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Atrophization of Minority Languages: Indigenous Folktales to the Rescue

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Abstract

In the wake of the already established fact that Africa in particular, and some other developing countries of the world, are gradually losing their linguistic heritages, and in consequence their cultural ethos, to the encroachment of the 'super-power' languages like French and English, it is necessary to examine the scope of the hegemonic influence wielded by foreign languages, particularly English, on the culture of the 'colonized', and how folktales as a part of communal tradition can invigorate a renaissance in the preservation and sustenance of culture. This paper, as a synchronic study, therefore discusses the utilitarian values of some of the well-known Yoruba folktales in ensuring a reappraisal of the link between culture and language, and maintenance and survival.

Keywords: Language death, Indigenous folktales, Yoruba culture, Language preservation

1. Introduction

Sociolinguists from Africa owe their communities a duty of not only analyzing and describing their linguistic milieu, but also making sure that necessary changes that can spur the preservation, regeneration, and growth of such languages are promoted and supported. Currently, the language situation in most African nations are wholly exoglossic, that is, the languages used in formal, official situations are languages that are not indigenous to those societies. This situation can be traced largely to the colonial experience of the African continent. The only exception to this is in the use of Kiswahili, the national language of Tanzania and Kenya, which is also widely used in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and neighboring countries. In Nigeria English is *the* language that everybody wants to acquire, possess, keep and speak in that order, so as to be considered as somebody who belongs to the right social hierarchy.

Thus, the evolutionary trends of the English language in Nigeria can be discussed in four clear stages: i. English as a colonial legacy, ii. English as a language of education, iii. English as a language of integration, and iv. English as a 'Nigerian language'. Stage four is the present stage of English in Nigeria. This is the stage at which the pervasive use of English, whether in its standard or non-standard form, is best noticed. The language is being blended with the indigenous languages, especially in hip-hop music and entertainment generally to express typical Nigerian cultural milieu. This phenomenon, technically referred to in sociolinguistics as code-switching/code-mixing, has been taken to higher level in Nigeria when one critically examines the symbiotic relationship that now exists between English and many indigenous languages in Nigeria (Babalola and Taiwo 2009). As Babalola (2009: 46) observed "… Nigerian English can indeed be considered as a national sociolinguistic profile brought about by the adaptation of the English language to the Nigerian socio-cultural context".

However, the local or indigenous languages have somehow been relegated to the background, with most language users now opting to jettison their language for the "more superior and respectable" foreign languages. Although the governments of many African countries claim to pay attention to the language situation in their domains by making their indigenous languages part of the recognized languages, as is the case in Nigeria where Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo exist as regional superpowers, indigenous language planning has not really been established and promoted adequately and with the required political will in the African continent. In commenting on the exact number of languages being spoken in Nigeria, Babalola (2002b: 161) submits that

> While the Federal Government, in its language policy, has
> categorized three (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) as "major "
> languages out of over four hundred Nigerian local languages,
> Williamson (1990) made a brilliant list of 118 "minority"
> languages which have been found to have determinate geography
> and speakers as well as literature and potentials of being developed.

Babalola (2002b) points out that knowing how many languages being spoken in the country was however inconsequential, because according to him 'what is of paramount importance is the need to develop the languages and preserve them, so that the Nigerian indigenous cultures, which they preserve and transmit, will not suffer atrophy. This lackadaisical and the ambivalent attitude on the part of African policy makers as regards proper placement of

indigenous languages in developmental plans has led to what many linguists have pointed out as the major contributor to language death. Actually, according to the *Encarta Encyclopedia*, "many languages with a smaller number of speakers are in danger of being replaced by languages with large numbers of speakers." This is despite the UNESCO's recommendation that the mother tongue/the language of the immediate environment (L. I. E.) should be the language of educational instruction in the first years of schooling, if not all through (See UNESCO 1953). The fact now is that some scholars (e.g. Fase et al, 1995; Grenoble and Whaley, 1998; Ostler, 1999), believe that perhaps 90 percent of the languages spoken in the 1990s will be extinct or doomed to extinction by the end of the 21st century. The 10 most widely spoken languages, with approximate numbers of native speakers, are as follows: Chinese, 1.2 billion; Arabic, 422 million; Hindi, 366 million; English, 341 million; Spanish, 322 to 358 million; Bengali, 207 million; Portuguese, 176 million; Russian, 167 million; Japanese, 125 million; German, 100 million (Whalen and Harrison, 2000). However, some of these data might have changed in the recent past, as English remains a very vibrant language on which various studies are conducted regularly. If second-language speakers are included in these figures, English is the second most widely spoken language, with 508 million speakers. But when prevalence, prestige associated with the language, centrality and volume of use are considered as yardsticks for measuring the world's languages, English is second to none (Quirk et al, 1985). As argued by De Swaan (2010), English is the only hypercentric language in the world as other languages are either supercentral or central languages. This fact has made English one of the most sought-after languages in the world and a major medium of driving technological advancement globally. It is therefore in the light of the foregoing that it is imperative to explore ways by which English can continue to co-habit with Nigerian indigenous languages with more positive influence that will be beneficial to the survival of the indigenous languages, most of which have very restricted use in the country at present. Thus, this paper seeks to look at the roles which folktales, as a reservoir of cultural elements, can play in the sustenance of African languages and culture and at the same time facilitate a more correct pragmatic usage of the English language in the country.

2. Code Mixture and Linguistic Improvisation

Like Nollywood, the Nigerian music industry, especially in the genre of English, has made very significant impact in the world's music scene as many of Nigerian hip-hoppers have won many awards in the continent and the world at large. But interestingly enough, many of the songs that have won awards were recorded, not solely in English, but in a blend of English and Nigerian indigenous languages. And when you listen to the harmonious melody produced from this linguistic improvisation, you cannot but praise the ingenuity of the hip-hoppers. Sometimes, the blend may involve more than two indigenous languages with English serving as the matrix language, and at times, it will be an indigenous language(s) serving as the matrix language(s). This new phenomenon of blending indigenous Nigerian languages with English by contemporary Nigerian hip-hoppers is one of the newest ways through which the use of English is being promoted along with Nigerian indigenous languages.

Listening to these songs, one becomes very intrigued on a few levels. One, the contents of the songs are very fascinating with regard to the topicality of the message, which most of the time promotes the indigenous folktales which are almost forgotten, but are now being resurrected by these singers; so also are the wealth of entertainment, exaggerations, hyperboles and avant garde mannerisms thrown at every turn to their audiences. Two, their weird style and non-inhibitions are gaining ground very rapidly in the country and they are winning adherents among young and old, rich and poor, power-brokers and the masses. Third,

this kind of music is already attracting attention of scholars within and outside the country. But what we have really found to pique our interest is the delivery and use of English and Nigerian indigenous languages in such a way that one may argue that only English is being used, unless one comes across the songs in their written form. Sometimes, the body of the song is sung entirely in English, and only the refrain or chorus is in one or more indigenous language. At times, the song may the sung in both English and indigenous language(s) while the chorus is in either English or indigenous languages.

This use of multi-codes seems not to have had any adverse effect on the melody of the songs, and the hip-hoppers appear to be completely at ease doing their thing. A unique, very captivating music genre, which allows the use of English and indigenous languages in a single piece of communication, seems to have been born in the country. In fact, the mellifluous lyrics that come out of this experimentation testify to the creative ingenuity of the musicians. In the United States of America from where hip-hop originated, hip-hoppers are not known to engage in this kind of linguistic experimentation. Not that the U.S. is essentially monolingual, but the English language and its rich dialectal variations appear to suffice for the hip-hoppers to ply their trade and continue to hold on to the attention of their adherents. However in Nigeria, there seems to be a serious need for these indigenous languages to complement English in projecting the rich heritage of African value systems and ways of life through, for example, the indigenous folktales most of which have almost been neglected by the people. In addition, the use of English and local languages like we have described by the singers might not be unconnected with the fact that many of the singers might be somehow deficient in the use of English. So, what they do is to fuse words of the different languages (both English and indigenous) with a kind of musical sensibility to create something of a unique African 'rhythm' that is so appealing to the generality of the people of diverse social strata, and at the same time enable them to pass across their intended message with little or no linguistic hindrance. The phrasing of their sentences, the free-flowing nature of their thought processes, even the *sounds* and variety of their word choices, all work together to create a big, cohesive sound of music.

3. The Yoruba Culture and Folktales

Sachnine (1997) reports that the Yorùbá language is spoken as a first language by more than 22 million people mainly in the south-western parts of Nigeria, and in the neighbouring countries of the Republic of Benin and Togo. There are also pockets of Yoruba speakers in Sudan, and Cuba, and the Yoruba culture is extensively practiced in Brazil and other parts of the world. Apart from these are the few speakers scattered around South America, descendants of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade. Estimates of the number of dialects vary from twelve to twenty-six, although there is a standard language, which is chiefly associated with the Southwest of Nigeria (Fabunmi and Salawu, 2005; Fabunmi, 2009). It has been written as early as 1800, although there have been changes in aspects of its orthographic representation. The language has proven to be fruitful for students of language. Like every living language, various attempts have been made at studying the Yoruba language and its people (Bamgbose, 1965; Isola, 1991; Finnegan, 1970; Adewole, 2007; Awobuluyi, 2008; Fabunmi 2010; Adika et al, 2009). These studies have helped in opening up research work into the Yoruba language, and have also assisted in making certain that the language is well documented. It is also evidenced from the studies that the language is abundantly rich culturally.

Folklore is the body of expressive culture, including stories, music, dance, legends, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, customs, and so forth within a particular population

comprising the traditions (including oral traditions) of that culture, subculture, or group (Ben-Amos, & Goldstein,1975; Richard, 1972). It is also the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared. The academic and usually ethnographic study of folklore is sometimes called “folkloristics”. The word 'folklore' was first used by the English antiquarian William Thomas in a letter published by the London Journal *Athenaeum* in 1846. It is a widely accepted fact that human beings have always been storytellers. Before history books, novels, or short stories, and such other literary forms were devised, they had entertained themselves, instructed younger generations, and kept their records with the many-faceted folktale. Folktale is a generic term for the various kinds of narrative prose literature found in the oral traditions of the world. As one of the many forms of folklore, folktales are heard and remembered, and they are subject to various alterations in the course of retellings. As they are diffused (transmitted through a culture), some folktales may pass in and out of written literature and some stories of literary origin may cross over into oral tradition. Nevertheless, an essential trait of folktales – and all folk literature – is their diffusion, and their passage from one generation to another, by word of mouth. The primary features of most of the folktales of different regions often coincide. Thus, in spite of varieties and local peculiarities, the folktales of different regions share a common pattern. Stories about the genesis and origin of mankind, animal stories about the supposed cleverness of the jackal, the mischief of the crow, the royal magnanimity of the tiger, as well as the cunningness of the tortoise are recounted throughout the world. The life of a single sister among her seven brothers, the jealousy of a second wife, the villainy of an ogre, the simplicity of a scholar, the ultimate triumph of goodness and virtue, happiness after all trials, worries and deprivation, are some of the basic common features of folk stories not only in different parts of India but also in different countries of the world (Dundes, 1989; Thompson, 1946).

In Yoruba folktales, the same can be said since most of them also are mainly animal stories centered on the cunning tortoise, the sly snail, the deceitful leopard, untrustworthy fox, and some other iconic characters. These tales/stories are reflective of the specific cultural background, in this case the Yoruba, from which they are found, regardless of the generic qualities of folktales (Bamgbose, 1969, 1969b). Although the audience of a folktale session is usually made up of children, the tellers could be adults or children. The beginning and closure of Yoruba tales are easily recognizable since they are marked by stock phrases. The narrator begins by drawing the attention of the audience with formulaic utterances, which is technically referred to as ‘call and response technique’ such as the following:

Narrator: Alo o! (Tale, tale!)

Audience: Alo! (Tale!)

Narrator: Alo o mi firigbagboo, o daleri Ijapa t’o lo ji isu loko ana re, Igbin.

> (My unusual tale concerns the tortoise, who went to steal yam from his in-law’s farm.)

The opening utterances are usually a summary of the content of the tale. In addition to Yoruba folktales possessing introductory formulaic utterances, these utterances are also realizable at the end of the tales, as closing markers. Some of such is:

Idi alo mi ree gbangbalaka;

Idi alo mi ree gbangbalaka;

Bi n ba puro, kagogo enu mi ma ro;

Bi n ko ba puro, kagogo enu mi o ro leemeta.

O di po…po…po!

(This summarises my tale;

This aptly captures my tale;

If I lie, may my mouth fail to make a whistle;

But if my tale is real, may my mouth make three resounding whistles.

Po! Po!! Po!!!)

The significance of these endings as clearly expressed in the utterance is to assure the listeners of the veracity of the story, and to guarantee the audience that the moral of the story is neither targeted at any specific person nor cooked up.

The folktale session usually starts after twilight, never before. Neither does it occur before dinner since it is meant for relaxation and education. Moreover, because the people are mostly farmers, folktale telling follows every other domestic chore, that is, people engage in folktaling only after every other household chore has been accomplished. Night too adds its own mystic aura to the realization of a typical folktale plot. Abarry (1982: 24), writing on storytelling among the Ga of Ghana, says nighttime is the choicest time because it "provides a fantasy-inducing aura emanating from the ethereal effulgence of the moon, or the wistful scintillations of the stars; and the dismal glow of the evening log-fire". It is an anomaly to narrate folktales in the daytime, presumably to discourage indolence among the children who, rather than perform their domestic tasks, may swap tales.

Apart from the didactic lessons prevalent in Yoruba folktales, folktales are typically employed to teach language, and this can actually be explored in the teaching of English, where discourse features like co-operative principles, turn-taking, politeness principles can be inculcated very early into the children. This is also done through the simultaneous presentation of the indigenous languages alongside the English language. It should be noted that these folktales are preserved and told in indigenous languages, notwithstanding whether such languages are minority or even endangered. The audience in a folktale session, who are mostly children, listen with rapt attention, and mimick the teller as they go on narrating the story. The children at intervals are made to say after the teller, or even sing, dance and take turns to narrate their own stories. Through this systematic drill, the language of narration comes alive and the participants immerse themselves in the nitty-gritty of the language. This is a veritable way of ensuring the continuous survival and relevance of the local languages. At this point it is necessary to peek into the cultural elements identifiable in Yoruba folktales. Some of these cultural aspects or elements are:

A) Songs

A large corpus of Yoruba folktales/stories is punctuated with songs. Okoh (1988: 36) rather laments that "the element of narrative texture most frequently discarded is the songs," even though "one of the foremost features of African tales is the preponderance in theme of songs". These songs in fact constitute the entertainment aspect of the tales and are highly valued for their poetic qualities. Tales that bear such songs which can be shared between a narrator and the audience are more desirable than those that are sung by the narrator alone. Furthermore, the songs ensure a rapport between the storyteller and his audience, and this is maintained from the beginning of the tale with its formulaic introduction. For instance, one of such songs within the framework of a typical Yoruba folktale is:

Eye melo tolongo waye,

Chorus: tolongo.

Okan dudu aro,

Chorus: tolongo.

Okan rere osun,

Chorus: tolongo

So o so firu bale,

Chorus: tolongo

So o so firu bale,

Chorus: tolongo.

(How many birds descended to earth, tolongo.

One is black as charcoal, tolongo.

Another is scarlet red, tolongo.

They jumped about standing on their tapering tails, tolongo.)

Nwosu (1981: 69) informs us that a good narrator "enters his audience just as his audience enters into him through the intermittent responses at the beginning, middle and the end of the story". Only Finnegan (1970:385) has emphasized in detail this dimension of African tales:

> In all this the participation of the audience is essential. It is common for members of it to be expected to make verbal contributions – spontaneous exclamations, actual questions, echoing of the speaker's words, emotional reaction to the development of yet another parallel and repetitious episode. . . The audience contributes to the choruses of the songs so often introduced into the narration, and without which, in many cases, the stories would be only a bare framework of words.

Songs enable the narrator to achieve this rapport, especially in the middle of long tales.

Another of such songs within the frame of folktales is:

Narrator: Ijapa Ole (Tortoise is a thief.)

Audience: Ole (Yes. He is!)

Narrator: Awa'su onisu (Yam pilferer)

Audience: Ole (Yes. He is!)

Narrator: Ijapa Ole (Tortoise is a thief.)

Audience: Ole (Yes. He is!)

Narrator: O ka'la onila (Okra pilferer)

Audience: Ole (Yes. He is)

Narrator: O fe'fo ana re (Vegetable pilferer)

Audience: Ole (Yes. He is)

Narrator: Ijapa Ole (Tortoise is a thief.)

Audience: Ole (Yes. He is!)

In the tale with the above song, Ijapa (tortoise), overtaken by greed, stole food items from his in-law's – Igbin – (snail) farm. Igbin, in anger, detains Ijapa, chains him along a major road where passers-by would make mockery of his act of thievery. This happens and the tortoise suffers so much indignity with people going to the morning market casting aspersion on him on their way to the market. However, the snail's action boomerangs when the passers-by who saw Ijapa in the morning again meet the tortoise in chains looking haggard and profoundly remorseful on their homeward journey in the evening. Thus, the people descend on the snail castigating him for his unforgiving demeanour. They felt the snail (Igbin) should have tempered justice with mercy and release Ijapa who had shown genuine remorse for his action. The people harangue the snail for being so callous to even his daughter's husband. The lesson here is two-fold: the tortoise's behaviour is condemnable and he deserves the punishment meted out to him. On the other hand, the snail should demonstrate a forgiving spirit and not overdo things.

B) Morals

As noted earlier, the stories are generally told in order to epitomize a virtue and teach a moral lesson. In fact, this art of story-telling can be referred to as indigenous sermonizing! The end of a Yoruba folktale is marked by a restatement; this is especially so in a tale with an announced thesis at the very beginning of the story. The restatement may be summed up in a proverb or it could be a descriptive summary of the narrative's moral. This is also evident in the folktale analyzed above. There, the resultant moral is summed up in the proverb "Eebu atilo ni t'ahun, t'abo ni ti ana re" ("The reproach at the onset belongs to the tortoise, while the concluding reproach belongs to the snail"), which can be understood within the purview of the folktale. The constant attachment of morals to tales is significant because it reveals those attitudes, the ethos and mores of the Yoruba people, which are largely preserved and transmitted through the Yoruba language. However, it is noteworthy that such morals, to which high recognition were accorded in the traditional Yoruba society, have become neglected with the advent of "civilization". In the traditional Yoruba society, credence was given to being truthful, honest, respectful, tactful, and diligence, etc. Consequently, with the simultaneous use of English and Yoruba languages advocated in this paper, these morals can be harvested and published in a bilingual leaflet and serve as a veritable source of teaching both languages.

C) Naming

Naming is important in imaginative literatures of Yoruba and this is encapsulated in the folktales. Names, apart from acting as pointers to meaning in certain kinds of narrative, help to characterize the work for the reader, or for the listener. In his study of Gbaya folk narratives, Noss (1972) observes that "names may be a device for telling the reader something about the character bearing the name". The names of the characters in a tale can be indicative of the concern of the tale. This is most often identified in the tales found in the novels of foremost Yoruba writer, D.O. Fagunwa. There, names like Ifepade (Lovemeet), Iforiti (Endurance), Aramonda Okunrin (The Unpredictable Man), Efoye (The Feathered Man), Kako Onikumoekun (The Ferocious Club-wielding Man), Anjonnu Iberu (The Dreaded Troll), Itanforiti (The Repository of History), Oke Hilahilo (The Mountain of

Upheavals), etc are commonplace, and the characters so named behave true to their names. In short, the names given to them already sensitize the audience to their characterization, and whether they would be flat or dynamic characters.

D) Religious Beliefs

The Yoruba religious beliefs and outlook are also clearly revealed in the folktales. Incidents of taking part in rituals and asking for the goodwill of the gods in settling human problems are discernible in Yoruba folktales. This act of soliciting for divine assistance is a universal occurrence in all human culture. On occasions where there is famine, drought, or when a folktale character is in trouble, it is seen that divine assistance is requested. Instances abound of these in Yoruba folklore. One of these tales culminated in the proverb: "Oore ni Igun se to fi pa lori". ("The vulture became bald through his act of kindness") From this, one can conclude that folktales also act as a mirror from which one can see the religious orientation of the Yoruba people. Yoruba traditional religion enjoins its adherents to be straight-forward and truthful, tolerant and forgiven in whatever they do, virtues which are now almost extinct in our present-day society.

E) Kinship

In Yoruba folktales, one can also be guided into the complex kinship relationship that exists in the Yoruba society more than what is realized in English kinship systems as obtains in English semantics. "Baba", the term for father can refer to just about any male member of the community who is older than one and is in the capacity to apply corrective measures. Also, in the Yoruba society as reflected in some of the tales, a friend, a close, one was regarded as a member of the family, granted unrestricted access to the goings-on within.

F) Government

The system of governance in the Yoruba society as reflected in the tales also shows the one in whom total power resides. This is the Oba (the king), but who is forbidden from arbitrary usage of the power. The kings are sometimes expected to be just, firm and cautious in the exercise of the power, although the full weight of the law can be brought to bear on an offender when it is necessary. Justice was accordingly meted out to the guilty party as portrayed in the proverb "Ika to ba se ni Oba n ge" ("It is the finger that errs the king will cut"). Thus, although the tortoise was always cunning and deceptive, he always almost got paid back in his own coin, as he always ends up being dragged before the king to receive punishments for his acts. In addition, the Oba was ably assisted by a council of Chiefs (Ijoyes), who were there to check the excesses of the Oba. This provided a system of checks and balances, where power was not arbitrarily used. The system of government also showed that any system could succeed no matter the sophistication or simplicity; what really counts is the dedication to service of the leaders. All of these are played out in folktales by the use of caricatures in the forms of animals and sometimes spirit beings acting out the supposed human roles.

G) Socio-economic background

The socio-economic realities of the Yoruba society are also foregrounded in Yoruba folktales. The fact that most of the people were farmers is clearly seen, and the role which farm produce played in the survival of the society cannot be over-emphasised. Everybody was at least a subsistence farmer while cash crops like cocoa and rubber enjoyed high patronage as a result of their lucrative nature. Inter-community trade was a regular event well attended on the fixed particular market days. Some of these are portrayed in the various Yoruba folktales.

H) Dressing

This is another notable cultural element which is well represented in Yoruba folktales but which unfortunately is on the verge of total extinction. Of the various popular ways of dressing, the one that has struggled to survive is in the form of "agbada, buba, Sokoto, iro, gele", all of which are now mainly sewn with foreign cloth materials. Indigenous beautifying agents like laali, osun (indigo), et al have also been cast into oblivion and replaced with tattoos, lip sticks and glosses. Decency which was the order of the day has been thrown away so much that it became an issue of national importance to debate on what amounted to decency in public places.

4. Matters Arising: Current Trends

Here, it is necessary to mention the fact that the Nigerian nation has always been multilingual, with a conservative number of about 450 different languages. However, the English language enjoys greater use because of its international recognition as well as the influence of globalization. It has also been argued elsewhere that there is no political will to promote some language (s) in the country to the level of national language (Babalola, 2002a). Presently in Nigeria, the preference is for English for many people when they are confronted with a choice between their indigenous languages and English in many domains of language use, even when it is apparent that they are deficient in the latter (Adegbite and Babalola 2008). Children are taught not to speak in their own local languages and are sometimes even punished for doing so in the schools. The English language is even believed to be more prestigious and seen as a mark of "superiority and class". If this attitudinal trend continues among people of all levels, there is no way of ensuring that the indigenous languages will survive. If these languages are allowed to die due to neglect and non-use, then there lies the danger of losing the rich indigenous folktales, cultural ethos and consequently the sources of identity as a nation. Thus, what is the veracity of the nation's claim to greatness: a force to be reckoned with in the black race? The linguistic and cultural diversity in existence is being increasingly threatened as a result of the adoption of more technological advancement, which inevitably encroaches on the cultural front.

Salawu (2006: 6) says of the situation that "it has already been settled that Africans, especially the educated (Western), do not seem to appreciate their languages as being fit for serious matters of education, business, governance etc.; as such, they do not patronize it." In the same vein, Sonaiya (2007: 18) confirms this notion when she points out that:

> . . . what continues to be of great concern to many in Africa is the fact that even after independence not only are European languages still being maintained within the educational system, but very little is being done to develop African languages which had suffered over a century of neglect. This state of affairs is what Djite (2004: 1) refers to as "the most painful and absurd interface between Africa and the rest of the world". The fact is that Africa is the only continent in the world in which language-in-education is largely exogenous to the society it seeks to serve".

The point being emphasised here is that, any serious country seeking to improve holistically its fortune and that of its people must accord the indigenous languages in which the majority

of its people conduct their day-to-day affairs a pride of place in its developmental plans; be it in education, economy, politics and even entertainment. The continued exogenous language policy need to be reviewed to accommodate the indigenous languages, and the nation's policy makers, scholars and leaders of thought must look inwards and harness the rich cultural diversity of the country which is preserved in these languages. The rich folktales of the indigenous languages can be exploited to teach morals, change attitude and inculcate the spirit of self-sufficiency and prudence in the citizenry and this can galvanize the country into a leading exporter of cultural ethos as is the case with some Western nations whose ways of life, both positive and negative, are being blindly aped around the world. Awonusi (2004: 97) notes:

> The notion of hegemonic English implies the perception of the English language as a significant linguistic superstructure that has a wide usage and acceptance as well as influence. This hegemony with relation to language connotes a fairly complex interplay of a number of variables such as power (socioeconomic power of its users), control (how the powerful users of a particular language use it as a weapon of linguistic domination of communities especially those that are multilingual or multicultural), legitimacy (the dependence on a language as the basis of social and political acceptance) and influence (the exercise of power…)

We share the sentiments of Awonusi that being multilingual and multicultural does not mean that a country is linguistically powerless, and thus condemned to be in a linguistic and cultural bondage to another language, however powerful that language could be. Rather, the mutual benefits should be reciprocal in such a way that this plurilingualism and pluriculturalism of the country could be turned into strength. But this can only be achieved if the country starts to care for its linguistic resources and puts them to a judicious use. This lamentable situation also does not escape the attention of Bamgbose (1998: 9) when he writes that:

> The effects of the continued dominance can be seen in alienation resulting in unfavourable attitudes to African languages. The attitudes may be illustrated in the preference for early acquisition of these languages (with two-year-olds being made to speak English or French in elite homes), taking pride in proficiency in the imported languages at the expense of a sound knowledge of one's own mother tongue, preference for written communication in a European language, addiction to information disseminated in imported languages by electronic and print media, and lack of interest in, and concern for, the development of indigenous languages.

At this juncture, it is necessary to examine the present state of the use/relevance of Yoruba folktales in the present day Yoruba society. Fakoya (2008) conducted a research into how really endangered the Yoruba language is. He says "Of the respondents, only 3% report that their children can tell one or two folktales or sing any folksongs at all, but 54% are honest enough to reveal that the children can recite many poems, songs, and tales learned from American and British books, television, and school." Responding to their expectation of proverbs and similar turns of phrase of Yorùbá origin, 81% consider such expressions as befuddling and a mere waste of speaking time and would rather not hear them in conversation at all. Thirty-two per cent (32%) say they prefer straightforward and candid talk to speech interlarded with proverbs, idioms, and similar expressions." These paint an uninspiring representation of the situation. Without a doubt, these results simply do not augur well for a language that has such a large population of speakers and that is a great repository of culture and tradition. Therefore, regardless of the various realizations of folktales as being a repository of cultural elements, it is obvious that not enough attention has been or is being paid to it as a way of revitalizing and resuscitating the Yoruba language as well as other indigenous languages in the face of the rampaging encroachment of the English language and other foreign languages. While not insinuating that inability of Fakoya's respondents to recite indigenous poems or tell folk-stories is an indication that Yoruba is an endangered language, we however believe that the author has made a significant discovery about the use and non-use of the Yoruba folktales by Yoruba speakers.

5. Folktales to the rescue?

Wajuppa and MacDonald (1996) believe that, to preserve and revitalize the use of local languages and cultures, storytelling remains the answer as it is believed that it possesses spellbinding magic and power over both the listeners and the tellers. Storytelling is always enjoyable for people of all ages, and through it, the language, literature, and rituals inherent in the use of the language would be maintained. Children could learn to read, write and comprehend their indigenous languages and literature while maintaining fluency in speaking the exoglossic/"imported" language(s). Folklore has many cultural aspects, as have been discussed above, and can also serve to validate a culture, as well as transmit a culture's morals and values. As a nation formulates educational philosophy, economic policies, political philosophy and religious philosophy, the cultural philosophy through which a nation maintains its national identity is preserved in the languages indigenous to such a country. And this can be passed on to the younger generation quite effortlessly through folktales, anecdotes and ditties.

However, as has been noted in this paper that with the present pre-eminence status of English in Nigeria, majority of the people in addition to being largely illiterate in English are also unable to appreciate the indigenous folktales which are veritable sources to teaching morals and cultural ethos of their languages. Thus, we will like to advocate a bilingual approach to the use of the folktales by the people, especially the children. By this we mean that these indigenous folktales could be compiled and then translated into English to be introduced to the school children at specific levels of their education. Through this, both English and Yoruba, for example could be learnt simultaneously by the pupils, and the pupils stimulated to appreciate the rich heritage of their indigenous languages. By encouraging children to re-tell the stories, in both English and Yoruba, lessons in speech-making and articulation are being imparted. The translated folktales can also be made available to the adult speakers in the form of pamphlets, dictionaries, etc. It should be noted that these indigenous folktales had existed orally through ages and had always been shared largely in

indigenous languages, and that is why many people who now live a kind of western lifestyle are not aware of them or cannot just appreciate them.

Nwachukwu-Agbada (1991) also says of folktales as having "an entertainment value, it serves a didactic mode for childrearing, and it is a memorable artistic genre. In spite of these prevailing social changes …, the folktale remains perhaps the most performed and enjoyed artistic form in the typical villages." This is the more reason while we feel that translating these folktales into English will enhance their viability and learnability for the people, and this will promote a symbiotic relationship between English and the indigenous languages. Nwachuwu-Agbada (1991) continues that

> a related issue to the motifs of folktales is their function or purpose in the society. Thus, the Igbo folk narrative tradition serves to stretch children's imagination, to cultivate their intelligence, to enhance their artistic expressiveness, as well as to put them in a simulated moral condition which calls for a moral decision. But most importantly, the folktale-telling tradition seeks to maintain some form of balance and harmony between individual desires and social norms and mores.

With regards to keeping up with technological developments, folktales can be made to evolve along the various technological gadgets. Folktales may be read and burnt on compact discs for wider spread. So also they can be made into cartoons, animated films and movies, still retaining the local language and cultural flavour, so that many people can have access to them.

6. Conclusion

Each language is the vehicle for a unique way of thinking, a unique literature, and a unique view of the world. Only now are linguists starting seriously to estimate the world's rate of language loss and to debate what to do about it. If the present rate of language disappearance continues, the about 6,000 modern languages could be reduced within a century or two to just a few hundred. Time is running out even to study the others. Hence linguists face a race against time similar to that faced by biologists, now aware that many of the world's plant and animal species are in danger of extinction. For a disappearing language and culture to be maintained and revitalized, everyone must take part. The government, parents and teachers are to be involved, not just the children, who can help to perpetuate the language. Experts could get together and exchange their experiences and ideas, face to face, in a friendly and open manner at conferences, workshops, and they could take advantage of these precious contacts in their future collaboration. Scholars, educators, and policy makers need to evaluate, examine, and take actions in the preservation and revitalization of local cultural heritage before it is too late. The government too should provide the enabling environment and legal backing to ensure that these languages, regardless of their number of speakers, are allowed to thrive.

With regards to folktales in helping to salvage indigenous culture from extinction, storytelling should be encouraged among adults and children, so that the art might not disappear as well, as the age of mass media and advancement in technological information are upon us. Fortunately, the mass media and other tools of technological advancement can be incorporated in spreading the gospel of storytelling. Storytelling can be and has been

adapted in some parts of the world as an effective language technique at university, elementary, and pre-school levels. The collection of folktales, folksongs, children's games, songs, and lullabies should be encouraged as they help the children become familiarized with their environment culturally and linguistically. In addition, adapting folk epics for children's theater has been successful in getting both children and parents to be excited about local folktales and literature.

To sum up, the folktale in Yoruba culture enjoys popularity among the people, not only because of its artistic quality, but also because of its ritual nature, the discipline it demands from its narrators, its creative and imaginative content, and its educative potentials. It indeed should be encouraged to preserve the Yoruba cultural ideals from evaporating. More importantly, the current drift of synergy in language use that is taking place between English and the Nigerian indigenous languages, in several domains of language use, should be encouraged by language scholars through continuous research into the phenomenon with a view to enriching linguistic studies and promoting mutual collaboration among the languages.

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