

# **Faculty Lecture**

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**Title:**

**YORUBA MUST NOT DIE OUT**

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The Vice Chancellor, Obafemi Awolowo University  
The Deputy Vice Chancellor  
The Registrar  
The Bursar  
Directors and Deans,  
particularly the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, on whose  
invitation I am here today  
Staff and Students  
The Royal Fathers present and/or their representatives  
Respected Elders, Male and Female  
Friends and Colleagues  
Members of the Press Corps here present

I bring you all greetings from the Yoruba Cross-Border Language Commission, of which I happen to be the first and current chairman. Not many of you are at all likely to have ever heard that name before. And that is simply because the Commission was set up only recently – in February last year, to be precise, in Cotonou, in Bénin Republic (formerly known as Dahomey). It was set up by the African Academy of Languages, or ACALAN for short. The latter was itself formally established by the African Union, or AU for short, in 2006. That effectively makes the Yoruba Cross-Border Language Commission, like the Swahili and Hausa Cross-Border Language Commissions before it, as well as the Ìgbò Language Commission which is to follow in due course, a grandchild, so to speak, of the African Union.

The only responsibility assigned ACALAN by the AU has to do with languages in Africa. Specifically, the AU wants ACALAN to:

- (i) promote indigenous African languages for official use in education at all levels, in

government and the judiciary at all levels, in law enforcement, commerce and industry, as well as in mass communication;

- (ii) encourage the further development particularly of indigenous trans-border languages so as to foster greater educational, cultural, commercial, and social interactions among their native speakers; and
- (iii) get resource persons who already have expertise in the development of one or more indigenous African languages to go and assist in the development of still other such languages.

When ACALAN set up the Yoruba Language Commission, as indicated above, it simply devolved upon it the first two of the three terms of reference given it by the AU, and thereafter charged us members of the Commission to implement them for the language of special interest to us, namely, the Yoruba language.

Because this language happens to be spoken as a native language in neighbouring areas of Nigeria, Bénin, and Togo in that order, eight of the members of the Commission are from here in Nigeria. Two are from Bénin, while two others who are yet to be named will come from Togo. We, the members of the Commission, are no politicians; we are no government officials either. The only thing that actually binds us together is that we are members of the academia having abiding interest in the progress and development of the Yoruba language. Other like-minded individuals are both free and welcome to join us, with a view to assisting our effort in any and every way they can.

We have our own logo already, in the form of a map of West Africa with only Togo, Bénin, and Nigeria shown on it as well as with an image of the head of the Sea God (Olókun) mounted over Bénin Republic as the totem of all the Yoruba speaking peoples in those three countries.

Work is currently in progress on an interactive website for the Commission. When completed, the website will enable people (including Yoruba speakers in the Diaspora) who are favourably disposed to the cause of the language to contact us with advice, suggestions, and donations in cash and/or kind.

The motto we have chosen to inform and direct all our activities in the Commission is “Yorùbá kò gbọdò kú,” which translates roughly in English as “Yoruba must not die out!”

There is good, nay, compelling reason today for choosing this particular motto. Any careful observer of developments within the contemporary Yoruba community is bound to be filled with grave fear for the future of its indigenous language. Many Western educated Yoruba persons today seem to consider it a mark of sophistication for them to speak English where they should speak Yoruba, their native language. They speak only English to their children at home, and wish only English to be also spoken and taught to them at school from the Kindergarten level to the University level. In all local and state government establishments in Yoruba speaking states, English is the official and preferred language. If the governor of a state or one of his high officials visits a traditional ruler in his palace, or market women in the market, the preferred language once again will be English (a language that members of the audience hardly comprehend) rather than Yoruba, with which both the speaker and his audience are much more comfortable.

Now, if the negative attitude of government officials and many Western educated Yoruba persons towards the Yoruba language is to be blamed on plain ignorance, how is one to explain the same attitude to the language on the part of universities, which are supposed to be citadels of learning and seats of enlightenment? To be sure, Yoruba is these days routinely offered as a regular degree programme in all state-owned universities within the Yoruba speaking community. But very few, if any, of the private or faith-based universities within the same community offer the language at any level at all, let alone as a full-fledged degree programme. Even, among the state-owned universities that today offer degree programmes in Yoruba, only Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, and Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, to the best of my current knowledge, permit Yoruba to be used as a medium of instruction for the language beyond the first degree level. For all the other state-owned universities that offer Yoruba beyond the first degree level, English is the only permitted language of instruction and discussion for the Master's and the doctorate. Papers written in Yoruba by lecturers other than those in Yoruba studies are routinely discountenanced for the purposes of promotion to different grades of lectureship, regardless of the actual quality and content of such papers. Finally, professors wishing to deliver their inaugural lectures in Yoruba are advised or obliged to shelve such an idea if they will not deliver them instead in English.

All this reminds me of a favourite proverb of a late friend and colleague of mine at the University of Ilorin, namely, Dr Bayo Ogunjimi, born in Šakí, Oyo State. The proverb, which corresponds figuratively in English to "By their fruits ye shall know them," translates literally in

English to “No one but Nda himself will call him a slave or servant.” Asked to please explain the meaning of the proverb, my late friend and colleague chose instead to tell me the story behind it. He said, in the days of old, when people still kidnapped and enslaved fellow human beings, a man once decided to have his favourite slave, named Nda, accompany him on a visit to friends somewhere faraway. On their way there, Nda entreated his master to kindly spare him embarrassment by not letting it be known to their hosts that he was actually a slave rather than an ordinary travelling companion. To this, the master is reported to have said, “Nda, provided you keep your own side of this bargain by acting naturally, there will be absolutely no cause for anxiety.” Upon getting to their destination, they were treated to the traditional lavish Yoruba hospitality of pounded yam and very tasty meat-choked stew. But rather than sit and eat lunch at the same table with his master, Nda quietly withdrew to the backyard and there began foraging for food in the dustbins placed there. Whereupon the astonished hosts immediately sensed that the person they had all along taken for an ordinary travelling companion was actually a slave!

While Nda’s slave or servant mentality could easily be excused, because his master was after all very close by in their joint hosts’ sitting room, what looks like our colonial mentality cannot. This is because our former colonial masters, by contrast, are now far removed from our midst, and Yoruba, our native language, should therefore no longer be under the bondage of their language. They have been gone now not for a day or two, but for over fifty years; and they therefore cannot from that distance in space and time exercise any further restraint on us as to how we use our native language within our native community rather than within theirs over there.

In actual fact, however, I for one do not believe for one moment that the current widespread negative attitude towards our native language is borne of colonial mentality on our part. It appears rather to be borne of lack of contentment, a state of mind that makes people dump their own things, rather than refurbish them, and then start hankering after others'. It would seem that this kind of base spirit has been with us ever since our former colonial masters came into our midst. An example of the way this base spirit works can easily be seen, it would seem, in our traditional cloth weaving industry. There were in my youth two types of loom within the Yoruba community. One of them was the upright loom, typically constructed and erected perpendicularly to the floor against some adjoining wall. It was the type used by women for weaving the coarse cotton cloth then known as '*kíjìpá*' and measuring about three feet wide. *Kíjìpá* was typically for making work clothes and casual wear. The other loom is the horizontal type found till today in places like Ilorin, Iwo, Ibadan, etc. It was and still is for weaving strips of cloth measuring four to six inches wide and used for making clothes for formal and/or ceremonial wear. The native cloth for sewing casual wear and work clothes was what I grew up with, but people who still know how to weave it are now very hard to find, particularly in my part of the Yoruba country. Its place has now generally been taken there by admittedly much finer imported machine-made fabrics.

It would appear that we are in a similar fashion now gradually dropping our native language and adopting a presumably better foreign language to replace it. Most of my academic colleagues today would say Yoruba lacks words and expressions for teaching and/or discussing

Science, and that, rather than lack of contentment, is the simple reason why they use English instead. The simple question they never ask themselves, however, is: “Who in particular developed English to the level where it is now used with great ease for teaching and discussing Science? Was it God, or rather the English people themselves, using their God-given creativity?”

**The first important point for this audience to bear in mind here is that no human language was ever expressly created for discussing any particular discipline or set of disciplines. Any language found suitable for discussing specific disciplines today only became so mostly through the collective conscious efforts of its speakers/users.** Thus, in this connection, we learn, for instance, that around 2,000 new words and expressions entered the English language through the writings of William Shakespeare alone ([www.anglik.net/englishlanguagehistory.htm](http://www.anglik.net/englishlanguagehistory.htm)). And as new words and expressions entered the Humanities through the writings of Shakespeare and others like him, so they entered the Sciences initially through the writings of native English scientists. From what we thus learn from this account, no one came from heaven or elsewhere to develop English into a language for teaching Science; the English people developed it to that level mostly by themselves. Accordingly, it is not God’s fault that Yoruba currently cannot be used with ease for teaching Science; it is not the fault of our former colonial masters either. Rather, the fault lies entirely with us in the Yoruba community, and we will never overcome the problem involved by hankering after English.

Only the shameless ever hanker after other people’s things, and for their pain they invariably end up being disgraced and thoroughly shamed. Most of what passes for

written and spoken English every day here in Nigeria is actually no English at all, as most of us, including this writer/speaker, not surprisingly lack the needed natural facility in it. In these circumstances, should the native speakers of the language find it both feasible and in their self-interest to do so, they could at whim easily order us to hands off their language and stop mangling it any further. Consider in this connection what it currently suits them to do. They decided recently that first-time visitors from here to their country must each post with their government a bond of £3,000 or ₦700,000 which such visitors will only be able to redeem in full if they do not overstay the periods indicated in their entry visas. As if that was not irksome enough, they now say that visitors must also purchase health insurance policies in Britain, the aim of that being to prevent them from surreptitiously enjoying free health services under their National Health Scheme. Implicit in all this is the belief or feeling that people from here, including us, the Yoruba, are all shameless opportunists, and they would rather that we stayed back here in Nigeria, instead of coming in droves to their country. If and when it suits them to similarly ask us to leave their language alone, what will we do if by then we still haven't developed our native language ourselves for talking and writing about anything that catches our fancy or imagination?

However, to be candid, if lack of contentment plays any role at all in the current negative attitude towards our native language, that role must actually be very minimal. Clothing will conveniently serve here once again for illustration. Compared to some other people in Africa that I know, we, the Yoruba, have cause to rejoice and thank our stars for having the tradition of wearing clothes well before our former colonial masters arrived in our midst. It is for that reason that we still wear today the style of clothing

worn in their times by our ancestors – namely, *dàńsíki*, *bùbá*, *şóşó* (trousers), together with matching gowns and caps, for the menfolk, and *iró*, *bùbá*, *gèlè*, and *ìborùn*, for the womenfolk. The tradition of wearing that style of clothing did not die out before the colonialists arrived. It did not die out while they were here in our midst, and neither has it died out since they left our shores. If we had similarly had the tradition of reading and writing in our native language, more specifically, the tradition of using it as the language of formal instruction in schools as well as of writing different kinds of books, it would have fully survived colonization exactly as our traditional style of clothing has done.

I know this because (see Awobuluyi 2012) we, Blacks, in Black Africa were not the only peoples that suffered colonization in the past. The Arabs in North Africa did, as did the Indians in South-east Asia. However, because, unlike us, the Arabs and the Indians had the tradition of reading and writing in their indigenous languages, in some cases for up to a thousand years before their colonial masters arrived, they simply reverted back to that tradition immediately their former masters left for home. That is why, till today, their indigenous languages serve them mostly as their normal and natural means of spoken and written communication.

The current situation of our native language is indeed very worrisome. However, luckily for us, it is not yet past redemption, as there are things we could easily do to reverse it. In particular, if we want the language to ever attain the status of its counterparts in North Africa and India, the various things we must do and the different steps we need to take are as follows:

1. We must restore Yoruba to its natural status as the host language in all our schools, and make it compulsory for all pupils and students from kindergarten to university level within the Yoruba community.<sup>1</sup> At present, the time allotted to English on the school timetable is about five times the one grudgingly granted to Yoruba. This proportion has and needs to be reversed, as the host is by right entitled to more of everything within its domain than the guest, which is what English actually is in the Yoruba community. In addition, the teaching of English should not centre on its structure and literature alone as now; it should also include the history particularly of its vocabulary. That way, our children will get to know first, that there is actually nothing special about English as a language other than its vast and highly diversified vocabulary, and second, and this is the real lesson intended here, the vocabulary of their mother tongue could, with time and the determined joint efforts of all of us in that direction, also become similarly expanded and diversified.

Only the various state governments within that community can legally effect the change called for

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<sup>1</sup>It would appear from page 54 of *The Nation* of 2 September 2013 that the Igbo have now reached this same decision for their language too. And that, to me, is cause for joy, as I long ago urged the Hausa, the Igbo, and the Yoruba to cater for their respective languages themselves instead of waiting for the Federal Government to do so for them. This is because, true to the traditional English saying that misery loves company, the speakers of some of the other smaller languages in this country appear to want those three languages permanently kept down where they, too, are – under the domination of English.

here, as they alone have the power under the law to do so. And if they do so, the benefits that our community stands to derive from that will be of at least two kinds (see Awobuluyi 2013: 358-9). First, educated Yoruba speakers that can read and write the language very well as well as speak it fluently will increase tremendously in number in the society. And second, given such an increase in our educated and, therefore, reading public, economic activities relating to the use of the language and book publishing in it, which appear moribund at present, will come fully alive again.

2. Yoruba needs also to be declared the official language for all institutions and establishments, both public and private, throughout the Yoruba community. Yoruba should be the only medium of written and spoken communication among workers at work, and among the criteria for eligibility for appointment into any institution or establishment within that community should be a high degree of competence in the written and spoken forms of the language.

Only the state governments within the Yoruba community are once again empowered by law to issue the required directives. And if they do so, as they are well capable of doing, parents/guardians and their wards will begin for a change to see the study of Yoruba in schools and colleges as a form of training that assures economic reward and upward mobility. Furthermore, the language will, like English today, gain value and prestige; and there will be no further cause for anyone to

denigrate it, as an otherwise respected elderly Yoruba statesman once did in jest, when he called it a language suitable only for casting a spell on people and for reciting the sacred verses of the Ifa oracle.

**Another important point for this audience to bear in mind is that no human language ever suddenly becomes suitable for matters it had never before been used for.** This being the case, if Yoruba is ever to truly become suitable for things other than casting spells and reciting Ifa sacred verses, now is the time to start using it (gradually for now, if need be) for such other things as teaching in schools, conducting government business at all levels, carrying out legislative business also at all levels, carrying out law enforcement duties, etc.

3. New words and expressions need to be urgently created in very large numbers for Yoruba, to enable it to be used with ease for teaching all the subjects or disciplines that need to be taught in all our educational institutions.

There are associations and individuals that have for some time now been expending their time and private resources for this purpose. One such association is the Yoruba Studies Association of Nigeria (YSAN), which has published two terminology booklets, (Awobuluyi 1990 *Èdè-Ìperí Yorùbá II*) and (Bamgboṣe 1992 *Èdè-Ìperí Yorùbá I*), for use by teachers and their students. Thanks to that association as well as to the Yoruba Teachers

Association, and the various Yoruba-medium books that some members of the two associations have written for school use, Yoruba has for more than twenty years now been the sole medium of instruction for its language, literature, custom, and history components from primary school to the first-degree level in state-owned universities throughout the Yoruba community.

Among the private individuals who have expended time and effort on creating new terms and expressions in the language are: (1) the late Prof. Babs Fafunwa and his colleagues like Prof. Adebisi Afọlayan, who undertook the ‘Yoruba Six-Year Project’ here in Ile-Ife some thirty years ago, to demonstrate for us all to see that Yoruba can indeed easily serve as a medium of instruction in our primary schools; (2) the late Prof. Adeboye Babalọla and his colleagues, who created and compiled in 1991 the Yoruba terms contained in *A Quadrilingual Glossary of Legislative Terms*; and (3) the late Mr J A Odetayo, an engineer by profession, who single-handedly created, compiled, and published at his own expense in 1993 the *Yoruba Dictionary of Engineering Physics*.

The individuals known to me (whether directly or only through third parties) who have been and are still expending time and effort on creating new terms for the language are: (4) Prof. Olasope Oyelaran and his colleagues, who created and compiled in 1980 the Yoruba terms in *A Glossary of Technical Terminology for Primary Schools*; (5) Dr Kayode J Fakinlede, now of the Department of

Chemistry, Federal University of Technology, Akure, who, while still in the US, single-handedly compiled and at his own expense published in 2001 his *Modern Dictionary of the Yoruba Language: Translation of Modern and Scientific English to Yoruba*; (6) Professor Olorode, a botanist and formerly of Obafemi Awolowo University here in Ile-Ife, who, as reports have it, expended time and resources collecting native words for some of the different plant species in the Yoruba community; (7) one Dr Demola Ajala, a medical doctor, who was known to television viewers in Ilorin as collecting and compiling native words for bodily ailments in Yoruba land; (8) Prof. Adebisi Ogunşina, Dr Lere Adeyemi, and (at that time) Mr Peter Oluşeyẹ Adeşeyẹ, who, more than a decade ago in Ilorin, were collecting native terms for medical care in our traditional setting; (9) Dr (Mrs) Funmilayo Omolabake Olubode-Şawẹ, who in 2010 wrote her doctoral dissertation, *Devising a Yoruba Vocabulary for Building Construction*, under my supervision at Adekunle Ajaşin University, Akungba-Akoko; and (10) Prof. Kọlawọle Owolabi and his colleagues at the Centre for Yoruba Language Engineering in Ibadan, who for some two or three years now have been busy creating and compiling Yoruba terms for computing, commerce, legislative business, and mass communication.

The various past and on-going terminological projects enumerated above may somehow give the impression that Yoruba now has more than sufficient new terms for its needs. In fact, however,

nothing could be further from the truth, as the number of new terms and expressions so far created and accepted into the language is actually very small indeed compared to the number actually required, particularly in the area of the sciences. That apart, and to the best of my knowledge, no university within the Yoruba community has, as an institution, ever sponsored or financed any terminology workshop or project for the language. And yet universities are the institutions best placed to undertake such projects. For one thing, most of the people with expertise in such matters are all to be found in universities. For another, money is voted to them annually for carrying out research that is of relevance to their respective communities, and no research could be more relevant to a given community than one designed to make its language serve it as a better and more efficient means of imparting, whether in writing or by word of mouth, all the kinds of knowledge that children go to school there to acquire. This being the case, all that any university within the Yoruba community needs to do is to simply summon both the will and the courage to set adequate research funds aside for terminology work on its indigenous language.

Notwithstanding that Obafemi Awolowo University is today fully funded by the Federal Government of Nigeria, we cannot forget that it was actually founded by the Government of the old Western Region specifically for the benefit of the Yoruba community. As such, it actually is the oldest and, therefore, the leader among the state universities established so far within that

community. It accordingly behaves it as a leader by virtue of its age and status to undertake this particular kind of project in the interests of the community. And if the authorities of the university graciously agree to undertake it, it would then be both a duty and a pleasure for us members of the Yoruba Cross-Border Language Commission to offer and render assistance in the form of expertise and advice.

4. There is need for a computer or set of computers reserved exclusively for dictionary making. All the new words already created and accepted into the language as well as others to follow in future need to be inputted into such a computer or set of computers, for processing and eventual publication at, say, five-year intervals, as fully alphabetized Yoruba-to-English/French and English/French-to-Yoruba bilingual dictionaries or glossaries. In time and as the Yoruba language takes root in all spheres of life within its community, monolingual dictionaries will start being published for native speakers, and bilingual dictionaries featuring English (in Nigeria) and French (in Bénin and Togo) for second-language learners of the language. As I see it, it will be completely up to the Yoruba Cross-Border Language Commission to find ways and means of acquiring the required computer sets – after it has found or acquired space for use specifically as its base or offices.
5. There is need, too, to start writing Yoruba-medium textbooks covering all the subjects on the curriculum from Primary School to all the degree

levels in our universities. We academics are best placed to undertake this kind of writing, and it is particularly gratifying that some of us are already doing so.

Of note in this regard are: Prof. Kọlawọle Owolabi who, in 1989, came out with *Ìjìnlẹ̀ Ìtupalẹ̀ Èdè Yorùbá: Fònétiṣi àti Fonólójì*; Emeritus Prof. Ayo Bamgboṣe who, in 1990, came out with *Gírámà àti Fonólójì Yorùbá*; Dr Lere Adeyemi who, in 2006, came out with *Tíṣi Lítírésù ní Èdè Yorùbá*; Prof. Oladele Awobuluyi who, in 2008, came out with *Èkọ̀ Ìṣẹ̀dà-Òrò Yorùbá*, and in 2013 with *Èkọ̀ Gírámà Èdè Yorùbá*; and Dr Kayode J Fakinlede of the Federal University of Technology, Akure, who, in September 2013 published *Ìwé-Ìléwọ̀ [fún] Èkọ̀ Ìmò-Ìjìnlẹ̀ àti Ìmò-Èrọ̀* as a 150-page e-book (ISBN: 0-678902-4-1), with his *Ìwé-Ìṣẹ̀ Ìṣirò Alákòbèrẹ̀* to follow subsequently.

The academics just mentioned together with their Yoruba-medium works constitute but a very small, indeed tiny, fraction of all the academics in Yoruba land. Therefore, let their Yoruba-medium works just mentioned be a challenge to all those other academics that are yet to undertake such works. And let such works challenge each of them to write one or more Yoruba-medium textbooks in their respective areas of specialization for the doctorate or equivalent degree.

6. History tells us that Latin was once the medium of instruction in schools in England. When the French from Normandy on the continent came over as

conquerors, French became the universal medium of instruction, except at the universities of Cambridge and Oxford, which were loath to give up Latin. When the English language eventually freed itself from the stranglehold of French and became the medium of instruction in educational institutions, the universities of Cambridge and Oxford were once again reluctant to join the bandwagon, so to speak. Eventually, however, for fear of becoming the black sheep of the English family, they felt forced to accept English as medium of instruction.

As it is, the various universities within our community are expected to serve as our beacon and guide. Accordingly, and unlike Cambridge and Oxford Universities, they should act responsively regarding the Yoruba language. As more and more Yoruba-medium textbooks on different academic disciplines get published and as new technical terms grow apace in number in the language, the universities in our community should commensurately welcome Yoruba as the language for teaching, writing, and delivering the various kinds of public lectures associated with universities worldwide. Where there is a need for non-Yoruba persons to know what has been said or written entirely in Yoruba, what could be done, depending on the length of the discourse concerned, would be to either translate it all into English/French for such persons or merely summarize it for them in English/French. This was what was done at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, in respect of a PhD thesis written in Yoruba under my supervision in 2006 on an aspect of the grammar of

the dialects of Yoruba spoken in Ekiti State. Doing things this way removes the fear entertained in some quarters that scholars elsewhere might not be able to get the gist of works done entirely in Yoruba. As we do this while undertaking serious research in the Yoruba medium, so the language will continue to take root and flourish within our community.

7. There is need, too, for books written in other languages such as English, French, German, etc to be translated into Yoruba. Such translated works will not only increase our knowledge and broaden our outlook as Yoruba people; they will also bring new words and new meanings into our language. Thus, *Bíbèlì Mímó*, a Yoruba translation of the *Holy Bible*, brought numerous new words and meanings into the Yoruba language. For example, the Yoruba word, *mímó*, originally only meant ‘clean, not dirty or filthy’. It acquired its second contemporary meaning of ‘holy, sacred’ only after the *Holy Bible* was translated into Yoruba.

The people known to me to have in recent times translated foreign works into Yoruba are: Oladele Awobuluyi, Adeboye Babalola, Akinwumi Işola, et al. who, in 1998, translated *General History of Africa I : Methodology and African Prehistory*, J Ki-Zerbo (ed.) into Yoruba as *Àgékúró Ìtàn Jákè-Jádò Ilẹ̀ Áfíríkà I : Ogbón Ìşèwádìí pẹ̀lú Ìtàn Ìgbà-Ìwásẹ̀ ní Ilẹ̀ Áfíríkà* (some officers of the Federal Government regrettably frustrated its publication after we finished translating it; among the things the Yoruba Cross-Border Language Commission

would now need to do is to retrieve the relevant typescript and ensure its prompt publication); Prof. Akinwumi Işola who, in 2010, translated *Ake: Years of Childhood* by Wõle Şoyinka into Yoruba as *Aké: Nígbà Èwe*; Prof. Oladele Awobuluyi who, in 2011, translated *Information for Patients on Anaesthesia* (Anon) into Yoruba as *Àlàyé fún Àwọn Aláìsàn nípa Ìdènà Oró-Abẹ*; Prof. Adelọla Adeloje and Rufus Akinyemi who, in 2011, translated *Neuroscience: The Science of the Brain* by Richard and Fillenz Morris into Yoruba as *Ìjìnlẹ̀ Èkó nípa Işé Qpọlọ: Ìwé Ìbèrẹ̀ Èkó fún Qmọ Ilé-Ìwé àti Qdó*; and Dr Yetunde Oluwafisan whose translations of three French novels came out recently. The novels are: *Les Soleils Des Independences* by Ahmadou Kourouma, which came out in Yoruba in 2012 as *Ìgbà Tó Dé Là Ní Lò*; *Monè: Outrages et defis* by Ahmadou Kourouma, which came out in Yoruba in 2012 as *Mòṅè: Ègbìn Gbùn-ún-ùn*; and *Ex père de la nation* by Aminata Sow Fall, which came out in Yoruba in 2012 as *Ààrẹ Àná*.

This is the kind of work that you, academic colleagues of mine that have good command of English, French, German, etc, can easily undertake individually for the purpose of developing and deeply entrenching Yoruba literary tradition in our community.

8. We are exceedingly lucky to have in our midst Yoruba sons and daughters that are richly endowed with creative and writing skills – skills that they have all along masterfully been exploiting to

produce valued prose, poetry, and plays in Yoruba both for entertainment and enlightenment. A foreigner (Hair 1967: 4) who came to carry out research on book production in indigenous languages in this country in the early '60s found us, the Yoruba, to be head and shoulders above the other ethnic groups in that respect. But then that observation was made more than forty years ago. Does it hold true still? One can only hope so, while at the same time urging our current crop of creative writers not to relent or relax in their efforts.

We have many other truly gifted Yoruba-born writers who choose to display their literary talent in the medium of English only. With the exception of such writers' English translations of the novels of the late D O Fagunwa, none of their original works in English is of any direct benefit to the Yoruba language; rather they are a detriment to it, as they continually increase the quantum of publications in English, thereby further popularizing and glamorizing it, at the expense particularly of Yoruba within its native community.

Such Yoruba-born writers should realise, however, that the community of writers in English today is like a crowded market place, where no particular person's presence or absence is apt to be noticed or felt. Accordingly, whether these Yoruba-born writers write or do not write in English makes little or no difference to the quantum of yearly outputs in that language. By contrast, their failure so far to write in the Yoruba language continues to tell very adversely on yearly outputs in it. Fortunately in this

connection we have the example of Ngugi wa Thiong'o (formerly widely known as James Ngugi), a world renowned writer in English just like our compatriots, who decided to give up writing in English and start writing instead in Gikuyu, his native tongue. If our famous Yoruba-born writers in English decide to follow Ngugi's footsteps and start writing in Yoruba, that will immediately have the very dramatic effect of advertising that language to the whole world while also adding very significantly to annual literary outputs in it. And it is of the utmost importance that both literary and scholarly outputs increase annually in the language – as that is the only way it will become a language known and respected worldwide, as is necessary and as we members of the Yoruba Cross-Border Language Commission very much want it to be.

9. The various books that become written and published in Yoruba will exist as a source of lasting pride and inspiration for the Yoruba community. For this reason, we members of the Yoruba Cross-Border Language Commission consider it fit and proper that there be a large building somewhere, where two to three copies each of such books could be housed for the use and inheritance of our children born and unborn. This, I feel, is not a matter for the consideration of the Commission alone. Rather, it is one for joint consideration by that Commission, officials representing the various state governments in Yoruba land, as well as private persons and entities that are well disposed to the Yoruba language.

Ladies and gentlemen, what I have attempted so far to set out before you in this lecture titled “Yoruba must not Die Out” is a long-term plan for the continued growth and development indefinitely far into the future of the Yoruba language. The title of the lecture, which is also the motto of the Yoruba Cross-Border Language Commission, as said earlier, is actually ambiguous between two related meanings, at least in Yoruba. First is its meaning having to do with “Yoruba as a language,” which is all I have spoken on thus far in this lecture. And second is its meaning having to do with “Yoruba as a people or community.”

This second meaning of the title of this lecture reminds me of an issue that caught and retained my attention in *There Was a Country*, written and published by the late Prof. Chinua Achebe of blessed memory. In that book (p. 74), he said Western education in this country started in Yoruba land and eventually reached the Igbo community to the East of the River Niger much later. But that notwithstanding, by dint of hard work and grim determination, his kinsmen, the Igbo, not only made up lost ground, but had by the 1950s also actually left the Yoruba lagging far behind in matters of that type of education. In short, according to that writer, the Yoruba have at best been resting on their oars and have, therefore, neither been progressing nor regressing as a community. Some of us might be inclined to take umbrage at his assessment of us as a community, but his view, whether true or false, actually turns out to be very mild in contrast to the view of us Blacks held by the Whites, a view responsible for the way they usually or generally treat us.

That view of us Blacks is partly responsible for, among other things, the recent decision that first-time visitors from here to Britain must each post a refundable bond of

£3000 with the British government as guarantee that they will not overstay their visits if granted entry visas. When that decision first became known here, some of us made what I consider as very silly comments to the effect that the British ought not at all to treat us that way, given the ‘historical bond’ between us and them – as if our former master-servant relationship with them should be a continuing source of joy and pride for us in Nigeria! For anyone who actually considers the matter thoughtfully enough, however, the only real bond between us and them is that we are all members of the human race. And many of them are not even willing to fully accept that. And the reason is that, as we must admit, our society is not at all well organised and there is nothing concrete that the whole world knows us to have achieved in recent memory. The kind of achievement of relevance here, if the plain truth must again be told, does not take the form of religion (such as establishing religious sects with branches all over the world), nor the form of nonmaterial culture (such as dance, music, hair fashion, etc), nor the form of ordinary commerce involving the mere exchange of imported foreign products for unprocessed local ones. What I know for a fact that it involves are visible and physical products or devices created and manufactured **solely by us in our local community** (as opposed to being manufactured for us in China and/or Japan) for the comfort of life here and worldwide.

None of us trained Yoruba linguists ever formally studied Yoruba language beyond the secondary school level. The Yoruba scholars that specialised in Yoruba literature did not only study Yoruba at university level, as they needed to do; they also took courses in Linguistics as part of their training. Now, one thing about Linguistics as a discipline is that it can be applied to any and every natural

language. It is for that reason that we, Yoruba language and literature scholars, began by making new contributions to the extant scholarship on that subject, after correcting what appeared to us to call for correction there. That done, we have now turned our attention next to employing the tools of Linguistics for developing the Yoruba language into a handy and more efficient medium of instruction and communication within our community. If others join hands with us in this effort and we carry it through, its positive effect on the whole community will be both visible and palpable.

What we, scholars of Yoruba language and literature, are now doing is what all our colleagues in all the other disciplines should also be doing, in the interest of the progress and development of the Yoruba community and race. Conducting research and producing different scholarly publications that earn us rapid promotion at work is both proper and commendable. But in reality it is no more than work done for mere self-interest. There exists another kind of work of a higher moral value. It is work done specifically in the interest and for the progress of the whole community. I have in mind here work in the form of studies or pieces of research that lead to or result in the invention of new tools and/or mechanical devices that considerably ease if not totally eliminate the hard labour that farm work is and has been for the farmers in our midst almost since creation; work in the form of studies or pieces of research that lead to mechanical devices and products that will enable farm produce to keep both for long and in fresh condition; work in the form of studies or pieces of research that will enable various types of farm produce to be converted into raw materials for making different finished products in our community; work in the form of studies or pieces of research that lead to mechanical

devices, tools, and/or products that can be used to convert the perennial eyesore of litter around our individual homes and all over our towns and villages into tools or raw materials for other useful things; work in the form of studies or pieces of research that lead to mechanical devices, tools, and/or materials for turning the minerals in our soil as well as the trees that grow on it into tools and materials for adding value to other materials, etc.

Only these kinds of studies, research, and associated inventions can earn us respect and recognition in the human community worldwide. Therefore, let us all see Professor Achebe's negative assessment of our community as well as what the Whites think of us Blacks in general as a veritable challenge, and give it all that it takes, in the interest of the true progress and development of our community.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for your attention!

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