

Is Yorùbá an Endangered Language?*

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of language death is real. The phrase ‘language death’ may sound stark and unwelcome, but its grapping muscles on the throat of the Yoruba language have terrible, unannounced and unnoticed suffocating effects. Yoruba is one of the major languages in Nigeria. Does the language face the threat of total extinction in the next two or so decades? The answer is far beyond saying either yes or no. The paper discusses this issue with some illustrational analysis. The paper contends that the largeness of the percentage of the speakers of the language cannot thwart the supplantive moves of language endangerment. The paper then highlights some preventive measures for the Yoruba language to be able to overcome the danger of losing domains in today’s flow of globalisation.

Keywords: Yoruba, endangerment, globalisation, acquisition, and attrition

1. INTRODUCTION

The only channel by which human beings abstract reality is language. Language affects the way we think or perceive our reality. If we allow our language to slip away from us because of the various trans-national structural revolutions going on in the world today in the name of globalisation, we will begin to think anew. Such newness affects our reality and this leads to endangerment. One of such endangerments, a very important complement to our environment, is language endangerment. The Global Language Register (GLR) observes that “less than a third of the world’s languages are dying...” (Crystal 2000: 7). Moreover, the present reality in the world today is the rapid endangerment and death of many languages. At the extreme end of language endangerment are Language Attrition and Language Death. It is said that only 600 of the 6,000 or so languages in the world are safe from the threat of extinction. The Nigerian situation is quite alarming because both population and language endangerment complement each other. We want to opine that in the next twenty-five years, most of the languages in Nigeria would be gone. Yorùbá is one of the languages in Nigeria. Is the

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language endangered? Does the language face the threat of total extinction in the next two or so decades? If most of the languages in the country are dead in the next two decades, how many languages will remain in the whole world? English, French, Arabic, German, and Chinese? This paper intends to examine the possible answer to the question posed by the title. The issue is far beyond saying either yes or no. Language death is real. Is the Yorùbá language at the point of death? Apparently why and how will it die? Can anything be done? We shall try to provide some illustrational analysis while answering these questions.

2. THE YORÙBÁ LANGUAGE

The Yorùbá language belongs to the West Benue-Congo of the Niger-Congo phylum of African languages (Williamson and Blench 2000: 31). Apart from Nigeria with about 30 million Yorùbá speakers, Yorùbá is still spoken in Togo, Republic of Benín, Ghana, Sudan, Sierra-Leone and Côte D'Ivoire. Outside Africa, a great number of speakers of the language are in Brazil, Cuba, including Trinidad and Tobago. Yorùbá is regarded as one of the major languages of Nigeria. The effective speakers of the language in the country are about 35% of the country's total population. According to the International African Institute (1980: 60), the Yorùbá language "is used by the media i.e. the Press, Radio and Television. It is also used as a language of formal instruction and a curriculum subject in the primary school. In the secondary school and post-secondary level (including University); it is a curriculum subject. It has a standard orthography". The Yorùbá language occupies a privileged place within the entire range of African studies. A relatively abundant literature exists on the language both in the European languages and in the Yorùbá language itself.

The Yorùbá language is in contact with many other language groups in Nigeria and in some African countries; so it has several exonyms (outside names) like Yárfbà, Yórúbáwá, Nàgó Ànàgó, Lùkùmì, and Akú.

3. LEVELS OF DANGER

As impressive as the output outlined above for the Yorùbá language is, it has not, however been without its dark corners. The most serious is language death. The phrase 'language death' may sound stark and unwelcome, but its grappling muscles on the throat of the Yorùbá language have terrible suffocating effects. Although a language only dies when nobody speaks it any more, Yorùbá is yet to die even though people are still speaking it. But the threat of extinction is still solidly there. How? Wurm (1998: 192) recognises five-level models of language status: (i) potentially endangered, (ii) endangered, (iii) seriously endangered, (iv) moribund, and (v) extinct. Following Wurm, therefore, Yorùbá may be classified as belonging to the second level. However, we postulate that the language be

classified on the third level highlighted above, i.e. seriously endangered. The reasons are not far-fetched, they will be enumerated shortly. Meanwhile, the gaps that exist between the third, fourth and fifth levels are too fine and thereby become inconsequential. In other words, the last three levels are only cover-ups for language death. 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 has still no fluent speakers. Fluency here is quite pivotal and calculatively necessary to prove either the livingness or deadness of such a language. Whereas one could easily take the largeness of the number of speaker of a language as a way-out of slipping into the last deadly three levels of Wurm's classification. Languages with large number of speakers like Yorùbá can nonetheless be in danger. Brenzinger (1998: 93) had earlier noted this when he said "even Yorùbá, with 20 million speakers, has been called 'deprived' because of the way it has come to be dominated by English in higher education". The section 53 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognises English as the official language. Moreover, the suppressive effects of English over the Yorùbá language and other Nigerian languages are too overwhelming and suicidal. Bamgbose (1997: 22) also notes this by saying that the "endangered languages come to be used progressively less and less throughout the community, with some of the functions they originally performed; either dying out or gradually being supplanted by other languages e.g. Yorùbá less use in educational political, other public situation because its roles have been taken over by English. Such languages have been called Deprived". Here, the issue of decline is stressed: Yorùbá language is not just vulnerable to decline, but on the verge of 'extinction'.

4. THE REASONS FOR THE ENDANGERMENT

There are both remote and immediate causes responsible for the threat of serious endangerment staring the Yorùbá language in the face. We intend to enumerate them here. Meanwhile, there are natural catastrophic causes like the physical well-being of the speakers, unfavourable climatic and economic conditions, i.e. famine and drought, habitat displacement, devastating ferocious diseases, desertification as well as unpredictable human migrations. Any of these may bring about a decline or total extinction of a language. However, we will not concern ourselves with such natural factors. We shall focus our analysis on those full ranges of factors that are not natural phenomena. We will do this because we believe that the issue of language death is not similar with language murder. (c.f. Aitchison 1991). We shall, in the following section, illustrate some other reasons for the endangerment of the Yorùbá language.

4.1 THE ATTITUDE OF THE ÉLITE COMMUNITY

As good as the introduction of the so-called western education in the Yorùbá land, it has however made majority of the elite divided personalities. Many of them are cosmopolitan nativists, fighting very hard to eschew their nativity, and at the same time fighting very hard to be adopted into the cosmopolitan order. This is conspicuously demonstrated in the elite attitude towards the use of Yorùbá language. English is regarded as a symbol of social structure. The age-long prohibition of ‘vernacular’ is still firmly operational in a large percentage of Yorùbá elite homes. Their children must learn and always speak English. Apparently, Yorùbá is still existing in Nigeria today because of high-level of illiteracy. If we have a low percentage of literacy, the language will be gone. Parents want their children to speak and learn English. Whereas, language gives us the ability to think differently and retain the mentality. Total abandonment of the Yorùbá language brings total dislocation and loss of identity. Some basic aspects of the Yorùbá culture, especially different forms of greetings, are now completely foreign to many élite families:

kú àfmjú o.	(Mid-morning greetings)
kààár, O ò jfire bí.	(Morning greetings)
kú iyálta o.	(Mid-day greetings)
kààsán o.	(Afternoon greeting)
kú ìrl o.	(Evening form of greetings)
káal o.	(Night-fall greetings)

Some élite find all these greeting forms unnecessary and time wasting. Instead of these, a simple greeting pattern – Hi/Hello – is preferable. The children too imbibe their parents’ attitude, their personalities then become not only divided, but also totally shattered; they become localised foreigners.

The negative negligence and negligible use of Yorùbá by the élite, has spilling over effects on Yorùbá as a discipline. The language is a curriculum subject at all levels of education in Nigeria. But how many children of the élite do go to the university to study Yorùbá as a discipline? If it is not zero percent, it will not exceed 0.999%. At the same time, a greater number of the élites’ children do go to study English or French or German languages in the University. According to Krauss (1992: 4), “languages which are no longer being learned as a mother tongue by children are moribund”. Therefore, that the Yorùbá language will become moribund, is just a matter of some little distant years. The number of students enrolling for the language as a discipline in tertiary institutions is dwindling annually. The fact still remains that even those students studying the language presently in some higher institutions reluctantly decided to offer it since such students cannot be admitted for the “real courses” of their choice. They will keep on struggling for their chosen courses and eventually jettison Yorùbá as a discipline. So, does the language have any future? The Yorùbá language expresses identity, it is a repository of history, it talks about the nation’s ancestry, lineages

or descents; it contributes to the sum of knowledge of any Yorùbá man or woman. Alas, all these would be gone and totally lost since the language is progressively dying out and steadily being supplanted by other languages, most especially the English language. If the élite could imagine how it would be like to be without Yorùbá as their rightful mother tongue in the next two or so decades, their emotional state will be stared. This is largely due to the fact that “language is the most valuable single possession of the human race” (Hockett 1958: 11). The more hostile the attitude of the Yorùbá élites to the use of the language, the more its devalue.

It will sound paradoxical if we intend that the present high level of illiteracy in Nigeria should be sustained. Its sustainability seems to aid the Yorùbá language while combating the threat of extinction. Nevertheless, that the literacy level should be high does not mean that the indigenous languages like Yorùbá must die. There are numerous advanced economies in the world today where their mother tongues are still thriving; countries like Japan and China deserve to be mentioned here. The mind-set of the élite against colonisation and neo-colonisation matters; without this, there will be no sense of belonging. The élite’s argument is that their attitudes to the Yorùbá language could not lead to its loss, that they are only maintaining a phenomenon called language shift. As plausible as this notion, it must be noted, however, that language shift, a process by which a community more or less gradually abandons its original language and adopts another, eventually leads to the total extinction of the abandoned language.

4.2 JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND ECONOMIC POLICIES

This factor directly relates to the attitude of the élites. Among the élites in Nigeria, the ultimate reasons for embarking on any educational discipline are financial inducement and economic well-being of the person pursuing such a discipline. Anything outside these pursuits is worthless. As a result, going to a tertiary institution to obtain a degree in the Yorùbá language is not considered lucrative. Job opportunities for degree holders in the language are too narrow in scope. As of now, such graduates can only either work as teachers in higher and lower schools, or as mass media practitioners. A fragile number of the degree holders in the language do find their ways into the so-called big money spinning commercial ventures like institutions, telecommunication, banks and oil companies. Nevertheless, in today’s globalised village, the major dictate of the trans-national global market economic policy is self reliance. A greater number of the élites will never permit their children to study Yorùbá as a discipline because of lack of financial self reliance. To them, therefore, of what use is the language if it cannot meet the dictates of the global economy. If anything, this assertion is again strongly responsible for the endangerment of the Yorùbá language. The people are slowly and steadily losing their language identity within a milieu of poverty. To survive the harsh economic condition, they acquire as much as they can of English

and other languages, most especially the Pidgin version of English. Presently, if we take any market setting of buying and selling in Yorùbá land into consideration, the traditional Yorùbá knowledge of some market transactions vocabulary is completely gone. For instance, words like:

Ènì	(A form of discount)
Ìs	(Shop)
rrún	(Every other five days)
Èlé	(Interest)

just to mention a few, have virtually disappeared, and taken over by English loan words. So, there is an alarming increase in the amount of code switching and code mixing among the people.

4.3 THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL FACTORS

The Nigerian language policies are pointers to the decline of the indigenous languages, Yorùbá is no exception. Several language policies have been made, but they are left to rot at the implementation level. Following Omamor (2003: 20) the “Nigeria’s national education policy promulgated in 1977... provided for children to be taught in their mother tongue or the language of their immediate community in the first three years of the primary school system...”. This has never been implemented in the country; rather enormous prestige is associated with English as Nigeria’s official language. In addition, in the Nigerian Constitution Hausa, Igbo and Yorùbá languages are stipulated to be used in the National Assembly after adequate arrangements. This has never seen the light of the day. Bamgbose (1973: 6–7) points out the relevance of the opinion of the UNESCO experts on the use of the mother tongue. It reads the following.

It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium.

The Global Information Capitalism has already sanctioned the versatility and dynamism of English as the only thriving language. And, since English has captured the Nigerian nation, implementing any educational policies on mother tongue like that of UNESCO, will continue to be an exercise in futility. This will lead to endangerment, then to moribund and finally to total extinction. Until this happens to Yorùbá and other indigenous African languages, the suppressive tasks before the English language and her few allies, would be not completed. The task is still going on because as of today, a good percentage of the products of the Nigerian educational system are, according to Bamgbose (1973: 7), “neither competent in the use of English nor in that of their mother tongue”.

Unfavourable governmental policies are rampantly unleashed against the survival of the mother tongue. A case in point on Yorùbá happened between the

years 2001 to 2003 in Osun State of Nigeria. The then Executive Governor of the state, Chief Bísí Àkàndé openly showed his contempt for the use of the Yorùbá language and as well as Yorùbá as a curriculum subject in public schools. He openly canvassed for the total extinction of the language, and practically implemented his educational policies, which led to the termination of the appointment of nearly 95% of the Yorùbá language teachers in all the Osun State post-primary public schools. The action of this science-biased governor was a serious devastating blow on the survival of the Yorùbá language till today. Expectedly, a large percentage of students completely lost interest in pursuing the language as an academic discipline. This nearly led to a total collapse of the running of some departments offering the language as a major course. Ironically, the governor claimed to be in the vanguard of the emancipation of the Yorùbá race. He always addressed political gatherings and rallies in the Yorùbá language. Again, majority of his official assignments as the state governor is carried out by him using Yorùbá as a medium. In fact, investigations have shown that he also belongs to a good chunk of people who are “neither competent in the use of English nor in that of their mother tongue”. Presently, the Yorùbá language is witnessing a gradual re-awakening. The incumbent governor, Prince Dr. Iágúnsóyè Oyínlá, has recalled all the sacked Yorùbá language teachers; students are also gradually reposing their confidence in the usefulness of the language as a school subject curriculum. At the national level, the Federal government of Nigeria claims that Yorùbá is a compulsory subject that must be offered along with English language in primary and post-primary school. However, the tenacity of the assertion becomes completely eroded due to the fact that unlike English, Yorùbá is not a compulsory subject needed to gain an admission into any Nigerian university. This criterion alone always gives English a dominant edge over any of the recognised three indigenous Nigerian languages. So, endangerment continues to stare them in the face.

4.4 THE GLOBAL INFORMATION CAPITALISM

According to Crystal (2000: 68–69) “no language has ever exercised so much international influence as English”. So, there is a current pre-occupation termed “Global English”. A large percentage of the information on the Internet is in English. We vehemently believe that this so-called Global English is the virus responsible for language death. This assertion can be illustrated using Information Technology – IT. In the course of the information revolution going on, language is the most fundamental space of flow. However, there are no spaces for any other language besides English. This has prompted responses from other European languages. But wither the indigenous languages? It is becoming less fashionable to write a letter and place it in a hole. IT is mediating human interaction, so it is becoming impossible to communicate in the Yorùbá language. This is because the Global Information Capitalism makes it impossible for us to communicate in

Yorùbá. Or when we browse on the Internet, do we read Yorùbá therein? No. This leads to endangerment. Since all the Internet facilities are communicated in English, the Yorùbá élites that are already hostile to the language, now find themselves a means of complete alienation, i.e. the Global Information Capitalism. The life of the Yorùbá language is embedded in its use, since GIC will make this impossible, the language faces total extinction. So, in the name of globalisation, we are being recolonised through the gradual loss of our language.

4.5 RELIGIOUS FACTOR

That religion plays a prominent role in the loss of the Yorùbá language could be amazing. This is because Yorùbá people are known for their strong religious inclinations. However, due to the encroachment of foreign religions, particularly Christianity and Islam, many religious beliefs and practices have been eroded or are being eroded in many Yorùbá communities. As expected, nearly all the speech forms or lexical items depicting these eroded beliefs and practices are on the verge of oblivion. These inexhaustible data below buttress the assertion.

(i)	kú/Ag	–	Masquerade clothes
(ii)	Ato	–	Masquerade guide
(iii)	Tòbòlò	–	Little masquerade
(iv)	Adósù	–	àngó Priest
(v)	Ìb	–	Deity
(vi)	Egbò	–	root of a tree
(vii)	dúndún	–	festivity
(viii)	Ìròsùn	–	Ifá paraphernalia object
(ix)	Ìpà (ìsípà)	–	Hunter's rite of passage
(x)	Álà	–	White cloth
(xi)	Ìre	–	Blessing
(xii)	já	–	Taboo
(xiii)	Àt	–	Saltless food items
(xiv)	r	–	Grotesque beings
(xv)	Iml	–	Deity

5. THE YORÙBÁ LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND ENDANGERMENT

In this section, we shall endeavour to show-case some areas in the Yorùbá language system where the effects of this linguistic phenomenon of endangerment are manifesting with available data. Language death, as hinted before, is gradual, slow and lethal. Language endangerment is just a process to language death. Language is the backbone of the people's culture. Once a language is affected, the ripples are felt in all cultural ramifications. The strangulating effect of the noose of endangerment on Yorùbá is being felt in the acquisition patterns among the

children, teenagers (who are the propagators of any language with a future prospect) and average adult speakers of the language. The negative or positive effects of suppressive interference of English on Yorùbá cannot be over-emphasised (c.f. Kúnday 1987: 5–13).

One of the aspects of Yorùbá language manifesting a sign of endangerment is its numeral system. Yorùbá employs a vigesimal numeral structure – where counting is done in multiples of *ogún* ‘twenty’, *igba* ‘two hundred’, *gbàá* ‘two thousand’ and *k* ‘twenty thousand’ (Kúnday 1987: 9). And, it involves a lot of mathematical processes such as multiplication, addition and subtraction. As a result of the complexity, the present speakers of the language, most especially teenagers, are dropping the language’s vigesimal system for the English’s decimal system. This decimal system has an apparent advantage over the vigesimal counting system in facilitating the computation of thousands, millions and billions. Awóbùlúyì (1993: 33) comments on the nature of the numeral system of Yorùbá as follows:

Most of the numerals in the language are derived, and they are derived in an often very cumbersome and complicated manner involving multiplication, addition and subtraction. Thus, in traditional Yoruba counting, seventy-one, for instance is: *kanléní àádrin* lit. ‘one plus four twenties minus ten’ i.e. $1 + [(20 \times 4) - 10]$.

Another reason for the present Yorùbá speakers’ preference for the English’s decimal system over the vigesimal system of Yorùbá is that the decimal system does not task the comprehension skill of the hearers much unlike the vigesimal system, which requires a series of cognitive processes. Even nearly all electronic and print media have adopted the English decimal system at the detriment of Yorùbá vigesimal numeral system. Soyoye and Lájuyìgbé (1993: 76) have this to say on their investigation of the native speaker’s knowledge on the numerals:

The general tendency brought out by this study is that the Yoruba are fast losing grip with the numeral system of their mother tongue, and that the 10–20 age-group is more affected than the other age-groups. The state of the knowledge of the Yoruba numeral system by the native speakers can be explained by the fact that they (Yoruba) prefer to use the English numeral system even when conversing in Yoruba. This may be due to the relative difficulty of the Yoruba numeral system when compared to that of English.

In the area of vocabulary, there are many native lexical items that are being replaced fast by the loan words from English. Notwithstanding that many of such English words are forced to conform to the phonological structures of Yoruba. The greatest danger in this aspect is that the Yorùbá children are acquiring these loan-words for many referents as if they are the native words. (Sàlávù 2002: 210). The examples are just representatives of the unaccountable endangered Yoruba words.

Yorùbá words	English loan words	Gloss
a. fun	skì /t!]:k/	Chalk
b. Tòlótóló	tkì /tf:kw/	Turkey
c. Korobá/Garawa	bkti/péèlì /b_kwt/pewl/	Bucket
d. Àpò	bààgì /b^g/	Bag
e. Kùùkù	kéègì /keg/	Keg
f. Ìk	ágà /hagXr/	Hanger
g. ife	kpù /k_p/	Cupt
h. ìs	sbù /! op/	Shop
i. k	mtò /mcutcr/	Motor
j. àtíkè	páúdà /pa_dcr/	Powder
k. fitílà/àtùpà	látà /l^ntcn/	Lantern
l. ike	rbà /r_bcr/	Rubber
m. rá	lálì-nù /naw lcn/	Lynon
n. Asùnta	Tgì /E_g/	Thug
o. èérí	ìdítì /d- : t/	Dirty
p. gbà (rùn)	séèni /t! e wn/	Chain (Necklace)
q. fèrèsé	wídò /windcu/	Window
r. ìjàbá	ásídítì /aeksident/	Accident
s. ìsáàsùn	ptì /pDt/	Pot
t. àw	kl /k_lcr/	Colour
u. dd	pál /pa:lcr/	Parlor
v. ran-j	géètì /gewt/ áhírèni /h^nd-rewl/	Gate Handral

The list is inexhaustible. If steps are not taken practically by the native speakers, language loss may set in.

The level of knowledge of the lexical items is dwindling fast. We notice that there are many referents that have two or more different names. It needs to be pointed out at this juncture that some old forms are giving way for the relatively new counterparts. The examples in the following buttress this assertion.

Old Forms	New Forms	English Gloss
a. Òkèlè/w	Àmàlà/kà/bà	Solid food items
b. Isà	Ihò	Hole
c. Òfin	Kòtò	Ditch
d. Túbú	wn	Prison
e. Èèkàn	Ìso	Tether
f. Tánganran	Àwo	Plate
g. wn	Òpó	Pole
h. Saka	Àpò	A big bag
i. g	Kùm	Club
j. Yangan	Àgbàdo	Maize
k. Gbágùúdá	g/Pákí	Cassava
l. Imí	Ìgb	Faeces
m. w	Ìgbál	broom
n. p	Ìgbànú	apron
o. Igà	Tata	grasshopper
p. Eréé	wà	bean
q. Àkete	Ìbùsùn	bed
r. Tatagànràn	Kk	bicycle
s. y	Ewéédú	vegetable leaf

Nearly in all human languages, there is always a series of general nomenclatures for some referents that have specific individual names. Yoruba is not an exception in this area. A tinge of endangerment is being noticed in this aspect of the language in the sense that most of the Yorùbá speakers of all different categories, can use the general terms very well but the specific names are in the state of oblivion. We shall give few examples of some of these Yoruba nomenclatures as stated in the following.

General Terms	Their Specific Terms	Scientific Names
(a) Kòkòrò (Insects)	- Yr (Mites)	<i>Dermanyssus gallinae</i>
	- Lámilámi (Dragonfly)	<i>Bradinopyga strachand</i>
	- Kúlús (Ant-lion)	Larva of <i>Myrmeleon</i>
	- Iná-orí (Lice)	<i>Pediculus capitis</i> .
	- Tatasánk	
	- lbbn-ùn	Coleopterans
	- Tamtiye (stinging ant)	
	- Ìr (cricket)	<i>Gryllus domesticus</i>
	- kùnrùn (Millipede)	<i>Pachybolus ligulatus</i>
	- Àkèkè (Scorpion)	<i>Pandinus imperator</i>
	- Ìdin (Maggot)	Larva of <i>musca domesticus</i>
	- Tawídí	Larva of <i>Anaphelis</i> mosquitoes
	- Yànmùyánmú	<i>Aedes egypti</i>
	- Irù (Tsetsefly)	<i>Glossina glossina</i>
(b) y (Birds)	- tal	
	- Èsíkanrín (fruitfly)	<i>Drosophila melanogastus</i>
	- Alápàdd	<i>Hirundo senegalensis</i>
	- lulùú (Brown-feathered bird)	<i>Centropus senegalensis</i>
	- Kanakáná (crow)	
	- Àá	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
	- Òpìpí	<i>Gallus domesticus</i>
	- Tíótíó (Brown-singing shrike)	<i>Lanius Mackinnani</i>
	- Làkúrègbé (rheutism, lumbago)	
	- Àtsí (syphillis)	
(c) Àrùn (Diseases)	- Nárùn	
	- Gbíndíngbindìn (A skin disease)	
	- Ìpá (Swollen testicles)	
	- Àmtkùn	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>
	- tà	<i>Viverra civetta</i>
(d) ranko (Animals)	- Àjàò	<i>Anomaluropus beecrofti</i>
	- Agílítí	
	- ká	<i>Bitis gaborríca</i>
	- èbé	<i>Python regius</i>
	- Erè	<i>Python Sebae</i>
(e) Ejò (Snakes)	- Ìgbádú	<i>Naja nigricollis</i>
	- Jomijòkè	<i>Natrix</i>
	- Ewé imí	<i>Crossopteryx febrífuga</i>
	- Ewé Pòpórò	
	- Ewé Elégédé	<i>Cucurbita pepo</i>
(f) Ewé (Leafs)	- Ewé Patanm	<i>Biophytum petersianum</i>
	- Ewé Iran (Gbòdògì)	<i>Sarcophyrynum brachystachys</i>
	- Ewé Ejìnrin	<i>Momordica charantia</i>
	- Ewé Ahn kùn	<i>Acanthus montanus</i>

(Thanks to the new awareness on the use of herbs. This helps to make the names of some leaves alive only in print)

(g) f (vegetables)	- Òdú	Solanum americanum
	- Yánrin	Lactuca taraxacifolia
	- Ìsápá	Hibiscus sabdariffa
	- Ebòlò	Crassocephalum rubens
	- Wrw	Senecio biafrae
	- Ìgbàgbá	Solanum macrocarpon
	- kùkù	Sesamum indicum
(h) Oúnj (Food Items)	- Bg/(bone marrow)	
	- Àlapà/(cooked bean paste with other ingredients)	
	- Àbàrí/(cooked corn paste with other ingredients)	
	- Sk/(fried bean paste)	
	- Èkuru (cooked bean paste without salt)	
	- Àwn (fried bean paste)	
	- Sùkúsùkù	
	- Lb k, (small parts of the cooked pap in the leaf-wraps)/l (small parts of the cooked bean paste with palm-oil in the leaf-wraps)	
	- Ògìrì/(fermented marshed melon seeds)	
	- Òrí/(Shea-butter)	
	- Aró/(Èkuru mixed with potash)	
	- jj (fried grated water-yam, with pepper)	
(i) Ìlk (Beads)	- Àkún (Types of Beads)	
	- Iyùn (Types of Beads)	
	- mkùn (Types of Beads)	
	- Sgi (Types of Beads)	

The resting place for most of these dying words is the Yoruba proverbs. The tragedy of the matter is that these proverbs are strange to most of the middle-aged speakers and child-speakers. Below is just a collection of some of these proverbs.

- a. A ni kí èkuru kó tán láwo; tún gbnw r sí. (We intend to finish eating the bean cake, completely, you are still putting the remnant.)
- b. lulùú to pòjò, orí ara r ni yòò r lé. (The centropous bird that invites the rain will become wet inside it.)
- c. Láísí tàgûrì, aw ò hu. (Without the creeper fruit, the skin leather cannot be made.)

In the area of aesthetics and cooking system in Yoruba language, some terms are on the verge of extinction because of the changes in fashion and technology. Some of those words are stated below.

- a. Bt (Specially prepared cow's dung for house decoration)

- b. bu (the place of soap-making)
- c. Lábú (the material used in soap making)
- d. Làáli (a plant leaf used in colouring the finger nails red)
- e. Àdí-yan (vegetable oil)
- f. Ap (earthen traditional cooking pot)
- g. Làgìdì (a type of fire-wood)
- h. Eésan (the shell of the palm-nut)
- i. Ààrò (fire place)
- j. Àmù (a big earthen pot for drinking water)
- k. Ìbub (ladle)

The following words are unclassified archaic words Èsúkè (hiccups), I (foetus), àbàra (slap).

The grammatical aspect of the Yoruba Language has not been spared by the suffocating tentacles of endangerment. There are many Yoruba verbs that are now uncommon in the usage by the speakers. Some of these verbs are underlined in the sentences below:

- a. yín r wjì (His teeth are stained)
- b. yín wn jrì (Their teeth are bad)
- c. k nàà pinjìnkìn (The cold pap is bad)
- d. Olè nàà díbn (The thief pretends/pretended)

The list can still be expanded.

Moreover, Yoruba has multiple verbal expressions for the same concept. The usage of a specific verb in a sentence is dictated by the object. But this peculiar linguistic quality is being neutralized by the suppressive interference from English. For the English word 'prepare', the object prepared will dictate the Yoruba verbal form to be used since Yoruba "pèse" is only a super-ordinate expression for several other verbs... such as: "t", "rò". If a person has prepared kà 'cooked yam flour' and bà 'cooked cassava flour', the respective Yoruba sentences for the two objects will be: Ó ro kà and Ó t bà. The verbal expressions, rò and t are giving way to the general English form. Likewise, the Yoruba verb 'ra' for English word 'buy' has displaced the Yoruba verbal expressions: b, wn, dá, sí, and yán totally (see Kúnday 1987: 6). The danger of this displacement is that the young speakers are only acquiring only the super-ordinate verbs when many specific verbal items are dying away. In addition, conjoining of two verbs or verb phrases together which is strange to the syntactic structures in Yoruba language, has become a frequent linguistic content in speech of the present speakers and in the diction of the print and electronic media.

6. WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Language binds and language divides. The Yorùbá people both in Nigeria and the diaspora are strongly bound together by their language and their culture. The fast way of killing a culture is to kill the language. Most of the cultural practices of the Yorùbá people are virtually dead. Those ones that are still struggling to breathe are anchored on the existence of the Yorùbá language. The language must be maintained or else nothing will be left as far as those rich cultural values of the people are concerned. There is need for an urgent positive attitudinal re-orientation to the proper maintenance of the Yorùbá language among the élites. The language must just be maintained. If not, it will die.

There are numerous ways of maintaining the language. Despite the high level of the élite's exposure to the western cultures and civilizations, English will never replace Yorùbá as the original mother tongue. We should de-emphasise the belief that English represents a sort of social class. No language is good or bad in itself, its prestige comes from the prestige of those who use it. Moreover, adherents of westernisation are beaming their research lights on African studies. Yorùbá is now significantly benefiting from this. The young ones should be encouraged by their parents and guidance to learn and speak Yorùbá. This will increase the rate of acquisition of the language by the children and it will not be moribund. Although a level of structural or functional change is normal and necessary for language growth, however children's acquisition of the basic vocabulary, grammatical features function words, etc., will decrease the amount of code switching and code mixing among the Yorùbá people. Ultimately, when we begin to use Yorùbá in homes and neighbourhood as a tool of inter-generational communications, it will enhance more of language revitalisation and language loyalty among both the middle and upper echelon of the Yorùbá society. The Yorùbá adult speakers must continually encourage younger ones to speak Yorùbá because even if the language is in a recorded form, it still needs fluent speakers.

We agree with the assertion of Grenoble and Whaley (1998: 52) that economics "may be the single strongest force influencing the fate of endangered languages". Apart from working as instructors in the language or as mass media practitioners, there are other economic ventures, which can make the study of the Yorùbá language as an academic discipline more lucrative. The government can establish language sections in all the research centres. This will facilitate the dissemination of the research results in local languages. It is a known fact that most research results usually ended up as wasted exercise because they are disseminated in English. The ultimate recipients of such research, i.e. the lower-class, cannot read nor write in English. Examples are agricultural researches meant for peasant farmers in remote areas. We could also borrow a leaf from the advanced economies of the world where their security outfits usually have language sections. For instance, because of the September 11 episode, the American government is now seriously interested in understanding all the languages of the world.

There are several political reasons in Nigeria that are strangulating the indigenous languages. The federal government should stop politicising issues on Nigerian languages. The Yorùbá language should be given the status of national property under the protection of the state. The language should have official status in its regional territory of southwest. The Yorùbá people should not be deprived of their language right. A language like Yorùbá spoken by over thirty million people, deserves more recognition than it is in Nigeria. The language should continue to hold its presence in the Nigerian school systems or else its future will be totally bleak. Until Yorùbá is given a formal place alongside English, education among the Yorùbá people will continue to be a mixed blessing. Hostile educational policies that are inimical to the survival of the Yorùbá language should be jettisoned by the six southwest states of Nigeria. We want to add here that all the Southwest regional governments should embrace tourism service industry. This can bring considerable benefits to the growth and safety of the Yorùbá language.

Any language that is not available to Information Technology is endangered. However, Global Information Technology should not necessarily be an avenue towards a total annihilation of the Yorùbá language. Instead, IT and the Internet should give the Yorùbá language a public profile. Software developers need to become more multilingual, embracing other languages like Yorùbá. Moreover, more coding convention need to be developed. Computers must handle other specialised knowledge like the Yorùbá alphabets and tones.

The recent attempt by the Nigerian government that the 1999 Federal Constitution be translated to Yorùbá and some selected indigenous languages is highly commendable. This will, definitely, open the door for the teeming masses of the people to appreciate and participate actively in the democratic governance. In addition, the Ogun State of Nigeria Legislative Assembly should be honoured and praised for their pioneering decision to utilise Yorùbá as a medium of communication during their legislative business. Since then, the gallery of the House of Assembly has always been full to capacity by people on every Wednesday. Speakers of the language used to troop in en-masse to witness the legislative proceedings being carried out in their mother tongue every Wednesday. We hereby call on all other State Assembly in Yorùbá land to copy from the good intension of the Ogun State House of Assembly. This, indeed, is the essence of language revitalisation, maintenance and loyalty.

7. CONCLUSION

Language loss brings emotional state. We have been prompted in this paper to examine how the Yorùbá language has been on the verge of 'extinction'. The fact that the language is privileged to have been widely studied may stir up a hasty conclusion among some people that Yorùbá is not endangered talkless of becoming moribund. And there exactly lies the danger. We have, through various reasons, demonstrated that language death is always a slow, unannounced and

unnoticed phenomenon. It is very real and the largeness of the percentage of the speakers of the language cannot stop its supplantive moves. As a way out, we have shown that urgent but concrete actions must be carried out to prevent the loss of the Yorùbá language in today's flow of globalisation. We will conclude by comparing the fate of Yorùbá with that of another international language – Dutch – struggling to stay afloat in the stream of language endangerment. The comparison is drawn from the observation made by Van Hoorde (1998: 6). It reads:

Dutch may not be threatened with extinction in the short or medium term, but it is in danger of losing domains. It could eventually become just a colloquial language, a language you use at home to speak with your family – the language you can best express your emotions in – but not the one you use for the serious things in life: work, money, science, technology.

If this fate will befall Dutch, wither the Yorùbá language?

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