessed with good manners. He (Abdullahi) normally attends to visitors with good manners whenever his father was not around such that he was nick-named “Yaro Giriki”, in Hausa language meaning “good child” and Yoruba people used to call him “Ọ̀mọ́ dáadǎá” which was later shortened to “Ọ̀mọ́dǎ”

| | | |
|-------------------|----------|--------------------------|
| ii. O+ní + à̀ngua | Alá̀ngua | ‘leader of the compound’ |
|-------------------|----------|--------------------------|

Our analysis reflects that the name “Alá̀ngua” is a traditional title given to the leader of a vast compound under whose the “Magaji’s” operate in the Ilorin traditional council.

The name is derived through the combination of the Yorùbá word “o-ní” which means the owner and the Hausa word “àngua” which means ‘compound’. This name is one of the pieces of evidence that shows Ilorin as a fusion of many tribes as championed by Katibi (2021).

- iii. O+ní + ànàmú Alánàmú ‘royal title for one of the four principal chiefs known as Balogun’

According to oral and written documents “Alánàmú” is a nickname that metamorphoses into a family name that was given to one of the four Ilorin Baloguns families; they are Balogun Alanamu and Balogun Ajikobi for the Yorubas, Balogun Fulani for the Fulbes and Balogun Gambari for the Hausas chiefs because of his prowess in battle. The background story as presented by Mumeen (2019) tells that Yusuf Bade is recognized as the ancestor of the current Alanamu family. He was approached by Emir Abdulsalam for assistance during the Kura-Ikoko war. Yusuf was a celebrated warrior, particularly noted for his ability to defeat his foes. He would physically overpower his enemies and capture them, earning him the nickname “*ɛni tí ó nà, tí ó sǐ mú,*” which translates to «a person who physically beats his enemy and captures them.» This title remained with him even after he was appointed Balogun, at which point he was known as Balogun Alanamu.

Findings and Discussion

The study revealed that similar to how certain Yoruba towns can be identified through prevalent items in their names, the Ilorin-Yoruba dialect is distinctly marked by the frequent use of the prefix “o-ní” in personal name derivation. While o-ní related names can be found across various Yoruba towns, they are particularly prominent among the Ilorin-Yoruba indigenes, serving as a clear marker of Ilorin identity. Ikotun (2014, p. 308) supports this assertion, noting that names unique to a specific town or city may also appear in other regions due to historical events such as wars and trade activities.

Additionally, the research indicates that names can function as instruments for historical construction and reconstruction. The hybrid nature of Ilorin, characterized by its diverse population comprising nine major tribes, is reflected in some o-ní derived Ilorin-Yoruba personal names (IYPNs). For instance, the name “Alàngua,” which combines the Yoruba word “o-ní” meaning ‘owner’ with the Hausa word “àngua” meaning ‘compound,’ exemplifies this cultural blending. Furthermore, the incorporation of Hausa food items such as “mágó,» «mósà,» «lúúró,» and “túwó” into IYPNs underscores the inter-tribal relationships and peaceful coexistence among the tribes in Ilorin.

The study also identified six main categories of o-ní related IYPNs: (i) material culture-derived, (ii) social status-derived, (iii) profession-derived, (iv) flora and fauna-derived, (v) religious items-derived, and (vi) historical account-derived. Moreover, the

Yoruba practice of “orúkọ agboolé,” or ‘compound names,’ embraced by the Ilorin-Yoruba people, has played a crucial role in preserving o-ní related personal names as well as other names that encapsulate the history, culture, and religion of the Ilorin-Yoruba community.

Implications for Yoruba Language Instruction

The O-ní prefix in Ilorin-Yoruba surnames presents significant implications for Yoruba language instruction and learning, offering a multifaceted approach to teaching various aspects of the language and culture. This linguistic feature provides educators with a valuable tool to enhance students’ understanding of Yoruba morphology and syntax, while simultaneously deepening their cultural and sociolinguistic awareness. These implications can be categorized into several key areas.

Morphological and Syntactic Instruction: In terms of morphological and syntactic instruction, the O-ní prefix serves as an excellent practical example. Educators can utilize these surnames to demonstrate how prefixes are employed in Yoruba to form compound words, thereby helping students grasp the intricacies of word formation and expand their vocabulary. Furthermore, examining the syntactic role of the prefix within sentences can aid students in understanding how Yoruba names fit into larger linguistic structures, aligning with broader syntactic concepts such as the use of focus markers in the language.

Cultural and Sociolinguistic Awareness: The cultural and sociolinguistic implications of O-ní surnames offer another rich avenue for exploration in language pedagogy. These names often indicate possession or association with certain attributes, professions, or social statuses, reflecting the importance of cultural identity and heritage in Yoruba society. By delving into the meanings behind these names, educators can highlight the non-arbitrary nature of Yoruba naming conventions, illustrating how they embody societal values, beliefs, and expectations. This approach not only enhances language learning but also fosters a deeper appreciation for Yoruba culture among students.

Dialectal Variations: the study of O-ní surnames can serve as a gateway to exploring dialectal variations within the Yoruba language. By examining how this prefix is used in different Yoruba dialects, such as the Ilorin-Yoruba dialect, students can gain insights into regional linguistic differences. This comparative analysis can enhance their analytical skills and broaden their understanding of the diversity within the Yoruba-speaking community.

Another highly important teaching about O-ní surnames contributes to the preservation of indigenous knowledge. By emphasizing the traditional aspects of Yoruba naming conventions, educators can help preserve and transmit cultural knowledge to future generations. This is crucial in maintaining linguistic and cultural ties to broader Yoruba heritage and resisting the trend of name modification and avoidance, which threatens the true identity of the Yoruba people (Ikotun, 2014).

Recommended Instructional Strategies

Incorporating O-ní surnames into language teaching also allows for the

implementation of diverse pedagogical strategies. Teachers can design interactive activities where students create their own O-ní surnames based on personal or family attributes, fostering engagement and creativity. Instructors can teach culture with cultural projects where students will research into the meanings and origins of different O-ní surnames and instructors may help students connect linguistic concepts with cultural history. Additionally, instructors can create role-playing scenarios in which students use Yoruba names in social interactions. This can provide practical language use experience and reinforce the cultural significance of names.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of o-ní prefixed personal names among the Ilorin-Yoruba people as vital markers of identity and cultural heritage. Through a comprehensive analysis of the sociolinguistic variables involved in their derivation, it is evident that these names serve not only as reflections of individual and familial attributes but also as rich resources for historical and cultural understanding. The classification of o-ní names into distinct categories—material culture, social status, profession, flora and fauna, religious items, and historical accounts—underscores their multifaceted nature and relevance in the social fabric of the Ilorin-Yoruba community. Furthermore, the implications for Yoruba language pedagogy are profound, offering educators a framework to enhance cultural awareness and linguistic competence among learners. By incorporating this linguistic feature into their curriculum, educators can significantly enrich the educational experience for students of the Yoruba language, fostering not only linguistic proficiency but also a deep appreciation for Yoruba culture and heritage.

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Appendix I:

Primary Data - Full list of names O-ní-derived personal names that were collected among the Ilorin-Yoruba people

| SN | BASIC FORM | Ilorin-Yoruba Personal Name | MEANING |
|----|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | O + ní + àáyá prefix have bullet | Aláàáyá | 'bullet merchant' |
| 2 | O+ní + abèré prefix have needle | Alábèré | 'tailor/doctor' |

| | | | |
|----|--|-----------|--|
| 3 | O+ní + àdá prefix have cutlass | Aládàá | ‘owner/seller of cutlasses |
| 4 | O+ ní + àdĩ prefix have black oil | Aládĩ | ‘seller/owner of black oil’ |
| 5 | O+ní + adìẹ prefix have chicken | Aládìẹ | ‘seller/owner of chicken’ |
| 6 | O + ní + afára prefix have bridge | Aláfára | ‘owner of bridge/bridge builder’ |
| 7 | O+ ní + àgúmu prefix have ground herb | Alágùnńmu | ‘seller/owner of ground herb’ |
| 8 | O+ ní + àgbèdẹ prefix have forge | Alágbèdẹ | ‘a blacksmith’ |
| 9 | O + ní + àkàrà prefix have bean cake | Alákàrà | ‘the one who sells bean cake’ |
| 10 | O+ ní + àkùkọ prefix have cock | Alákùkọ | ‘owner /seller of cock’ |
| 11 | O + ní + àlùbòsà prefix have onion | Alálùbòsà | ‘the one who sells onion’ |
| 12 | O + ní + ànà+ mú Prefix have to beat capture | Alánàmú | ‘traditional title for one of the four principal war chiefs (Balógun) in Ilorin’ |
| 13 | O + ní + àngua prefix have compound (Hausa word) | Alàngua | ‘traditional title for the leader of a settlement’ |
| 14 | O+ ní + àrán prefix have damask | Alàrán-án | ‘owner/seller of damask |
| 15 | O+ní + aró prefix have dye | Aláró | ‘seller of dye’ |
| 16 | O+ ní + așọ prefix have cloth | Aláșọ | ‘owner/seller of cloth’ |
| 17 | O+ ní + așẹ prefix have sieve | Aláșẹ | ‘owner of sieve’ |
| 18 | O+ ní + ata prefix have pepper | Aláta | ‘owner/seller of pepper’ |

| | | | |
|----|---|---------------|--|
| 19 | O+ ní + atare prefix have alligator pepper | Alátare | ‘owner/ seller of alligator pepper’ |
| 20 | O+ ní + àtiṣe | Alátiṣe | ‘the one who knows how to handle his problem’ |
| 21 | O+ní + awo prefix have skin | Aláwo | ‘owner/seller of animal skin’ |
| 22 | O+ní + àyà prefix have chest | Aláyà | ‘the brave one’ |
| 23 | O+ní + ayé prefix have world | Aláyé | ‘owner of the world’ |
| 24 | O+ ní + bàntẹ prefix have male-underwear | Oníbàntẹ | ‘owner of male underwear’ |
| 25 | O+ ní +epo prefix have palm oil | Elépo | owner/seller of palm oil’ |
| 26 | O+ ní + erèè prefix have beans | Elérèè | ‘owner/seller of beans’ |
| 27 | O+ní + ewùrẹ prefix have goat | Eléwùrẹ | ‘seller/owner of goat’ |
| 28 | O+ ní + èfọ prefix have vegetable | Elẹfọ | ‘owner/seller of vegetables’ |
| 29 | O + ní + èhá prefix have seclusion | Elẹháà | ‘a woman that covers her face and body’ |
| 30 | O+ ní + ẹja prefix have fish | Elẹja | ‘fish seller/owner’ |
| 31 | O+ ní + ẹkọ Prefix have pap | Elẹkọ | ‘pap seller/owner’ |
| 32 | O+ní + ẹṣin prefix have horse | Elẹṣin | ‘owner/rider of horse’ |
| 33 | O + ní + ẹran prefix have goat | Elẹran | ‘the one who owns or sells goat’ |
| 34 | O + ní + ẹrú prefix have slave | Elẹrú | ‘slaves merchant/ owner’ |
| 35 | O + ní + ẹrù + kan + filà prefix have load one cap | Elẹrùkan-filà | ‘the one that wears a special cap’ |

| | | | |
|----|--|----------------|--|
| 36 | O+ní + ẹ̀tù prefix have dark-blue cloth | Ẹ̀lẹ̀tù | the owner/seller of dark-blue cloth (a revered traditional type of cloth that is used during important celebration). |
| 37 | O+ ní + ẹ̀wù prefix have cloth | Ẹ̀lẹ̀wù | ‘owner of cloth’ |
| 38 | O+ní + ẹ̀wù-ẹ̀tù prefix have a revered traditional type of cloth that is used during important celebration. | Ẹ̀lẹ̀wù-ẹ̀tù | the owner/seller of a revered traditional type of cloth that is used during important celebration. |
| 39 | O + ní + gùgùrú prefix have pop-corn | Onígùgùrú | ‘pop-corn seller’ |
| 40 | O + ní + gbàjámò prefix have razor | Onígbàjámò | ‘barber’ |
| 41 | O + ní + ìlú prefix + have + town | Onílúú | ‘the one who owns the town’ |
| 42 | O+ ní + ìlù prefix have drum | Onílù | ‘drummer’ |
| 43 | O + ní + iyò prefix have salt | Oníyò | ‘owner/ seller of salt’ |
| 44 | O + ní + kàngù | Oníkàngù | ‘seller of kangu (Kangu is a type of food that is popular in the Northern part of the country’ |
| 45 | O+ ní + kánhún prefix have potash | Oníkánhún | ‘seller of potash’ |
| 46 | O+ní + kókó prefix have cocoa | Oníkókó | ‘cocoa farmer/seller’ |
| 47 | O+ní + làbídùn prefix have date-palm | Alábìdun | ‘seller of date-palm’ |
| 48 | O + ní + ilé + mārùn-un prefix have house five | Onílé-mārùn-ún | ‘the one that owns five house’ |

| | | | |
|----|---|-------------|---|
| 49 | O + ní + mágó prefix have mago | Onímágó | ‘seller of mago which is a type of food popular in the North’ |
| 50 | O+ ní + mósà prefix have a fried food made from corn | Onímósà | ‘someone that sells mósà’ |
| 51 | O+ ní + obì prefix have kolanut | Olóbì | ‘seller/owner or kolanut’ |
| 52 | O+ní + òdodo prefix have truth | Olódodo | ‘the truthful one/a nickname for Abubakar’ |
| 53 | O + ní + odù + owó prefix have pot money | Olódù-owó | ‘the one with enormous wealth’ |
| 54 | O+ ní + ogele prefix have ogele | Ológele | ‘a nickname for Shuaib’ |
| 55 | O+ní + ohun + oyin prefix have voice honey | Olóhùnoyin | ‘the man with the golden voice’ |
| 56 | O + ní + owó | Olówó | ‘a rich man/woman’ |
| 57 | O+ní + oyin prefix have honey | Olóyin | ‘seller/owner of honey’ |
| 58 | O + ní + oḡbà prefix have garden | Ọlọḡbà | ‘the one who owns the garden’ |
| 59 | O+ ní + ọ̀jẹ̀ prefix have masquerade | Olọ̀jẹ̀ | ‘the masquerader’ |
| 60 | Oní + ọ̀kà prefix have white amala | Ọlọ̀kà | ‘seller of a type amala made from cassava’ |
| 61 | Oní + ọ̀kò prefix have car | Ọlọ̀kò | ‘driver/owner of a car’ |
| 62 | O+ ní+ ọ̀kọ́-ńlá prefix have hoe big | Ọlọ̀kọ́-ńlá | ‘a commercial farmer’ |
| 63 | O + ní + ọ̀sàn prefix have orange | Ọlọ̀sàn | ‘the one who sells orange’ |
| 64 | O + ní + ọ̀mọ́dá prefix have good child | Olọ̀mọ́dá | ‘the good child’ |

| | | | |
|----|---|-----------|---|
| 65 | O + ní + ọmọọba prefix have prince | Olọmọọba | 'the one from the royal family' |
| 66 | Oní + ọrọ prefix have wealth | Ọlọrọ | 'a wealthy or rich man or woman of a car' |
| 67 | O + ní + sèsé prefix have sese | Onísèsé | 'the one who sells sèsé' |
| 68 | O+ ní + túwó prefix have grinded corn meal | Onítúwó | 'seller of grinded corn meal' |
| 69 | O+ ní + wírìdì prefix have wiridi | Oníwírìdì | 'a wiridi performer' |
| 70 | O + ní + yangí prefix have laterite red rock | Oníyangí | 'owner/seller of laterite red rock' |

Challenges in Developing Teaching Materials for Specific Purposes in the Yoruba Language

Oluwaseyi Fasunhan

Abstract

This study investigates the challenges in developing Yoruba language for specific purposes (YLSP) teaching materials. Developing authentic materials for specific purposes in the Yoruba language in various fields/professions such as engineering, healthcare, tourism, aviation, etc., is crucial to increasing and sustaining students' motivation in learning the Yorùbá language. Previous studies in the Yoruba language mainly focused on creating terminologies in some fields like medicine, engineering physics, legislative proceedings, building construction, etc. Despite these works, attention is not given to a comprehensive study of creating materials for specific purposes in the Yoruba language. Employing a qualitative approach, this study collected data through interviews with material developers and language educators, observations of existing language teaching practices, and a critical review of available Yoruba language resources. Findings reveal that inadequate research, non-availability of materials, needs in the context of use, colonialism, and lack of sufficient teachers in language fields are the problems currently facing material development in the Yoruba language for specific purposes. Proposed solution includes conducting needs analysis, developing curriculum that meets specific needs of the students, and amendments of government policies on indigenous languages. The pedagogical implication is that robust YLSP material development can significantly boost student enrollment and motivation, thereby enhancing the value and status of the Yoruba language in education and beyond.

Keywords: Yoruba language, Specific Purposes, Material development, Motivation, Need Analysis

Introduction

Developing materials in the Yoruba language for specific purposes is essential in learning Yoruba as a second language because it will promote the value of the language. This may seem new to the Yoruba learning circle, but it is important to develop materials for specific purposes to stimulate students' interest in acquiring the Yoruba language. This will also

sustain their motivation. Just as English for Specific Purposes developed after World War II and emerged as a language of power because of its functions (Starfield, 2016:151), we can also have a field for teaching the Yoruba language for specific purposes. This will increase the value of the Yoruba language and make the language prestigious.

The missionaries contributed to an aspect of the emergence of Yoruba for specific purposes when an attempt was made to put the Yoruba language into writing. They produced religious materials in journals and daily/bi-weekly newspapers because they were looking for a way to spread the gospel. Henry Townsend who is an English clergyman (Johnson, 1921: xxiii) made the first attempt to reduce the Yoruba language writing by creating the Yorùbá alphabet. Afterward, he began to write poems about the gospel in a Yoruba News paper called Akede Eko. We also have various scholars that have worked on Yoruba grammar, literature, and culture but there is no robust work on specific areas of study that can motivate more students to learn and acquire the language for professional fields. The most common concept in the available Yoruba textbooks that I classified under tourism is the greetings, shopping, and daily interaction with friends and family. I observed that there are no materials in specific fields on the Yoruba language except for the scripture that we have for Christian and traditional religion in the Yoruba language. In this study, I will address this issue by analyzing the interviews that I had with the participants.

Literature Review

Existing works on specific areas in material development have focused on creating materials on terminologies in some specific fields like engineering, legislative terms, medicine, etc. We also have several scholars that have worked on Yoruba dictionaries and religious books. Such scholars include Delana (1958), Abraham (1958), Yai (1996), and Fakindele (2003). We also have the encyclopedia of the Yoruba by Falola and Akinyemi (2016) and a dictionary of the Yoruba language by the Church Missionary Society (2012).

The works mentioned so far have focused on the translation and meaning of English words into the Yoruba language. Another related work is Yoruba Metalanguage I and II by Bamgbose (1984) and Awobuluyi (1990) which is a glossary of English-Yoruba technical terms in language, and literature. Books that serve for teaching Yoruba traditional religion include Abimbola (1969), Babalola and Jeje (1969), Samadhi (1993). Olupona (2017) works on developing Yoruba terminologies for diseases. His work is an attempt to create terms for some diseases in the Yoruba language. Furthermore, materials that are commonly used for teaching Yoruba second language learners are always filled with basic concepts like greetings, expressions, grammar, names of professions, Yoruba vocabularies etc. The scholars that have worked on that are Schleicher (1993 and 1998), Crowther (2011), Adeleke (2011), Mosadomi (2014), McClure, and Oyewale (2016).

To explore more data on the challenges that are facing the development of materials for specific purposes in the Yoruba language, I have been observing the kind of materials that are being used to teach the Yoruba language both online and in person.

These materials are largely books from scholars like Odunjo (1949), Awobuluyi (1978), Bamgbose (1990), and some other books that have been in existence for a long period. The new dispensation of books that are employed in teaching the Yoruba language to second language learners in this era includes online language books like *Yorùbá Yé mi* (Mosadomi, 2014) and other free online language resources.

In addition, we have the book called *Jé k'á sọ Yorùbá*, and *Jé k'á ka Yorùbá*, by Schleicher (1993 & 1998). These books focus on developing speaking, reading, and writing competence. For listening, the African language resource center at Indiana University has some open materials that can be used by Yoruba second language learners¹. I also observed that the materials have almost the same content, and most materials focused on concepts like greetings, shopping, and some basic grammar.

Current Study

This study investigates the challenges inherent in developing Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes (YLSP) teaching materials. By employing a qualitative methodology involving interviews, observations, and a review of existing Yoruba language resources, this research aims to:

1. Identify the challenges facing the development of materials for specific purposes in the Yoruba language.
2. Propose strategies to foster and encourage the creation of such materials for the Yoruba language.

Methodology

Data Collection

A qualitative approach was employed with emphasis on data collection through interviews, observation, and review of existing materials on the Yoruba language. To collect the data, a questionnaire with 8 questions were developed to obtain Yorùbá language teachers and material developers experiences to examine the problems that are facing materials development for specific purposes in the Yoruba language. The participants are three Yoruba teachers and materials/resources developers from different Universities in the United States.

The interview was conducted virtually via Zoom with 1 participant, and via email with the other 2 participants. The virtual interview was conducted with the participant that works at an African language resource center at a University in the United States, and it took about an hour because of some follow-up questions. Informed consent was given by the participant to record during the interview. The other participants answered the questions in a Word document, and they sent it via email.

Existing Materials

Existing works in the Yoruba language were also examined to explore the problems facing the development of materials for teaching the Yoruba language in specific areas. As I pointed out in section 1.1, we have some materials that are being used in teaching the Yoruba second language learners. Apart from Yorùbá Yé mi, Jẹ́ ká sọ Yorùbá, Jẹ́ ká ka Yorùbá, and Jẹ́ ká kọ Yorùbá, we have a lot of materials (soft and hard materials) that are used in teaching the Yoruba language. We also have materials that are used via technology-assisted learning platforms like mobile phones, computers, and applications like YouTube. Despite the extensive materials that are available for teaching and learning the Yoruba language, there are limited textbooks for specific purposes in the Yoruba language. The only areas where we have some materials for specific purposes in the Yoruba language are the social/communicative aspect and the religious aspect (Christianity and the Yorùbá Traditional Religion).

Results: Challenges in Developing Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes Materials

This section addresses the first research question by detailing the key challenges hindering the development of YLSP materials, as revealed through interviews with Yoruba language educators and material developers, supplemented by a review of existing literature.

Inadequate Specialized Research

A primary barrier to YLSP material development is the scarcity of targeted pedagogical research. As Participant A cogently articulated:

“There is a severe lack of specialized research in developing specific purpose materials for Yoruba language, particularly for fields like business, aviation, or law. Most existing studies stop at just listing terminologies.”

This observation is echoed in the literature, where much of the scholarly effort related to specific domains in Yoruba has historically focused on creating metalanguage and specialized dictionaries rather than comprehensive teaching materials. For instance, Olupona’s (2017) work on disease terminology and the “Metalanguage” series by Awobuluyi (1990) and Bamgbose (1984) are invaluable for lexical expansion. However, these resources, while foundational, do not translate directly into pedagogical materials that equip second language learners with the functional language skills needed for professional contexts. Current Yoruba textbooks for second language learners predominantly feature general communicative content—such as greetings, shopping, and daily interactions with virtually no materials dedicated to specific subject areas like engineering, law, aviation,

banking, or stock exchange.

Limited Availability and Accessibility of Existing Materials

The scarcity of materials extends beyond the lack of specialized research to the non-availability and accessibility of existing resources. Participant B lamented that, “There is limited availability of even general teaching materials.”

Citing the scarcity of useful textbooks like *Jẹ́ ká sọ Yorùbá*, *Jẹ́ ká ka Yorùbá*, and *Jẹ́ ká kọ Yorùbá*. She emphasized that these materials, though beneficial for their communicative activities and role-plays, are not in the market, which severely limits student access.

While these books are effective for developing basic communicative competence, they do not address specific professional or academic domains. This issue highlights a dual challenge: not only are comprehensive YLSP materials largely absent, but even valuable general resources struggle with distribution and accessibility, hindering teaching and learning processes.

Perceived Lack of Need in Context of Use

A significant challenge identified by participants is the perceived lack of contextual need for YLSP materials, both within Nigeria and in the diaspora. Participant C, who works at a language resource center, asserted that, “There are no efforts being made to create materials for specific purposes because there is simply no demand for teaching Yoruba in certain specialized fields.”

This perception stems from the current linguistic landscape where, for instance, the Nigerian banking industry predominantly conducts transactions in English. While bankers may code-mix or switch to Yoruba for customers who do not understand English, the overall communication is maintained through English, often facilitated by bilingual staff or interpreters. This socio-economic reality, heavily influenced by Nigeria’s colonial legacy, reduces the necessity for specific Yoruba banking materials. Similarly, in the diaspora, students’ immediate needs often revolve around general communication for family ties or cultural engagement, rather than professional application. The argument here is that the environment in Nigeria currently does not provide sufficient opportunities for professionals to extensively use Yoruba in specific subject areas, thus reducing the motivation for material developers to create them. This perspective, while reflecting current realities, underscores the complex interplay between language use, economic utility, and material development.

Impact of Colonialism and English Language Hegemony

Colonialism continues to exert a profound influence on the status and development of the Yoruba language, particularly concerning specific purpose materials. Nigeria’s adoption of English as its lingua franca post-colonization has led to the prioritization

of English language in official, professional, and educational domains. As Starfield (2016) notes, English's global power, often perceived as a "language of oppression and subjugation," has been reinforced by the political and economic influence of its native speakers (Ayeomoni, 2012). This societal prestige assigned to English often positions it as a measure of intelligence and a gateway to socio-economic advancement (Ayeomoni, 2012:15). Consequently, the Yoruba language is often relegated to a lower value status, diminishing the motivation for material developers and researchers to invest in creating specialized YLSP resources. The prevailing belief is that English is enough to achieving life aspirations, further strengthening its dominance.

Shortage of Passionate and Specially Trained Teachers/ Researchers

The development of YLSP materials is also hampered by a perceived shortage of teachers and researchers deeply committed to and specifically trained in Yoruba language for specific purposes. While Nigeria does produce trained Yoruba teachers (many with university degrees), a broader societal trend, often linked to the low value placed on indigenous languages, results in fewer individuals pursuing extensive Yoruba studies, especially beyond general communication. This can lead to situations where some schools, particularly at lower levels, may assign Yoruba teaching to unqualified personnel; qualified teachers may lack specific training in Language for Specific purpose pedagogy or material development for specialized domains, and research interests among Yoruba language scholars may not gravitate towards YLSP due to perceived lack of demand or institutional support. As Participant A candidly stated:

“Teachers who are not interested in the Yoruba language at heart can never think of using materials in specific fields or teaching specific subject areas to students. It is only teachers that have a passion for the Yoruba language that always have an interest in teaching Yoruba for specific purposes.”

This highlights that while general training exists, the specialized passion and expertise needed for YLSP innovation are less common, impacting both material creation and its integration into the curriculum.

Inadequate Government Policy Support

Government policies on indigenous languages constitute a significant barrier to YLSP material development. As Ayeomoni (2012:16) argues, institutional policies of government ministries, educational bodies, and media profoundly influence language functions. The Nigerian government's failure to consistently assign important roles to the Yoruba language across various sectors (e.g., law, business, media, engineering) directly impedes the motivation to develop specialized materials. Government publications

are predominantly in English. While some state governments, like Lagos and Oyo, nominally adopt Yoruba for legislative proceedings, this is often limited to specific days e.g., Lagos State House of Assembly uses Yoruba on Thursdays², while Oyo State uses it only on Wednesdays³, using English on other days. This sporadic and limited official use undermines the perceived utility of Yoruba in professional contexts, making the development of comprehensive YLSP materials seem less urgent or viable.

Strategies for Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes (YLSP) Material Development

Addressing the challenges outlined in the previous section requires several approaches involving various stakeholders. This section outlines key strategies to encourage and facilitate the development of YLSP materials.

Curriculum and Syllabus Development

A fundamental step is the development of robust and responsive curricula. As Tanner and Tanner (1980:25) define, curriculum encompasses “planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes,” while Mulenga (2018:3) describes it as the “program of education.” For this study, curriculum development refers to the comprehensive planning, organization, and implementation of course designs, lessons, and supporting materials. Purita, P et al (2008) affirm that most of the traditional ideas view curriculum as written documents or a plan of action in accomplishing goals.

The process of curriculum development for YLSP must be a collaborative effort involving researchers, Yoruba language teachers, and government/institutional education policymakers. Too often, particularly in developing countries, teachers are excluded from this vital process despite their frontline experience with student needs and their role in setting language course goals. Integrating their perspectives is essential for ensuring that the curriculum accurately reflects student needs and facilitates the inclusion of specific-purpose materials. The syllabus, as a direct articulation of the curriculum’s implementation, should then explicitly outline how YLSP content will be integrated, ensuring a clear path from broader educational intentions to specific classroom activities and material selection (Mulenga, 2018:3).

Comprehensive Needs Analysis

Central to effective YLSP material development is conducting thorough needs analyses. Authentic materials must be designed to directly address the specific communicative needs of learners. While acknowledging that YLSP cannot replicate the global utility of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)—which encompasses domains like English for medical, legal, scientific, or academic purposes due to English’s global dominance post-WWII (Starfield, 2016:150-151)—Yoruba language teachers and researchers must collaborate to identify the practical and aspirational needs of second

language learners.

For instance, students might learn Yoruba for relationship purposes, tourism, or religious engagement. A learner-centered approach dictates that materials should be tailored to these identified needs. To ascertain these diverse requirements, systematic surveys of second language learners can be conducted to classify their specific linguistic demands. This data can then inform the development of targeted materials and course syllabus.

Fostering Collaboration and Capacity Building

A collaborative effort among material developers, researchers, Yoruba teachers, and even professionals from various subject-matter fields is critical. This interdisciplinary approach can lead to a deeper understanding of specific domain requirements and the co-creation of relevant materials.

Furthermore, a key recommendation is to train instructors in YLSP material development. Beyond general language pedagogy, equipping teachers with the skills to design and adapt specific purpose materials empowers them to address emerging student needs directly. This capacity building is vital for pushing back against existing curriculum practices that do not adequately cater to specialized language use.

Institutional Support and Resource Development

Institutions offering Yoruba language instruction, both in Nigeria and abroad, have a crucial role to play in fostering YLSP material development. While some U.S. institutions like the University of Texas (Yoruba Ye Mi), Indiana University, and Michigan State University (through their open resources work with Foreign Language Teaching Assistants) provide valuable general online resources, and other open resources for African languages. These typically lack specific-purpose content.

Institutions should conduct their own needs analyses of their student populations and invest in designing targeted materials. This could include developing resources based on real-world content such as news reports, children's programs, and games, alongside activity books that enhance active learning. Collaboration between university language departments and professional faculties (e.g., business schools, law schools) could lead to the creation of field-specific Yoruba materials. For example, partnering with the aviation industry to develop Yoruba versions of flight announcements and safety guides, as famously demonstrated by Captain Bamise of Delta Airlines⁴, could prove highly effective for specific audiences.

Advocating for Robust Government Policy Reforms

Ultimately, comprehensive government policies are essential to elevate the status and use of the Yoruba language across educational and professional sectors, particularly in Southwestern Nigeria. Current practices, such as the limited use of Yoruba for legislative

proceedings (e.g., Lagos State House of Assembly on Thursdays and Oyo State House of Assembly on Wednesdays), are insufficient.

Policy should encourage and mandate the use of Yoruba as a medium of instruction in core subjects like Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Accounting, and vocational fields. This would not only demonstrate the language's utility but also significantly motivate students by highlighting its practical value. By embedding Yoruba in critical domains, such policies would spur the creation of much-needed specific-purpose materials in areas like tourism, religion, politics, and law, thereby enhancing the language's overall value and societal respect.

Limitations of the Study

This study, while providing valuable initial insights into YLSP material development, has several limitations. First, the sample size of participants was restricted, with only three individuals responding out of eight contacted, primarily due to time constraints. Consequently, the findings are based on the experiences of a small group of Yoruba language teachers and material developers, supplemented by my own observations and teaching experience in both U.S. and Nigerian contexts. This limits the generalization of the findings to a broader population of educators and developers.

Second, there is a shortage of existing literature specifically addressing the development of comprehensive Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes materials. While this limitation is itself a key finding of the study, it meant that the literature review relied heavily on related fields (e.g., terminology development) rather than direct parallels. This lack of prior research might stem from the perceived low demand for such materials, as noted by one of the participants. Future research would benefit from a larger and more diverse participant pool and a deeper exploration of emerging YLSP initiatives if they arise.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the current state and future potential of Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes (YLSP) material development. The challenges identified, ranging from inadequate research and limited material availability to the pervasive effects of colonialism, perceived lack of contextual need, and issues related to teacher training and government policy, collectively underscore the complex socio-linguistic and pedagogical landscape for Yoruba.

Enhancing Student Motivation and Engagement

A key implication of developing YLSP materials, grounded in a thorough needs analysis, is their profound impact on student motivation and engagement. When a curriculum and syllabus are tailored to meet learners' specific linguistic goals (e.g., for tourism, business, or religious purposes), students are more likely to perceive the immediate

relevance and utility of their language studies. This alignment between instruction and learner aspirations can significantly boost intrinsic motivation, as confirmed by educational theories emphasizing learner-centered approaches (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985, Self-Determination Theory). For instance, a student learning Yoruba for family communication might find highly relevant a unit on kinship terms and family dynamics, which is often underrepresented in general textbooks. As Participant A suggested, “When students see that the language can help them in their specific chosen fields or interests, their motivation skyrockets.”

Restructuring Teaching and Learning Processes

The availability of well-designed YLSP materials can also transform the teaching experience. Teachers would no longer need to spend extensive time adapting generic materials or struggling to bridge the gap between general language skills and specific communicative needs. Instead, they could focus on developing and implementing effective tasks and activities directly aligned with specific instructional areas. This not only makes teaching more efficient but also allows for more focused and impactful instruction, directly addressing learning outcomes.

Elevating the Status and Value of Yorùbá Language

Beyond individual classroom benefits, the successful development and integration of YLSP materials have broader implications for the status and value of the Yoruba language itself. By demonstrating Yoruba’s capacity to function effectively in professional, academic, and specific social domains, these materials can challenge the prevailing perception of its limited utility, a perception often exacerbated by the historical impact of colonialism and the dominance of English. As more students enroll in Yoruba programs driven by specific interests, and as the language is successfully applied in new contexts, the demand for and prestige of Yoruba in various institutions of learning and professional sectors are likely to increase. This contributes to the broader decolonization of the curriculum movement, positioning African languages as viable tools for diverse intellectual and practical pursuits. The experiences shared by participants underscore that visible utility is a powerful driver for language growth and development.

Conclusion

This study has provided critical insights into the various challenges hindering the development of Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes (YLSP) teaching materials. Our findings reveal a complex interplay of systemic issues, including a significant lack of specialized research, the limited availability and accessibility of existing resources, a prevailing perception of insufficient contextual need, the enduring legacy of colonialism, a shortage of passionately trained teachers and researchers in YLSP, and inadequate government policy support for indigenous languages.

To overcome these barriers, we propose a set of interconnected strategies: conducting rigorous needs analyses to align materials with learner goals, fostering comprehensive curriculum and syllabus development that explicitly incorporates YLSP, promoting robust collaboration among educators, researchers, and material developers, ensuring sustained institutional support for YLSP initiatives, and advocating for more impactful government policy reforms that elevate the functional status of the Yoruba language. By embracing these recommendations, the field can cultivate a more dynamic and responsive Yoruba language pedagogy, ultimately enhancing student motivation and positioning Yoruba as a vibrant language capable of addressing diverse communicative needs in a globalized world.

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Endnotes

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Pushing the Boundaries of Learning Materials in African Languages Instructions

Adeola Agoke

Abstract

African language instruction, especially those that target foreign language learners, have mostly relied on language dictionaries as an important reference material. Despite the relevance of dictionaries to language learning, the design of dictionaries based on learners' proficiency has not gained much attention in African language instruction. Focusing on Yorùbá language pedagogy, I draw on Robert Lew's perspective of factoring the target users characteristics into the design of dictionaries (Lew, 2015, p. 2) to examine the methodic processes of harnessing organized vocabulary of Yoruba and the attendant pronunciation of the words to address the challenge around tones, and contextualized learning of Yoruba words. This paper deconstructs the idea of context, as conceived within the dictionary genre, to repurpose it for proficiency-based language learning. While dictionaries are important reference materials in foreign language learning, they should be developed to respond to learners' proficiency needs using technological tools supported by the appropriate theories and methods of foreign language instruction.

Dictionaries: A Learning Reference Re-Envisioned for African Language Learning

A ubiquitous description of a dictionary refers to a text with compiled, organized vocabulary translated in at least one language and supported with sample sentences and categorization of grammar. In Kushenova's words, to develop a dictionary is to embark on a rare aspect of the linguistic study of etymology (2021, 1). Most dictionaries are bilingual with meaning translations that are either reception or production oriented, "depending on whether they emphasize helping the user to either grasp the meaning of foreign words (reception), or finding the proper way to express ideas in the foreign language (production) (Kaalep & Mikk, 2008, p. 372). Regarding second language learning, scholars have also linked the understanding of vocabulary to reading practice and dictionary use (Lupescu & Day, 1993). Over the years, dictionaries have been the tool that many language users who are either already proficient in the language or have some stability in navigating the language utilize as a reference material. With it, users expand their knowledge of the vocabulary in the language or double-check the meaning of ambiguous words or words

that have other uses.

Existing works in many African language dictionaries are commendable. Languages such as Swahili have developed various dictionary learning materials, including the *Standard Swahili-English Dictionary* (Johnson, 1998) and the *English-Swahili Pocket Dictionary* (Safari, 1996). Other available Kiswahili online dictionaries are Kiswahili-English Dictionary on the apps store and apps on Google Play. Dictionaries also exist in Isizulu, Yoruba, Wolof, and many other African languages. The *Oxford First Bilingual English-Zulu Dictionary* (Paizee & D, 2012), *English Yoruba, Yoruba –English Modern Practical Dictionary* (Fakinlede, 2003) *Proficiency-Based Dictionary of Yoruba Language* (Author, 2024), *Modern Yoruba Dictionary: English-Yoruba, Yoruba-English* (kasahorow, 2013), *Wolof-English-English-Wolof Dictionary and Phrase Book* (Kantorek, 2005) and many more. Efforts have also been geared towards developing many grammar textbooks to support the dictionary materials, which are published in print or made available online.

The “Proficiency-Based Dictionary of Yoruba” (Author, 2024) builds on these existing works to push the boundaries of how dictionaries are structured and engaged for foreign language learning. With a focus on the Yoruba language, three important gaps are identified: (a) providing dictionary contents that attend to the proficiency needs of foreign language learners (b) engaging technology as a tool to address the challenge associated with tones and pronunciation in the Yoruba language (c) re-conceptualizing context within the dictionary genre. I discuss each of the identified gap in light of the Proficiency-Based Dictionary Project and explicate the possibilities of expanding boundaries, access, and contextualized language learning in African language instruction. I argue that existing structures that are associated with specific textbook genres, such as dictionaries, can be re-envisioned to address learning gaps and the language needs of foreign language learners.

Dictionaries and the Proficiency Needs of African Language Learners

Dictionaries of world languages typically provide organized lexicons of a language along with their pronunciations and meanings. Sample sentences and grammatical constructions that explicate the use of some words are also included to provide context of usage and grammatical knowledge of the language. From a functional perspective, the structure and content of dictionaries of diverse languages have, over time, served the language needs of everyday language users, but without much attention to foreign learners of a language, especially less commonly taught languages. As indicated in Lew’s work, the strategy that has been used in monolingual dictionaries, namely, “controlled list of vocabulary items,” has been engaged to provide learners with ordinary, everyday common words (2015, p. 4). This approach, according to Lew, removes the challenge of introducing learners to too many unfamiliar words. While the use of a controlled list of vocabularies by lexicographers is useful, structuring learning dictionaries based on theoretically-driven guidelines of foreign language proficiency is very relevant to African language instruction. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

(ACTFL, 2012, 2024) provides the framework for understanding learners' proficiency and learning evidence, namely function and tasks; accuracy; context and content; and text type (FACT). Within this paradigm, a learner's proficiency is assessed in relation to the functions they can perform in the language.

To function in a language implies the ability to produce specific communicative and grammatically accurate content, either in written or oral form (ACTFL 2024, 5). This perspective on the assessment of language learning drives the development and organization of the Pedagogy-Based Dictionary of Yoruba. Myriam Met & Michael Byram's (1999, p. 63) distinction between content and performance standards as what learners should be able to know versus how well a learner is expected to master aspects of a language provides additional insights into the Proficiency-Based Dictionary of Yoruba Language. Using the ACTFL proficiency guidelines (2012, 2024), I developed the contents and structure of the *Proficiency-Based Dictionary of Yoruba* to align with the proficiency grid of assessment of foreign language learning. With specific attention to elementary proficiency of Yoruba, which ranges from the novice low to novice high/intermediate low, the Yoruba proficiency-based dictionary is structured based on the can-do statements of the elementary proficiency and the attending learning contents—vocabulary and grammar notes—within each of the chapters (Secules et al., 1992, p. 480). The can-do statements also provide learners with a threshold of performance measurements, which puts the organized vocabulary in the dictionary within the proficiency level of the learners. Based on this methodic organization of the learning contents, the *Proficiency-Based Dictionary of Yoruba* is not simply a language learning reference material but a learning resource with a measured aggregate of the vocabulary content that learners are exposed to based on their proficiency level. Because the dictionary is driven by learners' proficiency, the targeted functions that learners are expected to perform in the language also prepare them for real-world tasks in the target language.

The ACTFL performance descriptors for language learners (ACTFL, 2023, p. 5) provide details of the expected language output of learners across different proficiency levels. And by performance, the descriptors imply the “language ability that has been practiced and is within familiar contexts and content areas.” As a result, the immediate focus of the proficiency-based dictionary of the Yoruba language is the performance descriptors of beginning learners of Yoruba. As indicated in the performance descriptor, language learning is complex, and the modality by which learners learn, cognitive factors relating to age, and the environment of learning, such as the classroom setting or immersion in the cultural setting, are very important factors that determine learners' experiences (ACTFL, p. 2). Regardless of the learning environment or setting, the *Proficiency-Based Dictionary of Yoruba* constitutes a very rich language learning resource grounded in foreign language teaching methods. This dictionary, therefore, provides elementary learners of Yoruba with the tools to learn the vocabulary of the language and their use in real-world situations while considering the learner's proficiency needs in the language. Beginning learners of Yoruba using the proficiency-based dictionary can do or talk about topics such as social introductions, asking and answering simple questions,

ordering a simple meal, talking about self, family and others, talking about familiar topics that extend beyond daily routines, and more. (cf. Author, 2024). In each chapter of the dictionary, words are organized alphabetically alongside their meanings, word category, audio pronunciation, and embedded audiovisuals demonstrating functional use of the language in the target culture. Each lexical item is furnished with an audio component that learners can click on to hear isolated vocabulary so they can acquire skills for the correct pronunciation of Yorùbá words. While each of the listed words has English translations, users of the dictionary also have the option to click on the translations of the monologues and dialogues of the audiovisuals across the chapters. The dictionary also offers H5P and communicative activities for practice. The grammar notes at the end of each chapter provide additional guidance on the structure of the Yorùbá language.

Although the African language of focus in this grand project is Yoruba, it targets beginner learners who may have begun their learning at the novice level but will advance their proficiency in the language to reach the intermediate level. The template of this project will also be used to develop the intermediate-level proficiency of the dictionary learning content. Additionally, similar projects in Swahili, Wolof, Zulu, Akan Twi, and other African languages will also be developed as separate books but interlinked as a series.

The Structure of the Yoruba Language and the Methodic Organization of the Dictionary

World languages dictionaries thrive on organizational structures. Such organization begins with the layouts of contents in alphabetical order and followed by categorization of vocabulary into parts of speech, the definition of words and sample sentences. For languages with unique grammatical features such as tones and diacritics, the organization of dictionary contents prioritizes the appropriate tone placements, diacritics, and explanation of what each tone and diacritic implies in the target language. For example, all the diacritics used in the proficiency-based dictionary have interpretations. The three tones of the Yoruba language mark distinction in pronunciation and meaning. All subdots on the Yorùbá alphabet also indicate the Yoruba writing system. With an attention to the nuances of the Yorùbá writing system, each vocabulary is categorized by the part of speech, the meaning, and sample sentences. Because this dictionary provides in-depth insights into the Yoruba vocabulary and words that are being used in context, it will be reviewed and updated to reflect ongoing language practices in the target context. Such ongoing modifications and additions will provide learners with a continued understanding of Yoruba-language-in-use and the changes that impact the vocabulary words that are being created and/or reused among the speakers of the language. To make sense of the Yoruba tonal systems, the sounds and the processes of tone placements and interpretations are discussed below.

Vowels

Yoruba has a total of seven oral vowels and five nasal vowels. The nasal vowels are marked with an accompanying nasal consonant, /n/. For example, in words like wọn “they”; ìtàn “history”; ikùn “stomach.”

| Oral Vowels | Nasal Vowels |
|-------------|--------------|
| /a/ | /an/ |
| /e/ | |
| /ẹ/ | /ẹn/ |
| /i/ | /in/ |
| /o/ | |
| /ọ/ | /ọn/ |
| /u/ | /un/ |

The Yoruba Syllable Structure

Like many languages, understanding the vowel sounds is key to understanding the Yoruba syllable structure. In Yoruba phonology, syllables can occur as a stand-alone vowel, for example, /ẹ/ “you,” singular pronoun in the object position; /ẹ/ subject plural or honorific pronoun”; / ǐ / in words like ǐ-lù “drum”. Syllables can also occur as a sequence of consonant and vowel sounds in monosyllabic and disyllabic words. For example:

1. fò “to jump”
2. olùgbàlà «savior» with the syllables: o-lù-gbà-là

Consonants and Syllabic Consonants in Yorùbá

There are eighteen consonant sounds in the Yorùbá language. These consonants are integral to pronouncing and reading Yoruba words. /b/, /d/, /f/, /g/, /gb/, /h/, /j/, /k/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /r/, /s/, /ş/, /t/, /w/, /y/. It is important to note that the Yoruba language does not allow the sequence of consonants (consonant clusters) in a word, except if one of the contiguous consonants is syllabic. When such a sequence occurs in a word, it is called a **syllabic consonant**. Only two consonants, /n/ and /m/, can function as syllables in Yoruba. For example: In Bím-bólá, Bí-m-bọ-lá, a Yorùbá name that means “born into wealth,” /m/ is a syllabic consonant because it stands alone

as a syllable in the word. Similarly, /n/ in alàńgbá , a-lá-ń-gbá, “lizard, /n/ is a syllabic consonant because it stands alone as a syllable in the word.

Note: In Yorùbá syllable structure, nasal vowels are not the same as syllabic consonants. For example: The nasal vowel /in/ in i-rin “metal” is not a syllabic nasal but a combination of consonant /r/ followed by nasal vowel /in/.

Yoruba Tones

Yoruba has three tones, and all three tones occur in word syllables.

High: (ˊ)
 Low: (ˋ) and,
 Mid (-).

The high and low tones are marked using the corresponding diacritics in every syllable. However, the mid-tone is always unmarked. For example: In a word like “Adéṣlá,” the tones are carefully placed thus: A-dé-ṣ- lá, “ Adéṣlá. Note that the first and third syllables have mid tones, but they are not overtly marked using the mid-tone diacritic (-). Therefore, all vowels in Yorùbá words without tone marks are inherently carrying a mid-tone even when they are not marked in the words.

Tones in Yoruba are phonemic because they bring about a change in meaning. As a result, the correct pronunciation of words is extremely important for communicating accurate meaning in Yoruba. For example: Tones differentiate the meaning in these homographs sùn “sleep” versus sun “roast;” jó “dance” versus jó “burn.”

- Mo jó ní àsè ìgbéyàwó ọ̀rẹ̀ mí “I danced at my friend’s wedding party.”
- Oúnjẹ́ tí mo sè jó “The food I cooked got burnt”

Yorùbá does not use a glide tone on a single vowel sound. Instead, such sounds are repeated to articulate the glide as well as the corresponding tone marks. When there is a combination of tones on a singular sound, such sounds are written as multiple vowels with specific tone marks. Example are in words like: ọ̀lọ̀pàá, ọ̀-lọ̀-pà-á “police”; òórùn, ò-ó-rùn “smell”; dábàá, dá-bà-á “suggest.”

The order below shows how the contents in the Airtable are organized:

- a. The list of vocabulary that correlates with the can-do statement
- b. The corresponding recorded pronunciation of the words
- c. The part of speech or grammatical category of each of the words
- e. The English definitions of each vocabulary
- f. Sample Yorùbá sentences and the translation
- g. The colloquial form of some of the vocabulary and sample sentences, where

applicable.

To interpret abbreviations in the dictionary, specific abbreviations listed below indicate the parts of speech each vocabulary word is categorized.

Noun “n.”

Pronoun “pr.”

Verb “v.”

Adverb “adv.”

Adjective “adj.”

Preposition “prep”

Conjunction “ConJ.”

Question marker: “que. mk.”

Negation “neg.”

The Role of Technological Tools in Organizing the Dictionary Contents

The Proficiency-Based Dictionary of Yorùbá utilizes technology as a tool to respond to the gap in access to simultaneous audio pronunciation of vocabulary words in a Yoruba dictionary. Using appropriate technology also provides contextualized and functional use of the vocabulary in ways that carefully iterates the cultures of the language speakers. The organized vocabulary, along with the audio pronunciation and audiovisuals, are only made possible because of tools such as Airtable. The airtable is a versatile database that is suitable for organizing the vocabulary, which is also linked to external tools such as pressbook to allow for a seamless interaction of the vocabulary words of a language and the attendant pronunciation. Specifically, I utilized the Airtable software to organize the dictionary’s contents, which, although domiciled in the Airtable platform itself, are linked to an online open education resource on PressBook. All the vocabulary contents are organized to enable the user of the dictionary to produce words both in isolation and in Yoruba sentences while targeting ideas in the context of the specific focus of each section of the dictionary. As users access each vocabulary, they can also click on the audio-recorded pronunciation to hear each word and can repeat such for practice. While the sections of the airtable are structured using insights from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) can-do statements, each of the words listed across the different can-do-statements has a corresponding audio-recorded pronunciation. To access the pronunciation, learners are expected to click on the play button and listen to how each word is pronounced. They can also repeat the pronunciation as it is heard on the audio or self-record their effort to pronounce the words using their device. It is worthy of note that the recorded voice on the airtable will always be the learner’s point of reference in assessing the accuracy of their pronunciation. Additionally, words, phrases, and sample sentences are tailored to the novice, novice mid, and novice high elementary proficiency levels. Learners can search the different categories of parts of speech on the

airtable. For example, they may search all nouns in the entire dictionary or filter the search by the can-do statement.

H5P: A Tool for Creating Language Learning Activities

The pressbook is an online book publishing platform infused with the H5P tool used in activity design. This activity design is engaged in two different ways: First, as a tool to provide language transcript and translation in ways that motivate the learners to practice listening skills and attempt to use the language in speaking. Yet, it leaves room for fact-checking meaning by clicking on the translation button, which reveals the meaning in English language. Second, H5P makes the use of notecards in language learning handy and supported with the practice of pronunciations. Rather than the conventional use of notecards in hard copies, which of course has its value, learners using the Yorùbá Proficiency dictionary can now access notecards on their various devices, including phones, iPads, tablets, etc. With this, the dictionary is revolutionized in African language instructions.

Contextualized Audiovisuals with Grammar Notes

The combination of activities developed into the chapters of the dictionary constitutes the contexts created for users of the dictionary. Existing dictionaries have carefully curated sentence samples to provide context of usage for vocabulary words. While those samples are important to experimenting with the vocabulary in a dictionary, technology provides the tool to push the boundaries of context in the dictionary. The *Proficiency-Based Dictionary of Yorùbá* is an Open Education Resource (OER), which is available and accessible online. In it, the vocabularies listed for each can-do-statement are furnished with sample sentences, audio recordings of each word, a sample monologue, and dialogue, followed by a detailed explanation of grammatical concepts. These sentence constructions are exemplified in the sample audiovisuals to provide contexts to the use of the vocabulary words as well as to showcase the cultures of the Yorubas. The representations of contextualized language use and the target culture are critical to the presence of the Yorùbá language and culture in the global space. As a result, not only the language of the people is shared but also their cultures.

Additionally, with the use of appropriate technological tools, context within the dictionary genre is redefined. Unlike the popular contexts created through sample sentences in which speakers read through sample sentences to understand the use of vocabulary words, the *Proficiency-Based Dictionary of Yoruba* expands the idea of context to engage with dynamics of communicative functions using various modalities in which “Video allows second language learners to see the dynamics of inter- action in authentic setting” (Secules et al., 1992, p. 480). In this regard, context constitutes the

communication of meaning as defined by the understanding of the linguistic rhythm of the language exemplified through presentational and interactive audio-visuals. These forms of communication also infuse cultural understanding that is not only depicted in terms of vocabulary but also in motion and the use of cultural products and materials of the target culture. As a result, the dictionary becomes a window into understanding the target language and culture alongside the opportunity to practice the language in use.

The grammatical components of many African language dictionaries have mostly been engaged in terms of categorizations of grammar concepts alongside their definitions. Unfortunately, this existing approach of structuring the contents of a language dictionary does not leave enough room for a meaningful explanation of the grammar components of the language, especially based on the proficiency of the learners. The proficiency-based dictionary of Yorùbá takes a turn from this approach to provide grammatical explanations that are tailored to the proficiency needs of language users. Each of the can-do statements, driven by the ACTFL proficiency guidelines, is, therefore, laced with focused grammatical elements relevant to each of the chapters. The grammatical elements are then explained systematically to respond to the curiosity of elementary learners of the Yoruba language, thereby offering the learners insights into how grammatical rules inform word usage and sentence construction in Yorùbá.

Concluding Remarks

Dictionaries are important reference materials that are critical to language teaching and learning. The usefulness of dictionaries has been recognized as supporting materials that allow learners to not only learn the language but also navigate the language through self-study and attempts to practice the language using the meanings provided in a dictionary. The teaching of African languages as second and foreign languages requires the need to explore newer approaches to structuring and providing access to African language vocabulary based on learners' proficiency. Also, such approach should respond to the intricacies of specific African language, for example, tone and pronunciation of Yoruba words of an African language. As a result, dictionaries of an African language will be methodic as it factors the sequence of vocabulary organization to attend to what language learners can do in the language based on their proficiency. Providing learning tools to give learners access to learn and explore the language as they develop proficiency in the language would impact the students' learning experience. More importantly, dictionaries, when structured based on proficiency, become relatable and suitable for learning. The template provided in the Yoruba dictionary discussed in this paper could be adapted for other African languages. With such a template, African language dictionaries will own a theory-driven structure and will better attend to the needs of foreign learners of less commonly taught languages.

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