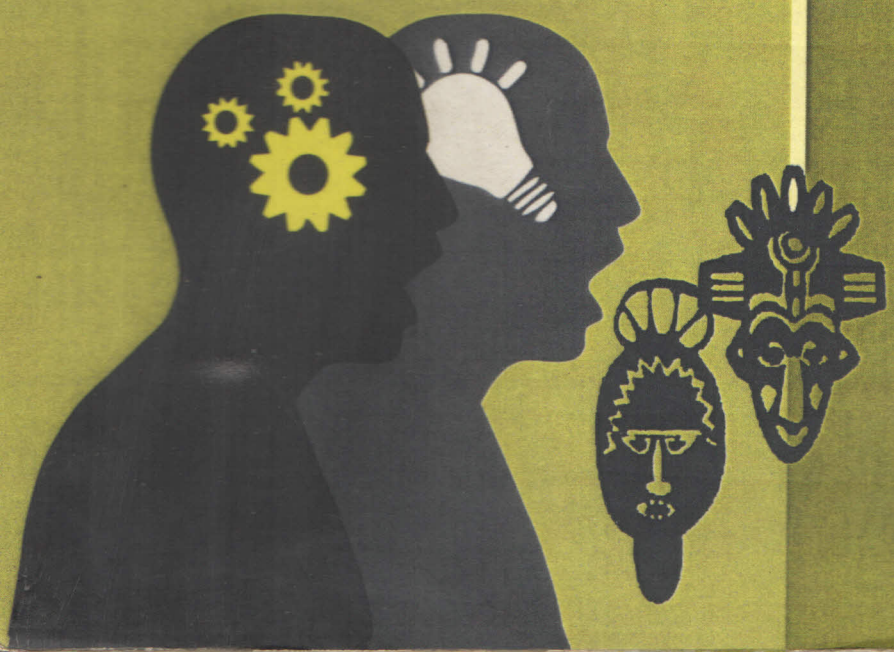
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Journal of Linguistics, Language and Culture (JoLLC) publishes research papers in linguistics, language and culture. It especially is interested in essays and studies that contribute to a better understanding of linguistics, language and culture in education. The journal also publishes critical reviews of books that contribute to knowledge in the areas of linguistics, language and culture. The number and the professional structure of the consulting editors correspond with the objectives and scope of the journal.

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Nigerian indigenous languages and the challenge of extinction: The Yorùbá language as a reference

Olúwọlé Tẹ́wọ́gboyè Òkéwándé

Generally, this paper addresses the present indigenous language situation in Nigeria, and in particular, the Yorùbá language, which is one of the three major languages in the country. Most of these indigenous languages are on the verge of extinction. For instance, a prominent Yorùbá king, Aláàfin of Ọ̀yọ́, Ọba Làmídì Adéyẹmí III, observes in a National daily (The Nation) of November 13th, 2013, that "Yorùbá language and culture faces the threat of extinction" (p.8). In a similar context, In The Nation cited above, Ohiri-Aniche alerted that "Although, some Nigerian languages, Igbo and Yorùbá, still have millions of adult speakers, they are nevertheless ranked in the category of endangered languages compiled by UNESCO, in about two to three generations (around 50 to 75 years' time), most Nigerian languages would have stepped into extinction, dead and buried forever" (p.13). Therefore, it is worth the trouble to 'rescue' the Yorùbá language from extinction in the nearest future. This work employs library methods by sourcing for the past relevant language policies with reference to the Yorùbá language in order to gain insights into the future problems and prospects in regards to the language. It is discovered that for the Yorùbá language to thrive and survive as a living language, previous language policies should be seen to be implemented and further pro-active language policies be put in place to protect the indigenous languages, in this case, the Yorùbá language from "being under fire". There should be additional constitution provision for protection of the Nigerian indigenous languages to survive and develop to meet the political, economic, social, scientific and technological needs of the country.

Introduction

Anthropologists see language as part of culture. Sociologists and the linguists argue on the "uniqueness" and "universality" of every language as being natural to human society because, an individual must be identified with a language Broom and Selznick (1977), Benedict (1988), Schaefer (1963), Awóbùlúyì (1991) and Adetugbọ (1982). According to Oyelaran (1988, p. 7) "language has been seen as the most distinctive of all the traits which separate human beings from any other being conceivable" This means that language serves as a distinctive element between human beings and all other creatures. Language further serves as a distinctive element among human race of the world. In other words, language is a means of human identification. Language gives awareness to individual culture. Mother tongue is one of the most powerful tools used to preserve culture. Children who are unaware of their culture, their language and history, will lose confidence in themselves, the family, society and the nation to which they belong and will have no other option but to seek an alternative identity. This alternative form of language identity will definitely leads to identity crisis; as such individual will neither belong here nor there. For example, the individual will not be identified with his or her natural identity (language) nor be identified with the adopted or artificial language.

Yorùbá language is one of the three major languages in Nigeria. Others are Hausa and Igbo. By these three languages, the major three tribes are identified in Nigeria. There are other numerous languages besides the three major languages in Nigeria. The exert number of languages in Nigeria has not been ascertained. For instance, Benedict (1988) projects between 200 and 400, Elugbe (1988) 394 and 400; while Lasisi (1989) gave a figure between 390 and 400. From these projections, it is clear, going by the previous findings that Nigeria has nothing less than 200 and not more than 400 indigenous languages. But, today Nigeria is reported to have six-hundred and forty-six (646) indigenous languages (as this will further be explained in this work). Yorùbá language is one of the Nigeria indigenous languages that have "genetic origin"; the Niger-Congo branch of the Niger-Kordofanian

phylum. The language is spoken beyond the country to nations such as Cuba, Brazil, Togo and Dahomy among others.

In Nigeria, English language is the official language. Its dominant power on the indigenous languages has equally been deeply felt beyond official domain to unofficial aspects of life. In other words, the use of English language has robbed the indigenous languages of its local values. The relevance of these indigenous languages in places such as the market, Churches and the Mosques, social gathering, and even at homes have made the indigenous languages to be vulnerable to one form of language endangerment or another. The issue of language endangerment in Nigeria is critical to the extent that, it has become one of the central issues being expressed in the national dailies. For instance, Owolabi in *The Nation* of November 16, 2013 observes that "the affliction of language endangerment torments all indigenous languages in Nigeria, with most of the languages now oscillating between vulnerable and definitely endangered, or even worse in some cases" (p. 15). The categorizations of the language status, according to Siebert's in the same national dailies are, that a language is vulnerable when it is spoken by less than 20, 000 speakers, threatened when a language is spoken by less than 10,000. A language is endangered when it is spoken by less than 5,000 speakers and severely endangered when a language is spoken by 1,000 speakers. These are four ways by which a language suffers from one form of language threat or the other. The fifth effect of language threat is the stage of language death. This occurs, when there is the loss of everything humanity requires to continue to stay afloat. When a language dies, what is lost is beyond sounds system of such a language but including life, meaning, knowledge, science and technology. Significant part of humanity is lost, so significant to the extent that the livings are incomplete forever. These effects have as well been affected by the major languages in Nigeria, especially, Yorùbá language. The language situation in Nigeria calls for an immediate attention in other to prevent some of the indigenous languages from death. According to Sanusi (2013, p. 15),

> ...considering the dominant role English language plays as an official language in Nigeria, it could be said that every indigenous Nigerian language is endangered...Naturally, language dominance leads to language shift and language shift leads to language extinction. If any natural language is abandoned by its native speakers, the language will automatically die a natural death.

Therefore, this paper is germane to language situation in Nigeria. The paper examines to what extent the indigenous languages, especially Yorùbá, are being "empowered" to meet social, economic, scientific, political and technological needs of the nation among others? Furthermore, ways by which Nigerian indigenous languages, especially Yorùbá, can be rescued from one form of language "ailment" or the other are proffered in this study.

Methodology

Library research method is adopted for this work so as to give room for evaluation and review the language situation in Nigeria. Various written documents such as language policies, laws and rules in regards to indigenous languages in Nigeria are reviewed. Positions of different scholars and linguists are examined as well.

Library method of research is a 'warehouse' or a 'store' of accumulation of knowledge and wisdom. According to Osuala (1994 p. 26), library research concentrates on "the review of literature, consists in the ability to locate sources directly, to browse through multiple sources quickly to cull relevant material and to interpret what the researcher has accumulated." To this effect, library research method integrates and accommodate past records to the present in order to arrive at a specific conclusion. In other word, the library research method input the past knowledge and wisdom to the present with a view to arriving at a concluding state. The method centers on surveying the available relevant literatures in other to locate specific information for a specific purpose.

Presentation: The emergence and development of Yorùbá studies in Nigeria

A lot has been said about the name "Yorùbá" as a language and a nation or race. A finding says a person who hails from the North was named "Yarba" before he was chased to the South. The slave of "Yarba" is named after the Yorùbá race. Other version of the origin of the Yorùbá is attached to Hausa "Yarbansi Dariberebe" Yet, another version of the adoption of "Yorùbá" says "as late as 1841, Crowther was content to use the spelling "Yarriba", but in 1643 he introduced Yorùbá" (Awóníyì 1978, p.19).

The name has been reported to be adopted from "Yariba" which has Hebrew biblical book of first chronicles, chapter four verse ten: "Yareb" "Yariba" "Yoiarib" (Awóníyì 1978, p. 19), but there is no sufficient available concrete evidence of any relationship between Yorùbá and Hebrew. It should be noted that Yorùbá nation shares the same major language (i.e.Yorùbá Language). It is by this language they are identified and recognized, for instance, by the use of "the Akus". Most scholars agree the name is derived from the greeting phrase of the Yorùbá peoples in the language "Akun"/Ẹkun/Ookun." Awóníyì (1978, p. 18) reports that, "Akun/Ẹkun was found convenient for this heterogeneous but related peoples in a foreign country speaking a common tongue, but who lacked a common name."

The birth of Yorùbá studies can be dated to 1828, with Hannan Kilham who was described as "The earliest Quaker educationist in Sierra Leone" (Awóníyì 1978, p.18). Awóníyì further reports that Kilham "was the first known scholars of the Yorùbá language and the first to propose the orthography on which she wrote her book" (p. 19). The language is classified as belonging to the "Kwa" cluster of language of the Niger-Congo family.

The yearning for the need and relevant of the Yorùbá language has long been canvassed. For instance, in 1886 Bickersteth, Assistant Secretary of C.M.S. in his special report on the West African mission had given specific instructions that attention should be given to the use of mother tongue education in mission programme. The story of the

emergence of Yorùbá studies may not be complete without reference to the missionary. It was an uphill task for the missionary to propagate their Gospel without the use of Yorùbá language, both as a medium of expression in writing and in speech. This happened between 1846 (when C.M.S. was lunched or established in Abeokuta), 1847 (when the Baptist Mission joined the train). The challenge of the needs for the use of Yorùbá language was faced by the missionary. This difficulty of language barrier propelled the establishment and growth of Yorùbá orthography under the Chairmanship of Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Through individual and corporate efforts, some texts (mostly Gospel) were written. English language was to be the only medium of education, until later by 1882 when Yorùbá language was used along with English language. Rev. Sunter affirmed in 1882, that "Yorùbá literature is the most advanced on the coast of West Africa" (Awóníyì 1978, p. 18).

In a similar effort, According to Awóbùlúyì (1991), Bamgbọṣe enumerated areas covered by the Yorùbá Studies at ordinary, advanced and degree levels of learning. According to him, the goal of the Yorùbá studies should be to broaden our knowledge about our language and literature, and ideally, this goal should be achieved through the medium of Yorùbá. A serious challenge facing Yorùbá studies then (according to him) was the development of "metalanguage" which will make this goal achievable. It should be pointed out that, through the efforts of The Yorùbá Studies Association of Nigeria, this bottleneck has been removed with the publication of volumes 1 & 2 in 1984 and 1990.

With the formulation of Yorùbá Studies Association, impact of Yorùbá Studies has been greatly revealed and felt. The association has lived up to her objective to "encourage the study of the Yorùbá with a view to promoting its preservation in its best form and its development on natural and enlightened lines." With the effort of the Association, scholarships were offered for the study of Yorùbá language and literature at "School of Oriental and African Studies" in the University of London. Among the beneficiaries of this gesture are Mrs Monrgan, Chief Ajibola and Ogunlesi. Following their train are Delano, Ọdunjọ, and Babalọla.

Relevance of Yorùbá language has been canvassed in various ways. It has equally been proven that, students that are taught in mother tongue understand and perform better than the ones taught in the foreign language. The challenge of inability to teach the students in English with better understanding was faced by Buhler, a German missionary, and a product of Basle Seminary. According to (Awoniyi, 1978, p. 51) Buhler's observation during the course of teaching the students reports that,

> what I consider a great disadvantage in our schools in the Yorùbá mission is too much teaching in the English language which retards the progress considerably, it being for most of the children an unknown tongue...But the use of English confused the children. Moreover, it appears to have led to a retardation in the reading of the Yorùbá language which, according to Buhler, the pupils did 'without thinking'...He went further by reporting that it took the pupils enormous time, 'four, five and even six years before they read their own tongue fluently'...

According to him, the way out of this predicament is that "English should not be taught until they can read their own language." (p.51). Other missions ran into the same language problem. For example, Joseph Hrden, a Baptist missionary faced challenges in Lagos in 1856. Likewise, Tylor, the secretary to the Foreign mission Board of Baptist mission commented that "I try to teach them better, but mine is as yet an unknown tongue to them, and they cannot understand me nor I them" (Awoniyi 1978, p. 52). Initially, the need to develop Yorùbá Studies was precipitated by the need to achieve a religion motive. The question then is that: is the Yorùbá Studies not relevant to acquiring educational development?

According to the research conducted by Fafunwa in the 90's entitled "The Ife Primary Education Research Project." Fafunwa (1982, p. 297), reports that student were examined in these subjects: "Civics, Social and Cultural Studies, Health and Sanitation, New Mathematics,

Elementary Science with particular reference to observation and classification, and Yorùbá." In a similar context, according to the interview granted to Professor Muhammad Junaid, who is the National Secretary of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in *The Nation* of May 21, 2015, the control groups used for the research were taught all the subjects in Yorùbá language for six years.

The pupils were found not to be disadvantaged in any ways as a result of learning in Yorùbá. On the other hand, according to him, "nowadays, it is not easy to find teachers of local languages as they tend to be less favoured than their counterparts who teach English and other Science subjects" (p. 25). Buhler had earlier observed that expunging the idea of inferiority in black man's culture will help "the language of the soil" (Awoniyi 1978, p. 57); to this effect, there was an urgent need to employ the indigenous languages, including Yorùbá language in teaching; especially at the primary and secondary schools. According to Awobuluyi (1991, p. 3), this led to the formulation of education policy that,

> 19 (4) of the NPE requires junior Secondary School (JSS) Children to study 2 Nigerian Languages made up of (1) "the Language of their own area and (2) "Any one of the three main Nigerian Languages, Hausa, Ibo and Yorùbá, subject to availability of Teachers.

The development of the indigenous languages to the level of meeting human needs should not be limited to communication alone but should reflect on every aspects of life. According to Awobuluyi (1991 p. 2), "Every self respecting nation has to have a language. Not just a medium of communication, a 'vernacular' or a 'dialect', but a fully develop language. Anything less marks it as underdeveloped" Another factor that calls for the development of the three major languages (Ibo, Hausa and Yorùbá) is to serve as 'glue', a force that binds people together; especially, with Nigeria heterogeneous nature. The culture of the nation can as well be preserved and protected. According to Awobuluyi (1991, p. 19),

> in addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving a people's culture, the Government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the Government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Ibo and Yorùbá.

Years after the formulation of these languages in Nigeria, no development has been achieved so far, instead the major languages and all other languages as well have been categorized to be either endangered or moving towards the verge of extinction. To this effect, there is urgent need to salvage Yorùbá language form the impending language death. The issue of the vulnerability of the Yorùbá is on the front boner of public discourse. For instance, *The Nation* of November 13, 2013 reports that, "according to latest figures from the data base of UNESCO, there are currently 6, 912 languages in the world...As it is often the case, Africa has a high share of these endangered mother tongues..." (p. 17)

According to the UNESCO yardstick of measuring endangered languages, it manifests in four ways based on "intergeneration transfer.": "Vulnerable", that is, not spoken by the children outside the home, 'definitely endangered", that is, not being spoken by the children, "severely endangered", that is, such a language is only being spoken by the oldest generations and "critically endangered" that is, the concern language is only being spoken by few members of the oldest generations, often semi-speakers. According to *The Nation* (p. 17) referred to above, there are 646 indigenous languages in Nigeria with States distributions as follows:

S/N	STATES	NO. OF LANGUAGES
1	Abia State	1
2	Adamawa State	58
3	Anambra State	3
4	Akwa Ibom State	20
5	Bauchi State	60
6	Bayelsa State	10
7	Benue State	14
8	Borno State	28
9	Cross River State	50
10	Delta State	11
11	Ebonyi State	5
12	Edo State	17
13	Ekiti State	1
14	Enugu State	1
15	Gombe State	21
16	Imo State	1
17	Jigawa State	1
18	Kaduna State	57
19	Kebbi State	16
20	Kogi State	8
21	Kwara State	7
22	Lagos State	2
23	Nassarawa State	29
24	Niger State	38
25	Ogun State	1
26	Ondo State	10
27	Osun State	1
28	Oyo State	1
29	Plateau State	48
30	Rivers State	23

31	Sokoto State	2
32	Taraba State	73
33	Yobe State	9
34	Zamfara State	1
35	FCT	9

As many as these languages, there is no one that is not endangered in one way or the other. This has posed a serious challenge to the nation, if the dream of development will be realized.

Discussion: Enhancing the study and use of the Yorùbá language in Nigeria

One of the problems of language policy in Nigeria is that of non-implementation and instability in of language policy. Seeing that the choice of a national language in Nigeria will pose a great challenge, government should stand by language policies both on education, politics and as a medium of interaction. For instance, the current education curriculum being adopted in the country is foreign. In other words, according to *The Nation* of May 21 2015, P. 26, the nation "does not recognize the importance of Nigerian languages as means of propagating Culture."

According to the report, Nigeria is running American, British concurrently with Nigerian curricula; to this end, a question is asked "which society are you preparing the children for?, when you run a British curriculum in Nigeria society" (The Nation, May 21, p. 26). Language policy only appears on the pages of papers. A decade proposals is yet to smears application. For instance, Awobuluyi (1991, p. 16) reports that a motion was moved in the upper chamber of the second Republican government by Mallam, A. Y. Baala representing Adamawa North West that,

> This house urges the government in consultation with the regional governments to introduce the teaching of Hausa, Yorùbá and Ibo and other languages into institutions of learning throughout the country with a view to adopting one of them as our official language in the near future (underline mine)

After twenty-five years of this motion, no substantial language development has been made. Until today, the "near future" is far from being reached. None of the three major Nigeria languages, which Yorùbá is among, is free from language endangerment. Oyelaran (1988) has equally observed that, even after being enshrined into the constitution, implementation becomes difficult.

While section five (5) of the 1979 constitution provides for the use of Hausa, Ibo and Yorùbá along with English for conducting official business in the National Assembly, section 91 of the same constitution similarly provides for each state of the federation to choose some of its indigenous languages for use in the legislative business at state level. In other words, Hausa would be preferably adopted due to its popularity in the North, Yorùbá language in the West and Ibo language in the East. Until date, no legislative business has ever reported to have been conducted in Hausa, Yorùbá or Ibo; even at state houses of assembly. It has even becomes difficult for states that have only one major language such as Abia, Ekiti, Enugu, Imo, Ogun, Ọsun, Ọyọ and Zamfara States as shown in the table above.

The contribution of our national languages to National development will depend on how much efforts government and the individual put into the development of Nigerian languages. Wise government all over the world has embarked on developing "Language of the soil" as such project is right decision because of what Benedict (1988, p. 43) called "Social Turmoil" which can arise from ignoring it. This had been adopted by develop Nations of the world to succeed. For instance, *The Nation* of November 13 (2013, p. 17) reports about China that,

> China has never lost its culture. The language of instruction from pre-primary to university level has been Chinese. The child understands better when thought in the mother tongue China therefore has made enormous progress in science and technology and they are selling this to the world. Nigeria on the contrary, has been using a foreign language as medium of instruction from the pre-primary to the university level.

Among little individual and government efforts that have been made in regards to development of Yorùbá are:

(i) Workshop for the standardization of syllabuses for teaching methodologies of Yorùbá along with other major languages.
(ii) Glossary of technical vocabulary for the teaching of Science and Mathematics in the Primary Schools covering Nine Languages-Hausa, Igbo, Yorùbá, Edo, Efik, Kanuri, Fulfude, Tiv and Ijaw.
(iii) Quadrilingual legislative terminology (English-Hausa-Igbo-Yorùbá that was published by the Nigerian Educational Research Development Centre.
(iv) Publication of MANUAL OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGE a series concerned with "Standard Orthographies."
(v) The establishment of the Institute of Nigerian Languages at Aba
(vi) Funding the publication of Yorùbá Metalanguage Volumes 1&2.

Among the individual efforts are:

(i) The Yorùbá dictionary of Engineering Physics by Ọdẹtayọ J.A.
(ii) Yorùbá Medical Terms by Ogunṣina et al.

Besides School of Nigerian Languages in Aba that is running the academic aspect of language, no substantial physical language development is felt in Nigeria. The written language materials funded by the government are nothing but a toothless dog that cannot bite. This has equally renders the few individual efforts unprofitable.

The more a nation fund language development materials in the areas of Economics, Technology, Science and so on, the more the impact will reflect in the national development. Elugbe (1988, p. 24) copiously puts the matter succinctly that "the contribution of our national languages to national development will depend on how much government put into the development of Nigerian languages." For Nigeria to achieve much in her drive to the modern scientific and technological challenges; more attention must be given to the indigenous languages. To make the impact of Yorùbá felt in the political, economic, social and educational aspects, we also require an attitudinal change. While the Federal government funds the major three languages (with the aim of adopting one as a national language in the future), the South-west governors (where Yorùbá language is most rooted) should be encouraged to spend much on the language development as well as culture. The Local governments should also be encouraged to fund the dialect(s) spoken in their areas. These efforts can be achieved with the efforts of Yorùbá scholars, linguists and language developers. This will make Yorùbá language more "sufficient" and "appropriate" to meet the social, economic, science and technology needs of the nation.

Government (Federal, States and Local Governments), corporate bodies as well as philanthropists should offer scholarships to students studying Yorùbá in the higher institutions of learning; at home and abroad. Government should realize that not much would be achieved by encouraging the studies of Medicine, Engineering and Science without encouraging the indigenous languages. In other words, the use of local languages in various aspects of life is a means to an end. Indigenous languages are panacea to nation's development. The use of the Yorùbá language as a medium of expression or communication should not be limited to informal or unofficial matters alone but should be extended to

formal or official matters as well. The use and study of Yorùbá language should be enforced on pre-primary, primary and secondary schools; especially, in the South-west of the country. A situation whereby a student is bitten up for speaking his or her mother tongue (referred to as vernacular) or a situation where the inscriptions are written on the walls of the most primary and secondary schools that "speak English always" "vernacular is prohibited" and so on should be prohibited. Some students are punished for violating this unwritten rule, a situation that will retard and deter the progress and development of the nation. On the other hand, parents should communicate with their children at home in Yorùbá language. According to Ngugi in *The Nation* of August 2, 2012, p. 25, observes that,

> If you know all the other languages and don't know your language that is called enslavement. If you know your language and add all the other languages, that is called empowerment...you can never lost with your language...those ones who cannot speak their languages have nothing to pass on. They are already lost"

This means the independence of a nation can be measured on the level of her language use. In other words, a nation that depends on foreign language is under "self colonization". No developed country is so called without developing her language. Countries like Britain, United States of America, China, Portugal, and France and so on are regarded to be developed countries with their languages. In other words, no country is referred to be developed with the use of foreign languages.

Furthermore, the choice of Yorùbá language should be made compulsory. In other words, it must be offered and passed at the credit level before gaining admission into any higher institution of learning in the country. Besides this, the National University Commission should mandate all the private Universities to include Yorùbá studies in their degree programmes before being given a license of operation, at least, where such a University is to be located in the South-west of the country.

It is not encouraging that some Federal higher institutions located in the South-west of the country are not offering Yorùbá studies in their programmes. Out of the private Universities in the country, no one is offering Yorùbá studies at the expense of English language and even French. On the corporate level, religion organizations like Christians and Muslims are encouraged to conduct their religion activities in the local languages; especially in Yorùbá. Likewise, different associations and clubs should conduct their association's businesses in Yorùbá languages.

Conclusion

The emergence, development and relevance of Yorùbá studies have been revealed in various ways. The future challenges for the language is in no doubt enormous. The studies have made it possible to unify Yorùbá nation as well as Nigeria nation. Yorùbá studies have kept alive the culture of Yorùbá people. The efforts in the Yorùbá studies have made an impact as far back as 1882 when Rev. Sunter discovered that the language has the largest number of literature not only in Nigeria but in the coast of West Africa. This tempo of development should be enhanced. Government (Federal, States and Local), corporate bodies, Scholars as well as individual should not rest on their oars so as to make Yorùbá studies first among others in Nigeria societies.

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Olúwọlé Tẹ́wógboyè Òkéwándé
Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages,
University of Ìlọrin
Ìlọrin, Nigeria