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PROMOTING COMMUNICATING IN YORUBA LANGUAGE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTH WEST, NIGERIA

Olugbenga Elegbe

Abstract

A body of linguists committed to preservation of languages claimed that about half of the world's languages are endangered. Among these endangered languages is the Yoruba language, one of Nigeria's major languages. Highlighting the importance of language as a form of cultural transmission, identification and socialization, the paper explores how globalization is endangering indigenous languages especially Yoruba language. The paper further explores possible challenges such as rural urban drift, adoption of English as language of communication, media propagation of English compared to Yoruba, Anglicization of indigenous names among youths and attitudes of elites to Yoruba speakers that could contribute to obstacle to speaking Yoruba language among young people in South West, Nigeria. Nevertheless, the paper states the need for the creation of awareness on Yoruba language among young people. Also, it calls for the need to encourage youth to speak Yoruba language, revive the storytelling tradition, promote cultural values among young people, promote Yoruba programmes in the broadcast media in order to discourage the use of code switching during communication among young people. Hence, there is a need for re-orientation of youths and other members of the society to make them cherish Yoruba language while the government should intensify the teaching of Yoruba language as compulsory subject in both primary and secondary schools in South West, Nigeria.

Introduction

Language is very important to man. It captures his entire essence and makes him who he is and what he will become. Language is the most valuable possession of man as it is a tool of exchanging ideas and sharing perfect communication (Wamalwa and Oluoch, 2013) and Odegbenle, (2013). Several definitions of language have been given by linguists and communication scholars. Few of these definitions will be cited for the purpose of this study. Olofin (2013: 37) refers to language "as the means

by which human beings communicate using words". Pearson et al (2003), cited by Odegbenle (2013: 164), defines "language as a collection of symbols, letters or words with arbitrary meanings that are governed by rules used to communicate". Adebisi and Ojo (2010) see language as a phenomenon which allows human beings to express their feelings, aspirations, desires and to interact with one another as far as human society is concerned. All these definitions underscore the importance of language as a mode of interaction and communication.

Importance of Language

The importance of the languages of the world is mirrored through functions performed by the languages to the speakers who use them as either mother tongue or second language. Wamalwa and Oluoch (2013) identify three purposes of language: Cultural transmission, Identification and Socialization, while Adejisola (2009) defines another purpose which is Communication.

1. Cultural Transmission

Language facilitates transmission of culture as it is a vehicle through which cultural experiences are accumulated, stored and passed on from one generation to another. The culture of African societies are embedded and transmitted in their language communication. It is therefore a critical means through which people's experiences are passed from one generation to another. Batibo (2005), cited by Wamalwa and Oluoch (2013), points out that the transmission of cultural knowledge in most African societies is done through oral folklores in form of historical narratives, fables, proverbs, idioms, sayings, riddles, songs and so on. All these are expressed through languages. Banjo (1971), cited by Ader (2012) states in his views that language is not only a vehicle through which culture is expressed but also a medium of man's thought, imagination, creativity, aspirations, desires and indeed the entire human need and capacity. The use of language for cultural transmission is a very important function for the sustenance of language among its speakers.

2. Identification

Language is very crucial in marking both the individual and group identities. Language is used to distinguish one ethnic community from another. Within the same speech community, it plays a vital

role in marking self-identity through individual idiolects that differentiate one speaker from another. Moreover, language is also an important tool for mapping out the geographic identities of its speakers. It is further used to identify an individual's place within a group, mark and differentiate the speaker's age sets, occupation of interlocutors and religion (Wamalwa and Oluoch, 2013). Hence, language is a vital tool for identity notification and development.

3. Socialization

Man, as a social being, has the natural urge to satisfy the need for socialization. Language is the tool that naturally facilitates this process. Children are socialized into the community through the use of language which they learn from infancy. According to Batibo, (2005) languages foster social relations between members of a community and serve as an important tool for thought and intelligence development. Olagbaju and Akinsowon (2014) stress the importance of language in education by describing it as a vehicle through which information is shared between a teacher and a learner. UNESCO (2003) also sees language as a unique expression of human experience of the world and then underlines the importance of preserving endangered languages.

4. Communication

Adejimola(2009:003) sees language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols". He stated further that:

"language as an instrument of communication may be used to influence personality; to declare war, to provoke, to incite, to oppose ideas, intentions and actions, to scatter, to condemn, blackmail, insult, destroy, tell lies, claim or testify falsely, to despise, abuse and to generate violence" (Adejimola, 2009:003)

In another perspective, it could be used to entertain, appeal, inspire, comfort, amuse, appreciate, build, enlighten, educate, establish cordial relationship, settle disputes and make peace with people or communities; to generate peace or to resolve conflicts within and among

religious, political, community, industrial, ethnic/tribal groups". These variations of illustrating the purpose and uses of language reveal its importance in the communication process.

Globalization as threat to Indigenous Languages

Languages are the centre-piece of the cultural diversity of the world. In spite of the importance of languages as a component of cultural diversity, they are also the vulnerable part of the world's cultural heritage. Many of them are endangered. Darhem (2002), cited by Balogun (2013), defines an endangered language as a language that may soon vanish, ceasing to be used as a vehicle of communication, perhaps even disappearing completely from human history.

A body of linguists committed to preservation of languages documented that over 6,000 languages which is about half of the world's languages are endangered and one of these endangered languages is dying every two weeks. They suggested that if nothing is done these endangered languages will disappear by the end of this century. Studies revealed that majority of these languages are in Third World countries including Nigeria with its multi-lingual and multi-ethnic nature. Nigeria with almost 510 languages is threatened by the massive use of English language (Dada, 2007, The Enduring Voices Project, 2007 and UNESCO, 2014). Hence, Adzer (2012) identifies globalization as a major threat to existence of indigenous languages in Nigeria. Globalization, according to Nwaolikpe (2013), is the interconnectedness of the world views, ideas and beliefs. It is the integration of peoples of different nations involving their economy, environment and lifestyle. However, Salawu (2006:1) is of the view that globalization is "the agenda of the United States led Western World. It is an idea that tends to present the philosophy of the U.S led West as the ultimate wisdom of the entire world".

In most urban societies in Nigeria, indigenous languages are wearing out because most groups and individuals particularly the elites conduct their activities in English language. The Nigerian elites replace their indigenous languages with English so as to comply with the dictates of modernization and globalization (Adzer, 2012). Woodbury, (2012) cited by Balogun (2013), warns that any language that is falling out of use or whose speakers are not handing it over to the next generation is endangered and could go into extinction in the near future. This implies that the negative attitude of the elites towards indigenous languages could lead to the languages' death or extinction.

Endangerment of Yoruba Language

Yoruba language belongs to the West Benue-Congo of the Niger-Congo phylum of African languages. (Williamson and Blench, 2000). The language is spoken in the south western part of Nigerian which spreads out to states and areas such as Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, as well as parts of Kwara, Kogi and Edo states. Apart from Nigeria, Yoruba language also is spoken in neighbouring countries such as Togo, Republic of Benin, Ghana, Sierra-lone, and Ivory Coast. Outside Africa, a great number of its speakers are found in countries such as Brazil, Cuba as well as Trinidad and Tobago (Balogun, 2013).

Balogun (2013:72) discusses five levels of language endangerment: (i) potentially endangered, (ii) endangered, (iii) seriously endangered, (iv) moribund, and (v) extinct. Based on these criteria, Yorùbá language may be classified as belonging to the first level. According to him,

“Any language that crosses the lines of either being potentially endangered or endangered is already passed into the limbo of time. Such a language may continue to have existence in a recorded form but could be falling out of use because of the preference of its speakers for more socially acceptable language. Indeed, languages with large number of speakers like Yorùbá can nonetheless be in danger” (Balogun, 2013:72).

There is no consensus on the exact population of Yoruba speakers across the world, as scholars gave different figures. However, going by the claims of Adaure (2013), Dada (2007) and Fabunmi and Salawu (2005), the number of Yoruba speakers could be between 40 and 50 million. Like other endangered languages, the use of Yoruba Language as mode of communication is in decline. This is attributed to the attitude of its native speakers to the language. Most members of the Yoruba ethnic group in South West, Nigeria no longer accord due regard to their indigenous language. Many of them including the youths prefer English to Yoruba as their mode of communication. The involvement of young

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people in the relegation of Yoruba language is caused by the day to day challenges they face in the use of the language for communication. We shall examine some of these challenges and how they have impacted negatively on the sustenance of Yoruba language.

Challenges Inhibiting Youths from Speaking Yoruba Language

The term 'youths' in this discourse, refers to young people between the ages of fifteen and thirty nine. Youths are the intermediaries between the old generation (the aged) and the new generation (the infants). They transmit languages and cultures from the old generation to the new generation. Thus, youths serve as agents of cultural regeneration and continuity. However, the performance of this role as agents of cultural regeneration and continuity by Yoruba youths is being hindered by several challenges they encounter in the use of Yoruba language.

1. Rural-Urban drift

The rural-urban drift poses a great threat to the continued existence of Yoruba language by the current socio-economic reality in Nigeria. Hence, for the transmission and cultural values to continue, the link between the youths and elders must be sustained. However, the rural-urban drift involving youths in search of opportunities has affected this link. The link between youths and elders is being broken by the continued emigration of young people from villages (where life expectancy remains drastically low with high risk of epidemics) to towns and cities (where better opportunities are believed to exist). According to Anchimbe (2006), the implication of this phenomenon is that those old people who are considered as mobile dictionaries of indigenous languages may die without transferring their knowledge to the young. This poses a great challenge to the continuous sustenance of Yoruba language among young people.

2. Adoption of English as Language of Communication

The adoption of English language as an official language of communication coupled with the society's negative attitude towards Yoruba language is another challenge which discourages young people from communicating in Yoruba language. Almost all strata of the society, from family level to community leadership, see Yoruba language as less relevant, while more importance is attached to

English language as language of communication. Hence, English language enjoys more use than Yoruba in most homes. Dada (2007) and Balogun (2013) state that many parents prefer to communicate with their children in English instead of in Yoruba language. Consequently, most of these children are not proficient in their native language since English has displaced Yoruba as their first language.

Ola-Olorun, Ikonta and Adeosun (2013) in the study of "the parental attitude to the learning of L1 in Nigerian Secondary Schools", note that many children who come from households where English is the language of communication tend to exhibit deficiencies in the knowledge of their native language. Such children find it difficult to express their thoughts fully in their mother tongue. Apart from homes, schools are supposed to be the platform for the learning of Yoruba language. However, the exposure of students to Yoruba language in schools is minimized by the school authorities. Even though Yoruba language is taught as subject of study, students are forbidden to use the language for general communication during school hours. On the other hand, English is both the language of instruction and medium of general communication in schools. Consequently, many students show little interest in learning Yoruba language (Adegbite, 2010).

Olagbaju and Akinsowon (2014) who examined the challenges and solutions to the use of Nigerian languages in formal education reveal that government policy makers have failed to enforce the use of indigenous languages for teaching. Nevertheless, religion, which used to be an avenue for entrenching Yoruba and other indigenous languages, has become a platform for promotion of English language. Yoruba language has been relegated to the background in the practice of Christian faith. In most churches in urban areas, the medium of transmitting messages is English even though the largest percentages of the congregation are speakers of Yoruba language. In some of these churches, the sermons delivered in English are translated into Yoruba language for the Yoruba audience while other churches don't consider this necessary (Adegoju, 2008).

3. Media propagation of English Compared to Yoruba Language

The role of the mass media in the propagation of English language to the detriment of Yoruba language poses another threat to the sustenance of Yoruba language. Odegbenle (2013) points out that most radio and television stations in Lagos including Rhythm FM, Cool FM, Classic FM, Beat FM, Inspirational FM, Top FM, City FM, Continental FM, Brilla FM, Channels TV, Silverbird TV, Galaxy TV, and TV Continental are without contents in Yoruba language. Hence, Adegoju (2008) observes that some of these broadcast stations based in Yoruba speaking cities in Nigeria shortchanged their Yoruba speaking listeners and viewers, by casting their news in English before giving an abridged version in Yoruba. Invariably, young people are greatly influenced by the media in their choice of language which nevertheless, is contributing to the extinction of Yoruba language.

In addition, the advent of social media (also known as the new media) has further compounded the problem. The social media such as the facebook, twitter, instagram and other on-line media networks were engendered by the advancement of information technology. In this era of globalization, with its increasing flow of information, the social media have become acceptable to many people especially youths, because of their speed, extensive coverage and efficiency in dissemination of information. The social media make use of English, French, Spanish and other global languages as their major means of communication and information dissemination. Thus, the new media, with their increase popularity among the youths, have further strengthened the use of English as language of communication in Nigeria and other Anglophone countries of the world.

4. Anglicization of indigenous names among youths

In Nigeria, the strengthening of English language by the social media has brought about the anglicization of indigenous personal names among youths in Yoruba speaking areas. This practice is in vogue among Yoruba youths who are users of social media. For instance, the Yoruba female name 'Adunni' is written on facebook as 'Hardunni', Lola becomes 'Lawlah', Abiodun is written as 'Herbiodun' while Deola becomes 'Deyhorla'. In a study of gradual shift in Yoruba personal names among youths in Western Nigeria, Raheem (2013:91) compiled a list of other examples of Anglicized

Yoruba names on facebook users. Some of the names are cited in table 1.

Table 1: Anglicization of indigenous names among youths

S/N	Yoruba personal names	Anglicized forms
1	Adeneye	Hardeyneeyeh
2	Abisola	Harbeesorlah
3	Ayomide	Haryurmidey
4	Jumoke	Jumurkey
5	Adedoyin	Ardeydhoyin
6	Bidemi	Bideymee
7	Babatunde	Barbartundey
8	Rotimi	Roteemee
9	Dare	Dharey
10	Adeigbe	Hardeyheegbe
11	Femi	Phemmy
12	Tobiloba	Tobbylorbar
13	Damilola	Darmeelorlah
14	Omotayo	Hormortayor
15	Yetunde	Yhetundey

Raheem (2013) explains the rationale behind this new linguistic habit by asserting that the practice of Anglicizing indigenous names is a way by which Yoruba youths make their indigenous names sound 'global'. It was however noted that the practice has rendered the names meaningless. Every Yoruba name has clear meaning which reflects the bearer's family background or circumstance of the birth. The Anglicization of Yoruba names therefore removes such meanings and reduces the names to just something with which an individual is addressed.

Findings also revealed that many youths now wear customized T. shirts and vests with the Anglicized names of the wearers inscribed at the back of the clothes. This new trend engendered by the social media shows the influence of the media on people. It further shows how the media have used its influence on Yoruba

youths by drifting them away from the cultural norms as practised in Yoruba land

5. Attitudes of Elites to Yoruba Speakers

The attitude of elites towards Yoruba speakers tends to frustrate youths interested in speaking the language. The elites treat speakers of Yoruba language as inferior and under-achievers, whose future is bleak. Because of the ignominy and contempt to which they are being subjected, many graduates of Yoruba language, most of whom are youths, are moving to other fields considered as more prestigious and lucrative. Hence, the trend of many Yoruba speakers is by adjusting their mode of communication in speaking a mix-code of Yoruba and English expressions. Katibi (2011) listed various examples of mix-code expressions in table 2.

Table 2: Mix-code expressions among youths

S/N	Mix-code expressions	Meanings in English	Yoruba Language
1	Mo n miss e badly	I am missing you badly	Okan re n fa mi gan
2	Awon girls yen ni carry over	The girls have carry over	Awonobinrin yen niise
3	Chair yiwa okay	The chair is okay	Aga yidaraatunse
4	Trailer yi lo cause hold-up	This trailer caused the traffic hold-up	Okonlayi lo da sukere-fakere sile

The use of mix-code language has become a vogue among young people and some adults. Contemporary Yoruba speaking youths are joining the bandwagon of those code-mixing Yoruba with English expressions. King (2006) notes that code-mixing is a sign of a speaker's deficiency. Many speakers code-mix to cover up their limited knowledge of the vocabularies of English or Yoruba language.

However, most users of code-mix languages see their action in a different perspective. They see code-mixing as voluntary action which they perform with delight. Adedun and Shodipe (2011) explain why people take delight in this form of language mix. They stated that "the use of vernacular language mixed with a European language marks the

speaker as educated and of relatively high socio-economic status". Thus, most of those who speak this form of Yoruba language (just like the English speakers) regard their mode of communication as symbol of high status and class pride. Those who chose to speak undiluted form of Yoruba are often considered as illiterates and nonentities. These distinct pictures of the different categories of speakers are portrayed in the electronic media which promote the use of these forms of Yoruba language. In many of the recent Yoruba movies, characters that code-mix Yoruba with English are often portrayed as men of high class or ideal people while those who speak undiluted Yoruba, including dialects, are portrayed as either illiterates, backward, old or unimportant personalities.

In addition, the radio and the television media also popularize the adulterated form of Yoruba language. Many radio and televisions stations in the South Western Nigeria broadcast programmes where this language form is freely used by presenters who are mostly youths. The use of this form of language-mix is even reflected in the names of some of the programmes, among which are 'O Nautical', 'E ma bubble' and 'E check e' in Oluyole FM, Ibadan, 'Bebe Extra' in Splash FM, Ibadan while 'Miliki Express' and 'Faaji Extra' in Orisun TV, Lagos. Hence, young people who are fans of these programmes, tend to see the use of adulterated form of Yoruba language for unofficial communication as ideal and acceptable in modern era.

The Way Forward

Balogun (2013) gave some suggestions on how to improve the speaking of indigenous language for example Yoruba among young people. Hence, the following suggestions could help to salvage the apathy of young people to communicating in Yoruba language.

1. Awareness Creation to Speak Yoruba Language

There is the need for government, parents, schools, policy makers, language planners and other stake holders to create cultural awareness among young people with the aim of repositioning Yorùbá language in a way that an average Yorùbá person will be proud of the language. In addition, young people should be encouraged to speak pure mother tongue. The mixing of Yorùbá language with English language by Yorùbá speakers should be discouraged. There is the need to focus on young generation to be

proud to be of Yoruba origin rather than selling out Yorùbá culture totally to a foreign culture like the English language.

2. Reviving the storytelling tradition to promote cultural values

There is the need for parents to revive the tradition of storytelling to teach morals and cultural values; they should speak Yorùbá language to their children and encourage the children to do the same thereby enhancing their knowledge and confidence in the language. This will instill cultural pride in the children or wards. This can be done by regularly clothing them in traditional attires which must be used regularly for all occasions so as to instill good traditional values in them. Also, competitions that attract motivations and reward for excellent performance in Yorùbá language at all levels should be encouraged and given wide publicity in order to promote positive values of Yoruba language.

3. Promotion of Yoruba programmes on the Media.

The media should be motivated and used as an avenue to promote pure Yorùbá programmes. Hence, interesting programmes in Yorùbá language that are children and youth-related must be encouraged. Children and youth-focused drama, comedy, music with the active involvement of the target audience; the youths and children must be encouraged. This could gradually displace the cartoon, Nickelodeon and The Disney series which have nearly captured the upcoming generation. Also, this avenue can be used to discouraged young people from using code switching during speaking Yoruba language because this will invariably destroy the real meaning of the language among intending learners. They should be encourage to appreciate their cultural form of communication.

Conclusion/Recommendation

The disparity in the use of English and Yoruba languages is a reflection of the society's contrasting attitudes towards the two languages. While English is held in high esteem, Yoruba language is treated as inferior. The unfavourable disposition of stakeholders to Yoruba language could be a continuous obstacle to the effective use of the language for communication and thus make youths not to appreciate its values as a veritable means of individual and collective expressions. Hence, there is the need for re-orientation of youths and other members of the society to make them cherish Yoruba language. Youths should be encouraged to speak unadulterated Yoruba language. The habit of code

mixing Yoruba language with English should be discouraged by the media which promote it. Government should encourage electronic media in the South Western Nigeria, through the National Broadcasting Commission, to increase their programme contents in Yoruba. More channels dedicated to Yoruba language as NTA Yoruba, Orisun T.V, Tiwan-tiwa and Amuludun F.M should be established to promote Yoruba language and cultures. Also, government should intensify the teaching of Yoruba language as compulsory subjects in schools. More Yoruba teachers should be employed and the language should be made as language of instruction in schools alongside English language.

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