

Instances of Gradual Vocabulary Loss in Yoruba: A Need for Documentation

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Abstract

A careful scrutiny of the use of Yoruba in contemporary discourse at various social situations reveals that there are two vital aspects of its system of communication which are gradually, and quite imperceptibly, creeping out. These are idioms and proverbs, two indispensable pillars of Yoruba communication system. However, in contrast with the trend in the ancient past, idiomatic and proverbial expressions are no longer salient in Yoruba media of communication such as verbal discourse, written materials, home videos, audio recitals, just to mention but a few. This clearly shows that these aspects of the language are endangered. This paper therefore highlights some of the Yoruba idioms and proverbs that are seldom used in today's discourse and discusses some of the ensuing social, cultural, religious and linguistic implications of such anomaly. To that effect, the paper then concludes by advocating a need for intra-lingual documentation of these expressions as a proactive measure aimed at ensuring their potential revitalization should they eventually die out of the language in the process of time.

Key words: Yoruba; Idioms; Proverbs; Endangerment

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INTRODUCTION

On the cultural cum linguistic relevance of idioms and proverbs, Sanusi and Omoloso (2008, p.57) wrote:

...Proverbs and idioms are never considered as the speech forms of the conservative speakers of a language, but regarded as words of wisdom or truism in the culture of a given language. Thus, in Yoruba culture, like in any other culture, proverbs and idioms have the linguistic capability of retaining and preserving some lexical items or expressions that are no longer in common use.

From the above submission, it could be deduced that idioms and proverbs are two aspects of the use of a language through which the culture of the people can be portrayed and the aesthetics of the language can be preserved. In the Yoruba race, language is a vital instrument which serves as a custodian of the people's culture, customs, beliefs, lifestyles, values, etc.. From time immemorial, idiomatic and proverbial expressions have often served as tools by which the people communicate their feelings, thoughts or ideas rather than doing so using prosaic vocabularies.

In the olden days, any native speaker of Yoruba (a Niger-Congo language spoken in the south-western region of Nigeria) in whose speech idiomatic and proverbial elements were always pervasive was highly respected in the society and would be dubbed as a typical Yoruba man. Likewise, the ancient Yoruba artistes and literati derived enormous interest in educating and entertaining the audience using idioms and proverbs in their live performances and literary pieces, respectively. During family, chieftaincy or community meetings, the use of idioms and proverbs were usually held in high esteem such that hardly would an elderly person talk for a few minutes without employing either one or both of them. Even in every family setting, parents did not hesitate to transmit these expressions to their children by using them in interpersonal communication since they found it conveniently easy communicating in them.

Today, reverse is the case. In the contemporary Yoruba society, these two vocabulary elements are no longer in constant use. Aside that English has supplanted Yoruba in several functional situations, the older generation, the

educated elite inclusive, are making matters worse by their unconscious or deliberate refusal to transmit the use of idiomatic and proverbial sayings to the present younger generation in few homes where Yoruba is still spoken. This anomalous phenomenon was also observed by Adebileje (2009, p.102) when he lamented that the custodians of our culture who are the parents have completely failed to transfer a healthy cultural identity to the children who are the newer generation. If this bizarre trend persists, it is envisioned that Yoruba might lose its cultural and linguistic relevance in a dynamic world where dominant languages, such as English in Nigeria, are daily chasing the minority ones into their caves.

To rescue these gradually dying vocabulary elements in Yoruba, a viable solution is to make sure that efforts are made to carry out documentation projects aimed at comprehensively archiving them for the purpose of preservation and future consultation should any need arises to revitalize them. As such, linguistic documentation of these less commonly used expressions is paramount; otherwise, Yoruba is on its route to losing its communicative value.

1. YORUBA IDIOMS

According to Udoumeobi (2014, p.20), idioms are group of words or special expressions whose meaning cannot be predicted from the meaning of the constituent words but by the contemplation of the expression as a whole. It is, he continues, characteristic of artistic style that is grammatical and natural to the native speaker of a language. In a similar vein, Olatunbosun (1996, p.90) explains that idioms are indepth linguistic expressions whose meanings are highly obscured. He stresses further that they are usually brief statements which are very useful when one wants to avoid certain expressions during communication. From these two positions, one thing is unique about idioms: Even though they are short, brief or concise statements, their meanings are usually deeper than what is conceived about them on the surface. In other words, the meaning that is usually embedded in an idiomatic sentence is usually deeper than the literal meanings of its component words.

Mustapha et al. (1990, p.121) observe that most of the idiomatic expressions in Yoruba have their origin in the Yoruba culture and tradition. This is because some centre on food, vocation, religion, etc. while some on the daily lifestyle and general behaviour of the Yoruba. They maintain further that some emanated via the careful observation of our ancestors about the nature and behaviour of certain creatures such as animals, birds, plants, insects, mountains, rivers and so on.

Idioms can serve the literary purpose of being used to present something unpleasant in a more pleasant manner. There are numerous Yoruba idioms but I will present just few of them most especially the less used in the

contemporary Yoruba society; that is, among the younger generation.

- a) Fi ọwọ ọlá gbá ni lójú:
(use one's position to maltreat others)
- b) Igi dá
(something highly important spoilt)
- c) Igi léyìn ọgbà
(someone upon whom one depends or one's benefactor)
- d) sí asọ lójú eégún
(to say the real truth)
- e) Forí jálé agbón
(to enter into trouble/problem)
- f) Jẹ iyán nísu
(to receive a grave consequence for one's action)
- g) Bá ọde pàdé
(to make profit in business)
- h) Ru etí ọmọlángidi
(to be disobedient)
- i) Jẹ ọjú méran
(to do a bad thing most especially where it ought not to be)
- j) Jẹ ẹran deegun
(to move from riches to suffering)
- k) Tafà sínú ikuudu/pa owó sí ajádií àpò
(to engage in unprofitable business)
- l) Gbẹwiri tàbí féwó
(to steal)
- m) Fi àáké kórí
(to be adamant)
- n) Òkéré gun orí irókò
(one's expectation eventually becomes fruitless)
- o) Fọnmú
(to become angry)
- p) Àkàrà tú sínú epo
(the secret is revealed)
- q) Kágò
(to receive permission before entering)
- r) Tẹrígbasọ/re iwàlè àsà/ta téru nípàá
(to die)
- s) Kọ iyán èniyàn kéré
(to underrate someone)
- t) So ọlọgbón kó, so wèrè kó
(to involve deep thinking)

2. YORUBA PROVERBS

The New Encyclopedia Britannica (Vol.9) (1992), cited in Omoloso (2006, p.4), describes proverbs generally as embodying superstitions or medieval advice held to be part of every spoken language and related to the other forms of folk literature which have originated in oral tradition. From a functional perspective, Ogundeji (1991, p.59), cited in Fájényò (2011, p.17), sees proverbs as in-depth linguistic expressions which are used to guide, warn, admonish and correct.

Yoruba proverbial statements are often a product of the combination of two things: Critical observation and innovative thinking by the people most especially the ancestors who were the real custodians of Yoruba culture, customs, beliefs, traditions and values. These people would carefully pay keen attention to the happenings in their surroundings as well as the nature and behaviour of things around them e.g. people, animals, birds, plants, etc. After their scrutiny, they would then employ their innovative intellect to code their observations linguistically. In a nutshell, the experiences of the elders about the behaviour of mankind, plants, animals, birds, fish, moon, star and other creatures of God which are always true without fault in all instances are what are known as proverbs (Mustapha et al., 1990).

From the discussion thus far, proverbs can best be described as wise sayings which embody the entire lifestyle of a group of people to whom they are associated. That is, Yoruba proverbs, as an example, are a social, cultural, religious and linguistic portrait of the Yoruba speech community in its entirety. Proverbs have ethical value in that they can be used to correct an individual in such a way that the person's anger will not be incurred. As is the case with idioms, proverbs can serve the literary function of being used as euphemisms for addressing issues that would have been linguistically expressed in an unpleasant manner.

The list of proverbial sayings in Yoruba is endless. However, some of them shall be examined below:

- a) A kii tori abinuku ekutu ge igi arere.
(We do not because of the sudden death of the silk-worm cut down the silk-tree).
- b) Bi ebiti ko pa eku, a a fi eyin fun elayin.
(If the trap would not kill a mouse, it should leave the palm-nut fruit (used as bait) for its owner).
- c) Bi o ti wu ki omode tete ji to, oko ni yoo ti ba kukute.
(No matter how early a child rises, he will meet the tree stump on the farm).
- d) Ihale agbe ti o gbin kokoto ni so ido.
(The farmer that puts stakes in a cocoyam farm has merely presented himself as a braggart).
- e) Oogun ti a ko ba fi owose, eyin aaroto ni gbé.
(The medicine that we acquire free normally ends up behind the hearth).
- f) Elenu rirun ni o ni amu iyare.
(No matter how smelly a person's mouth is, he still has authority over his mother's pot).
- g) Aifinipeni aifenyàn-penyàn ni mú ará oko sán bánté wọ ilú.
(It is disrespect that makes a rural dweller come into town with an apron round his waist).
- h) Ilèkè pò lójà kí sàngó tó wo mó kele.
(There are many beads in the market, yet sàngó prefers the kele bead).

- i) Owó omode ko to pepe, ti agbalagba ko wo keregbé.
(A child's hand cannot reach up to the shelf, that of an elder cannot enter a gourd).
- j) Enu kii si lara eni ti o fo ikemù.
(People never cease talking about somebody who broke the calabash cup).
- k) Bi ko ba nidi, obinrin kii je kumolu.
(If there is no reason, a female child does not bear kumolu).
- l) A kii gbin alubosa ko hu efó.
(It is impossible to plant onion and germinates vegetable).
- m) Ibi ko ju ibi, bi a ti bi eru ni a bi omo.
(Birth does not supersede birth, both a slave and a child are given birth to in the same way).
- n) Alagemo ti bi omo re na, aimo-on-jo ku sowo omo re.
(A chameleon has given birth to its child, inability to dance is left to its child).
- o) Ohun to mu aja to fi n gbo, ko to eyi ti aguntan fi nse iranwo.
(What makes a dog to be barking is not up to what turns a sheep to an onlooker).
- p) Eyi to wumi ko wu o ni mu omo iya meji fe obinrin lototo.
(What I like is your dislike is what conditions two children of the same mother to marry different women).
- q) Eni rora pa eera yoo ri ifun re.
(He who carefully kills an ant will see its intestines).
- r) Ila kii ga ju onire lo.
(An okra tree cannot be taller than the person that harvests it).
- s) Ara to ba wu ogodo ni fi imu olowo re da.
(Yaw can choose to do anything with its victim's nose).
- t) Ki a dagba ki a ma ni adie-irana, bi a ba ku ni elemoso, o ye ni.
(It is more glorifying to die in youth than to die in old age and not have the sacrificial fowl).

3. AN OBSERVATION

As part of this research paper, an informal social survey was carried out, using researcher's observation and interpersonal interviews. One hundred (100) Yoruba native speakers of the younger generation whose age ranges between 15 and 30 years were purposively sampled. The sampled population comprised indigenes of Osun, Ondo, Oyo, Kwara and Ogun States. They were instructed to supply at least ten idiomatic expressions and proverbial sayings in Yoruba. To the dismay of the researcher, only half of the selected sample were able to provide five each and it even took them a long period of brain racking. The

other half struggled to provide two, three to four examples. Even among this second category, some were unable to produce a single idiom or proverb in the language. Worse still, some of the idioms and proverbs made available by some of them were wrongly pronounced, some were modified versions of the original while some were given wrong meanings. When they were even given certain idiomatic and proverbial expressions to provide their appropriate meanings, majority of them could not respond, claiming that they were not familiar with them.

During interpersonal interviews, they were asked to give one cogent reason behind their apparent lack of knowledge of these linguistic expressions. To a considerable degree, there was uniformity in their response as many of them said they were not introduced to nor encouraged to speak Yoruba at home in their early childhood, as English was preferred instead. The few ones who claimed to have been encouraged to speak the language in their various homes lamented bitterly that they hardly hear their parents using idioms and proverbs in their intra-family communication. For this reason, they know little or nothing about Yoruba idioms and proverbs in their linguistic repertoire; the only thing they claimed to know is their existence in the language. Among the sampled population, there were also some who said they were indifferent to speaking Yoruba generally as they only subscribe to English. This negative linguistic attitude was cited as the reason to justify their lack of knowledge of idiomatic and proverbial sayings in Yoruba.

Also, in a mini survey of contemporary Yoruba drama and story books, it was discovered that only two out of every ten selected materials meet up with the required rate of the use of idioms and proverbs. Others are full of modern Yoruba trendy jargons largely influenced by the grammar of English. Worse still, audio and video recitals in Yoruba which are rendered by Yoruba speakers are full of code-mixed elements of Yoruba and English. Unlike the ancient Yoruba musical artistes who derived solace in using elements of idioms and proverbs in their renditions, the contemporary ones have shifted their focus towards mixing Yoruba vocabulary items with those of English in the forms of slangs, unacceptable expressions, contextually unsuitable utterances and the like. Hardly would one find traces of idiomatic and proverbial expressions in their musical performances. Yoruba home videos too cannot be left out of this anomalous trend. It is very rare today to find a Yoruba film in which Yoruba is not code-mixed with English from the beginning to the end. This is even a minor issue that can be disregarded in the mean time. The greatest concern is the paucity of the use of Yoruba idioms and proverbs in those home videos.

All these are foreboding and/or ominous signals that Yoruba idioms and proverbs may sooner or later become a thing of the past in Yoruba system of communication. It is not that I envisage a complete extinction of these

linguistic expressions but one should not be surprised if only their vestiges remain in the language in the nearest future because the moment the existing older generation with whom these expressions still abide sail to the abode of their ancestors, the immediate implication is that only their traces would survive. But what is the relevance of traces or remnants of a knowledge when the core is dead? As the Yoruba would say, “*ojú àpá ò le jọ ojú ara*” (a scarred skin cannot be compared with an unscarred one).

All the above observed phenomena are testament to the fact that Yoruba language is endangered as far as the use of idioms and proverbs is concerned. While we have language endangerment on the whole, a popular term for a language whose chain of intergenerational transfer is gradually breaking off, it is observed also that certain linguistic elements within a language may become endangered such that their usage becomes rare, restricted to a certain group of speakers (e.g. the elders) or replaced/modified with modernized/bastardized versions altogether. While one may not refer outright to such phenomenon as language endangerment in its entirety, I have preferably used an alternative term “intra-lingual endangerment”. This is because unlike the popular ‘language endangerment’ phenomenon in which the entire linguistic or communication system of a language is affected, only some component part(s) of such system undergo(es) such negative paradigm shift. This is exactly the case with Yoruba idioms and proverbs.

Though the Yoruba language is still being transmitted to the evolving generations, at least to a certain appreciable degree, the intergenerational transmission of idiomatic and proverbial sayings in the language in the present generation is sadly low compared to the rate at which their use permeated Yoruba communication in ancient history. Because these two sets of linguistic expressions are hardly conveyed to the younger generation, they are said to be endangered. Worse still, most of them have been bastardized by the present younger generation. The fear now is, as envisaged earlier, a time approaches when only their relics would survive in the language if all the present older generation eventually answer the natural call to the sepulcher of their progenitors.

4. THE ENSUING IMPLICATIONS

The dearth of the use of idiomatic and proverbial sayings in contemporary Yoruba communication system places grave consequences on certain variables connected to the Yoruba race. These variables are Yoruba culture, religion, social life and the language itself. Let us have a glance at some of these consequences vis-à-vis these variables.

4.1 Cultural Implication

The gradual loss of these two communication tools in contemporary Yoruba discourse has a serious implication for the Yoruba culture. It is incontrovertible that

language cannot be divorced from culture because of the sociolinguistic interconnectivity between them. The implication of this is that whatever, and in whichever form, affects language also does same to its culture either directly or otherwise. The way idioms and proverbs are used as well as their rich linguistic contents show that they are portrayals of the culture, beliefs, values of the people. Using proverbs as an example, Ojo-Ade (1980, p.63), cited in Sanusi and Omoloso (2008, p.61), echoes this position by saying that proverbs are a reflection of the life of the people, what they do, what and how they think, how they live, what values they admire or hate and what constitute their joys and sorrows. If the above is true, then, waving hands to them (Yoruba idioms and proverbs) in daily communication is doing same to the culture, beliefs and values of the Yoruba. Many aspects of the people's culture are lost, forgotten or abandoned today due to the subconscious or deliberate negligence of the use of idioms and proverbs in the language's several media of communication.

The Yoruba society, like all other societies, constrain their linguistic behaviour in a number of ways. The most salient of them is banning of certain terms and expressions from public or direct use by a community consensus. These banned expressions are technically referred to as linguistic taboos, and are product of Yoruba cultural values and beliefs. In the words of Oyetade (1994, p.98), the most obvious of all the taboos associated with the institution of kingship (in Yoruba land) is the restriction on direct reference to the death of a king. To say that a king died (*oba kú*) reduces him to a mere mortal, because it is believed that an *oba* (king) does not die, rather he changes position. He therefore outlines four different ways by which the death of a king can be described idiomatically:

- a) *Oba wàjà* (The king entered into the roof)
- b) *Oba gbèsè* (The king lifted the leg)
- c) *Ópó yè* (The pillar gave way)
- d) *Erin wó* (An elephant fell)

Due to his unfamiliarity with any of the above permissible idiomatic equivalents, a native speaker of Yoruba of the present younger generation might directly report that "*Oba ti kú*" (The king has died), which is completely against the cultural belief of the Yorubas.

Still within the premise of Yoruba cultural values, it is totally unethical revealing the weakness of another person in his/her presence most especially in a derogatory manner. The Yoruba forbid that by saying "*A kiì tojú oníka mèsàn-án kàá* (We don't count the toes of a nine-toed man in his presence). Since only few among the present younger generation are familiar with this idiomatic saying, they do not consider it culturally unethical even insulting or abusing someone with his/her obvious weakness. Doing this simply illustrates a devaluation of the Yoruba cultural standard which was once held in high esteem.

4.2 Religious Implication

There is a Yoruba proverb that says "*Náání, náání, náání, ohun a ní láá náání*" (It is one's own property that one should appreciate and value). This proverbial saying buttresses the fact that the Yoruba, by tradition, do not handle any of their inheritances with levity; rather, they value it to the core and often protect it against any external attack or assault. There are certain Yoruba inheritances that are supposed to be held in high esteem, secured and that the speakers, the younger generation especially, should be shamelessly proud of. One of those ancient inheritances is the Yoruba traditional religion. To one's dismay, reverse is the case today. The younger generation is not sensitized to the reality of the fact contained in the above cited proverb- it is one's own possessions that one should celebrate and not the foreign ones.

Quite shameful too, the advent of western religious practices has enslaved the Yoruba traditional religion and driven it into exile. Among other reasons attributable to this anomaly is lack of knowledge of the vital information inherent in certain Yoruba idioms and proverbs about the worth and relevance of Yoruba traditional religious practices as a result of the fact that people who are expected to be familiar with them (idioms and proverbs in Yoruba) are not. I believe that if the younger generation pays keen attention to the vital message conveyed in the proverb quoted above and some other ones about appreciating one's inheritances, they would, to a certain extent, have a feel of how important their neglected traditional religion is as well as the need to embrace and celebrate it over and above the so-called foreign religions.

In a related phenomenon, even few who still 'partially' practise the ancient Yoruba traditional religion only retain little knowledge about their gods and the way they are worshipped due to lack of such knowledge contained in some Yoruba idiomatic and proverbial expressions. There are multifarious varieties of Yoruba traditional religion among which are Sango worship, Ogun worship, masquerade worship, just to mention but a few. It seems that the knowledge of these varieties of religion as well as the divinities to which each of them is attached is at a far distance to the few ones who still practise them because they are no more acquainted with the Yoruba sayings (idioms and proverbs) in which such information is concealed. For instance, how many people, the younger generation especially, still know what the masquerade leader is called in Yoruba? This would have been easy if most of them are familiar with the proverb which says "*ohun tí í tán ni ọdún eégún, alágbaà yòò padà ra àkàrà je ẹko*" (The Masquerade festival does not last forever, so the masquerade leader will eventually have to buy bean-cake to eat his cold-pap). As contained in this proverb, the word for the masquerade leader in Yoruba is "*alágbaà*".

Similarly, how many people still remember the different personalities of the masquerade divinity and their peculiar characteristics? Again, this would not have been an issue if they are still acquainted with the proverbs in which their names and peculiarities are mentioned, using the following proverb as examples:

- a) Èni pàjé nà ní kùmò méfà tí ó ní òkòòkan kò ba òun, sebí ara rè ní ó wà!
(Somebody who was hit six times with a rod by the pàjé masquerade claimed that none touched him. Is it not he who would feel the pain?)
- b) Àilásò lórùn pààkà, àjomò wọn nínú awo ní.
(The nakedness of the pààkà masquerade is the conspiracy of the cult members).

In the above proverbs, two personalities of the masquerade divinity are mentioned, ‘pàjé’ and ‘pààkà’, respectively. Also, in these proverbs, one is informed of one of their peculiarities – whereas ‘pàjé’ is one who likes to beat; ‘pààkà’ is one who subscribes to nudity. One might not have got hold of this information if one has no knowledge of these proverbs and the implication is that the staging of masquerade festival in relation to these two different personalities might be unoriginal.

4.3 Social Implication

Since language is the chief agent of socialization, anything wrong with language use will inevitably have an effect on the socialization process and pattern of the people involved. More often than not, interlocutors do run into social problems as a result of their utterances. Certain Yoruba expressions that are supposed to be uttered using idioms or proverbs are often expressed with mere common or literal terms which sometimes lead to contextual language conflict, hence a breakdown of communication. More usually and quite shamefully, the younger generation is fond of addressing the elders with banal, modernly modified expressions that have little or no communicative relevance. Through this, many elders usually pick offence. For instance, it will be completely absurd reporting to someone that an elderly person “se àsedànù”, meaning that “he/she has carried out a futile project/task”. On hearing this, the concerned fellow might feel insulted thereby provoking a furious response from him/her. This, if unchecked, might lead to a physical fight. Employing a permissible alternative, such derogatory report can be politely made using an idiomatic expression like “yín àgbàdò sí èyìn igbá”, meaning “removing maize-grains from the corn cob and putting them at the back of a calabash”. With this, imminent social conflict would be averted.

Similarly, it will sound offensive and have grave social implication addressing an impotent man using the bare concept “akúkó” (Someone whose manhood is dead). Instead, an idiomatic euphemism can be alternatively used e.g. “Èsin inú iwé” “A horse in a book”. In another sense, such address can be carried out in the form of sympathy using a related proverb that says “Ibi tí àgbàlagbà ti n sukún

àiròbò dó ni ọmọdẹ ti n fi tiẹ wólẹ kiri” (While an elderly man is crying of his lack of sexual intercourse opportunity, a child is carelessly dragging his manhood on the floor all about). Expressing it this way would have prevented any potential social problem arising from language use. The fact remains that there are certain things which are better expressed and will be contextually suitable to the topic of discussion with idioms or proverbs. Quite disheartening, ‘modernized’ versions have come to replace them whose ensuing social implication cannot be overemphasized.

4.4 Linguistic Implication

The greatest drawback of lack of constant use of idiomatic and proverbial expressions (spoken and written) is its adverse effect on the Yoruba language itself. Many ancient Yoruba lexical items have completely died out of the language while some have become archaic due to the paltry use of idioms and proverbs during interpersonal communication. Since many of these lexical items are inherent most especially in Yoruba proverbs, the lack of periodic use of proverbial statements in speech automatically spells doom for them. Citing a practical example, hardly are the following Yoruba words heard any longer in contemporary discourse: tòbí (skirt), àfòpiná (moth), ekùtù (flute), pàpà (tapeworm), òpèkètè (young palm tree), etc. due to the dearth of the usage of expressions in which they are mostly found. If these words are uttered in the ears of the contemporary younger generation or perhaps they encounter them in written texts, only few, if any, would lay claim to have heard them in their lifetime. They can be partly exonerated of this blame though, since the older generation has refused to expose their children to native expressions, proverbs most especially, in which those words are used. Each of the above words can be found in the following proverbs, respectively:

- a) Bí ọmọ kò bá ọ sòkòtò, yóò ọ tòbí.
(If a child does not resemble a pair of trousers, he will resemble a skirt).
- b) Afòpiná tí ó ní òun yóò pa fitilá, ara rè ni yóò pa.
(The moth that insists on putting off a lit lamp would end up killing itself).
- c) Kí ní n yá àpón lóri tí ó fi isu lé iná tí n fọn ekùtù pé ‘bí mo ti n se ní n bí wọn nínú’.
(What is the source of a bachelor’s pride that makes him put yam on the fire and begin to blow a flute singing: ‘it is my way of life that people envy’).
- d) Pàpà n pa ara rè, ó ní òun n pa ajá. Bí ajá bá kú tán, pàpà nàà yóò lọ òrun.
(The tapeworm is killing itself and says it is killing the dog, once the dog dies, the tapeworm will follow suit).
- e) Òpèkètè n dàgbà, inú ọmọ Ádámò n bàjé.
(The young palm tree continues to grow and human beings continue to be sad on account of its growth).

Had it been the above proverbial statements are still in vogue, these lexical items would not be strange to the younger generation when they hear or read them and those words would not have become archaic as they are today in the language.

Aside that lack of constant use of idioms and proverbs in modern Yoruba discourse has made some lexical items in the language to become dead or archaic, it has drastically reduced the linguistic beauty of the language both its verbal and written versions. Yoruba is characterized by its linguistic beauty. The use of idioms and proverbs do reflect the aesthetic use of the language in the form of embellishing utterances with literary meanings beyond their literal senses. However, this beauty is gradually divorcing itself from the language's system of communication as its carriers are also finding themselves out of the language. That is why when the contemporary younger generation speak Yoruba, their speech often sound like eating a sour meal because the necessary linguistic spices- idioms and proverbs- are lacking.

If all the grave implications discussed above stand any possibility of being potentially reversed, then, intra-lingual documentation would be the immediate effort before later efforts of revitalization and maintenance will be made.

5. A NEED FOR INTRA-LINGUAL DOCUMENTATION

One of the areas of applied linguistics currently in vogue is language/linguistic documentation. It is a discipline established for the sole purpose of catering for endangered languages, languages that, by present social considerations, are predicted to go into extinction in the nearest future due to lack of intergenerational transmission or reduction in the social functions to which those languages were previously associated. Thus, language documentation can be described as a consciously organized and systematic effort aimed at collecting, recording, transcribing, analyzing, translating into the language of wider communication, and most importantly, proper archiving of the linguistic practices of a group of people whose language is considered endangered using sophisticated documentation gadgets.

Language documentation is a step-by-step exercise. It is an arduous task because it requires the researcher going to the field and finding the native speakers of the endangered language who will serve as informants and with whom the researcher will live and work. The researcher must be well trained in the techniques involved in language documentation with respect to the activities involved. Principally, this effort demands the researcher to collect and carefully archive the actual or naturalistic performance of the native speakers in their language at various social contexts/situations. The documentary

must be done in such a way that it will be made easily accessible by the community, linguists, language teachers and future researchers alike. Also, such effort must be one which gives room for easy recoverability of the language whenever the need arises.

Though this effort is often directed towards the general use of a language, my foresight in this paper is the linguistic documentation of two aspects of Yoruba culture and system of communication which are idiomatic and proverbial sayings in the language. They are considered endangered due to the paucity of their use in contemporary Yoruba communication settings as well as their minimal rate of intergenerational transfer.

In catering for endangered languages, the usual recommendations have often been that the older generation (e.g. the parents) should endeavour to pass across their linguistic and cultural heritage (Yoruba, in this case) to their children and that its teaching should be encouraged in schools. It however seems to me that the more these clarion calls are made, the more the concerned parties turn a deaf ear. Thus, instead of wasting time repeating the same set of practically unactualized recommendations, linguistic documentation will alternatively serve a valuable purpose both for the present and future since these expressions are gradually dying out of the language on a daily basis. Intra-language documentation is suggested simply because even if parents refuse to pass them (Yoruba idioms and proverbs) across to their children and schools also refuse to teach them the way they should, both of which are the present anomalous trends, such that they eventually become a thing of history in the language, an immediate recourse can be made to such carefully archived linguistic document in order to revive and/or revitalize the documented materials.

All said and done, the onus is now on well trained language documenters to engage in practical activities aimed at documenting Yoruba idioms and proverbs for the purpose of ensuring their sustainability, preservation and potential revitalization if the need arises. Thus, the following proposed practical steps would suffice:

Firstly, Linguistic documentary researchers should go to the elders in Yoruba land – the oldest generation who are proficient in Yoruba communication – and collect, as much as possible, proverbial and idiomatic expressions from them. Thereafter, the collected data should be properly and carefully documented in readable materials and video/audio CDs that are preservable for future consultation, say, for example, potential revitalization of these vocabularies may be needed if they eventually go into extinction or leave behind only their relics as the oldest generation pass on.

Secondly, Ancient Yoruba genres such as drama books, novels, home videos, audio recitals, etc. which are now abandoned should be gathered and reproduced,

republished or reprinted and properly kept for present and future use. Virtually all of these ancient invaluable Yoruba materials were characterized with raw, authentic and natural use of the Yoruba language. Quite interestingly, idioms and proverbs which are two important aspects of the language's system of communication were usually preponderant in these ancient resources.

Therefore, rigorous efforts should be directed towards searching for these abandoned and perhaps tattered materials. If need be to improve upon any of them, such attempt should be carried out. In fact, it will be advisable for Yoruba linguists, Yoruba language teachers and other lovers of the language alike to painstakingly write out all the idioms and proverbs found in any of those literary genres on which they lay their hands and make sure they are comprehensively archived possibly in a single documentary gadget or readable material so that it will be easily accessible for future use.

Finally, language documenters should take the pain in making efforts to visit, along with their sophisticated documentation gadgets, diverse social settings where the most proficient speakers of Yoruba usually gather, and carry out a systematic video and audio recordings of their conversations. After this, the idiomatic and proverbial elements in their speech should be extracted, recorded somewhere else, transcribed, analyzed and translated into the language of wider communication. Most importantly, they should be archived in long-lasting materials.

Places to visit include where the Yoruba elders usually gather to have their periodic chieftaincy, family or community meetings; where they sit to play traditional games; under the tree where they normally converge at sunset for group discussions; ceremonial occasions in which Yoruba customs and values are displayed; homes of the most proficient users of the language who converse with their family members only in Yoruba; farms where the typical Yoruba farmers communicate with their colleagues; hunting fields/jungles in which typical Yoruba speakers hunt; and shrines of the traditional Yoruba worshippers where they commune with their gods and ancestors.

In all the aforementioned social settings or gatherings, the use of Yoruba will not be devoid of idiomatic and proverbial sayings because the Yoruba elders prefer conversing in them to using mere familiar vocabulary elements in expressing their thoughts and ideas. Undoubtedly, visiting those sensitive places may not appear to be an easy task though, because of the daunting challenges involved both on the part of the language users and the documentation exercise itself. However, for the sake of the culture, religion and language of the Yoruba race, these two gradually-creeping-out vocabulary elements of the language should be rescued. One should not forget that the best immediate measure that can be taken is their proper documentation.

CONCLUSION

It is quite anomalous seeing two once highly valued aspects of the Yoruba culture and system of communication becoming relegated to the background. The scanty use of Yoruba idioms and proverbs in contemporary Yoruba media of communication is a thing of concern. Though the complete extinction of these vocabulary items is not foreseen, it is envisaged however that only their "crumbs" e.g. the modernized and bastardized versions would survive in the foreseeable future, as evidence even abound now in the ways and manners the younger generation sometimes overturn some of these expressions in order to address their personal communication needs vis-à-vis the influence of western values. This paper has therefore suggested that the viable immediate step to be taken so as to rescue these endangered linguistic expressions in Yoruba is to carry out an elaborate or comprehensive linguistic documentary on them. This will enable them to be revitalized if the need arises, which of course will, as envisioned.

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