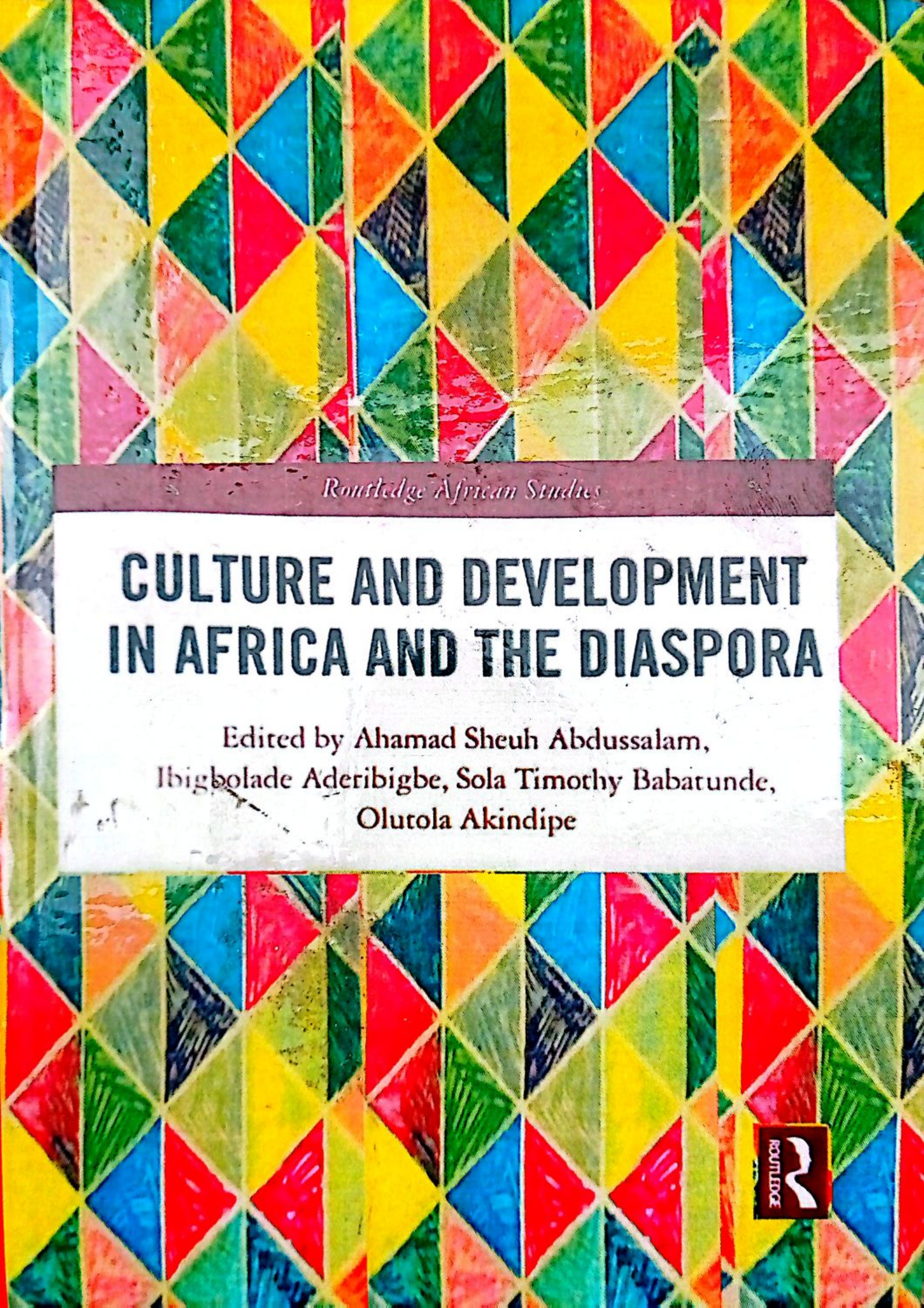




Routledge African Studies

CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA AND THE DIASPORA

Edited by Ahamad Sheuh Abdussalam,
Ibigholade Aderibigbe, Sola Timothy Babatunde,
Olutola Akindipe



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The paradox of Yoruba: A strong language in danger of avoidable death

A language is said to have died when it is no longer spoken in public domain (Wurm, 1991). The use of such a language is confined to whisper-like conversations among family members who are ashamed to be identified with the language in the public. In most cases, members of the language communities who have learnt dominant languages adopt the more prestigious languages for communication at home, thus significantly reducing the use of their indigenous languages.

A dead language can get to a worse and hopeless state known as extinction (Wurm, 1991). A language that has gone extinct is that which has completely ceased to be spoken at all. According to Blench (1993), nine of Nigerians had gone extinct by 1992. It is noteworthy that both the dead and the extinct languages were once vibrant but the evil fates befell them when their speakers became enticed or intimidated by other languages that were more prestigious as a result of economic buoyancy, political or military might. Matiki (1996) reports the example of the Lomwes of Malawi whose self-esteem in their language became so damaged that they would not speak their language in the presence of their neighbors from Nyasa land who describe the Lomwes' language as of a "naturally wild and low caste race whose ignorance makes them at once savage and timid" (Olatunji, 2011: 189).

There has been an alarm variously sounded to warn of the impending death and eventual extinction of many world languages as a result of the negative attitude of native speakers of such languages to their extensive use in both official and unofficial communication. Among such endangered languages is Yoruba, the language of the monolithic southwestern part of Nigeria that is also spoken in some other parts of West Africa and outside the shores of Africa. Considering the facts that the language enjoys a prominent status in Nigeria (Adegbija, 2004; Orekan, 2010), with its speakers within Nigeria estimated to be about 25 million, spoken by an additional population of about 15 million people in parts of the republic of Benin (Akinwale, Adetunmbi, Obe & Adesuyi, 2015) has a standard orthography, and is designated the medium of

instruction from the pre-primary stage to the end of the third class in the primary schools situated in the region of its nativity, described by Abiodun (2014) as one of the most prominent civilizations of sub-Saharan Africa, it may sound contradictory to claim that the language is in any way endangered.

However, key stakeholders in the maintenance, sustenance, propagation and perpetuation of Yoruba language have been found guilty of actively working toward killing the language with their inordinate preference for the English language, even in situations that research has variously proved that using the indigenous language has advantages over opting for any borrowed codes. For example, primary schools, especially privately owned ones, disregard government policy that stipulates the use of Nigerian indigenous languages for school instruction up to the end of the third year of primary school level (Oyeyemi, 2014; Awolere, Onyekwere & Ogunyemi, 2015). This practice of the schools is in response to popular demands from parents who call the tune as they pay the piper (Adebayo, 2009; Olatunji, 2013), thus showing widespread neglect of the indigenous languages among their speakers.

The Nigerian government, perhaps the most powerful stakeholder in the business of language maintenance, has been severally accused of paying lip service to proper implementation of the language policy that give relevance to indigenous languages in Nigerian primary schools (Emenanjo, 1998). Considering the discovery by sociolinguists that it is the will and transmission by speakers rather than the size of their population that determines the survival and propagation of their language (Fishman, 1991), the reported reluctance of the multitudes of Yoruba people to speak their language even in informal conversations spells an impending doom for the language.

The significance of the English language at the international level is consistently amplified because its corpus is largely available on the Internet and other electronic devices worldwide (Chapelle, 2003). Over 80% of the world's electronically stored information worldwide is in English and about 36% of estimated 200 million people using the Internet communicate in the language (Kolawole & Olatunji, 2006). Phillipson (1992) and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), among several other scholars have expressed the fear that English is becoming the intimidating and dominant language of international political, cultural and academic communities. Phillipson (2003, p. 71) has, however, realized that any claim that English will continue to enjoy such dominance on the Internet is mere "wishful thinking". Block (2004), too, proves with statistics that the Internet is being utilized effectively by other languages to challenge the supremacy long enjoyed by the English language.

The Internet: A double-edged sword for linguistic propagation and linguistic genocide

The Internet, according to Kelly-Holmes (2006), provides a platform on which the prevalence of the English language is outweighed by other languages, thus promoting multilingualism. But this happens while other

languages are still being downgraded. The reality of this paradox is a result of the advantageous use to which any language puts the resources made available by the Internet. While some languages leverage the worldwide coverage of the Internet, users of others seem to be oblivious of the immense opportunities. It is noteworthy that Kelly-Holmes' (2006) findings include the fact that the major challenge to the hypercentral status and function of the English languages comes unexpectedly from European central languages rather than any supercentral language. This further shows that it is not over for any language irrespective of how lowly it ranks currently. A much lower status language can overtake higher ones to gain unprecedented centrality on the Internet, given its success in utilizing the facilities.

De Swaan (2001, p. 171) categorizes the constituents of what he identified as 'world language system' to be the peripheral, the central, the supercentral and the hypercentral. Expectedly, English is designated "hypercentral" that holds all others. Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Malay, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Swahili are supercentral. Next in rank in terms of "prevalence" and "centrality" are those tagged "central" that enjoy local, regional or national significance. The languages in the peripheral category are primarily oral languages that perform only familial and local functions.

It is really cheering that the Yoruba language that is arguably being threatened with death and eventual extinction despite its current vibrancy has found its way into the limitless, "open, minimalist and neutral" (Goldsmith & Tim Wu, 2006) platform known as the Internet, the world of the World Wide Web. It is noteworthy that this same Internet has two-edged effects on languages, promoting the continued supremacy of the English language and concurrently providing a wide platform for other languages to displace the English language (Altbach, 2010). This, however, depends on the readiness of the speakers of such languages to either subject themselves to linguistic imperialism and "linguicide" (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2001) or assert the importance of their languages in the scheme of things in the global community.

Among the factors that make the Internet so fascinating is its success in harnessing features of television, telephone, print, and other advantageous packages. This means a material that finds its way into the Internet is likely to be inadvertently discovered by people with greatly varied interests. The Internet is thus a one-stop virtual market that is accessible to the whole world.

In addition to the fact that Yoruba-medium news, commercial and academic materials can now be found on the Internet, google.com has provided a Yoruba version of its search engine. This means Yorubas that may want to type in their Internet queries can do so using the Yoruba google version of the search engine. Understandably, there is currently very much limited resource in Yoruba language that can be accessed in the language. A lot of the academic articles would have to be translated into the English language

and this will be intimidatingly expensive. Also, since such materials are going to be used mostly for research in English-medium publications, translating them into Yoruba may arguably not be a very worthwhile venture. But the fact that researchers in Yoruba-medium assignments, too, can find such translated versions useful should be enough encouragement. After all, there are publications translated into English from various original tongues that are being quoted in a lot of English-medium publications.

Further, the population of the Yoruba-speaking people in Nigeria and the diaspora is so enormous that prospective providers of such translation can see the exercise as highly rewarding. But the theory of demand and supply will take its full course. It is not the size of the population but the demand for Yoruba-medium Internet products that can engender serious efforts at populating the World Wide Web with materials in the language (Bonanno, 2012). The frequency of visits to the websites that use Yoruba language is easy to determine by google.com. How long people stay on each website, too, is a factor to be considered in determining degree of patronage of such sites. But with the pervasive negative attitude to indigenous languages among the Yorubas, their visits to the Yoruba-medium google search engine and other related websites may not be expected to be encouraging.

On the other hand, a general excitement at Internet-mediated activities has been reported (Olatunji, 2008, 2011). Many a Nigerian can rightly be described with the word "netizen", a term coined by Crystal (2001: 3) to depict a person who is a regular citizen of the Internet. Perhaps the people's enthusiasm for Internet-mediated materials can mediate interest in the Internet-based Yoruba-medium materials. If it happens that the people's interest in the Internet has a positive impact on their patronage of Yoruba-medium Internet pages, then it will be good news to the language.

Serious efforts have gone into putting the Yoruba language on the global keyboard. Yoruba is one of the set languages of the new Microsoft Office XP Professional (Ogunkeye, 2006). There is, therefore, ample opportunity for the language to flourish on the Internet. But whether or not the Yoruba people who have "become cloned Americans or Westerners, all in the name of globalization or modernization" (Salawu, 2006: 3) will be willing to globalize their linguistic inheritance and identity remains a question to be answered.

The current study, therefore, aims at determining Yoruba bilinguals' rate of patronage of Yoruba-medium Internet materials, especially their utilization of the Yoruba version of the google search engine. This is with the secondary aim of predicting the level of investment that could be reasonably expected to be made into translating existing materials on the Internet. It is noteworthy that there were over 1.5 billion pages on the Internet by 2003 and almost two million new pages were being added to the Internet per day (Omekwu, 2003). It is safe to conclude that the rate must have increased nowadays. So, the presence and patronage of a language on the Internet are pertinent to its continued maintenance and global relevance.

Materials and method

The survey of the ex post facto type was adopted for the study. The sole instrument employed for data collection was a self-constructed ten-item questionnaire titled "Google Naijiria Utilisation Questionnaire (GNUQ)". Section A of the questionnaire is made up of 3 items requiring demographic information such as gender, age and educational status of each respondent. The 7-item Section B variously interrogates each respondent's awareness of Yoruba google and Yoruba-medium materials on the Internet, their disposition to such as well as their frequency of visits to the web pages containing such materials. The instrument was administered to 30 people sharing similar demography with the study sample but not taking part in the study. The data collected yielded a reliability of 92.3 Cronbach alpha. Three hundred Yoruba-English bilingual undergraduate as well as graduate students from 3 universities in the southwestern part of Nigeria were sampled. A total of 50 males and 50 females were sampled to make 100 in each university. Thus, a total of 300 people participated in the study.

Copies of the questionnaire were personally administered by the researchers and retrieved immediately. All the copies were found usable and thus used for the study. Frequency counts and percentages were employed in analyzing the data collected to answer three research questions.

Findings

Table 16.1 shows that 80 and 70 of the males were undergraduates and postgraduate students respectively while 93 and 57 of the females were undergraduates and postgraduate students respectively. Among the males, 74 were less than 20 years of age, 58 were between the age brackets of 21 to 40 years while 18 were from 41 years upward in age. Of the females, 78 were less than 20 years of age, 61 were from age 21 to 41 years while 11 were from age 41 and above.

Table 16.1 Demographic distribution of the respondents by gender, class of education and age

Gender	N	Class	Age	
Males	150	Undergraduate: 80	Less than 20 yrs	74
			21-40 yrs	58
		Postgraduate: 70	41 yrs and above	18
Females	150	Undergraduate: 93	Less than 20 yrs	78
			21-40 yrs	61
		Postgraduate: 57	41 yrs and above	11
Total	300	300		300

Table 16.2 The rate of awareness of Yoruba google search engine among the English-Yoruba bilinguals

<i>State of awareness</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Aware	197 (65.67%)
Not Aware	103 (34.33%)
Total	300 (100%)

The implications of this for the study are that (1) most of the respondents belong to the age groups that can be regarded as the near future of Nigeria and, being of the Yoruba extraction, specifically of the Yoruba language. (2) They can belong to the class of people who are, as a result of high level exposure to western education, opinion shapers and leaders in their respective domains of operation and dwelling. Thus, it is safe to conclude that what they stand for as far as disposition to and patronage of Yoruba-medium materials, whether in the traditional print or electronic Internet will be rapidly multiplied in the present generation that honors their opinions and the next. If they are positively disposed to the indigenous language, there is a bright hope of the language internationally. But if the reverse is the case, there is a bleak future ahead of Yoruba language materials.

Research Question 1: What is the rate of awareness about the Yoruba-medium google search engine among members of the university community section of Yoruba-English bilinguals?

Table 16.2 shows that a greater percentage of the respondents (197 or 65.67%) was aware of the google search engine while smaller percentage (103 or 34.33%) was unaware. Though those that were unaware were fewer, it should still be surprising that so many of the "netizens" generation could still be uninformed about the facility. It could even be that many of them had at one time or the other come across the Yoruba-medium facility but just did not care enough to take notice of it.

The direct answer to research Question 1 is clear: more of the bilinguals are aware of the Yoruba google search facility but those that are unaware are also in a large number. The rate cannot be said to be satisfactory for a language with the type of the huge population described earlier in this study.

Research Question 2: What is the general disposition of the English-Yoruba bilinguals to the provision of the Yoruba google search engine and other Yoruba-medium materials on the Internet?

Two yardsticks were used in measuring the disposition. The first was their self-expressed disposition while the other was through the rate at which they share the news of the existence of the Internet materials among themselves.

Table 16.3a indicates that only 7.45% of the responses to the three items on disposition to the Yoruba-medium Internet facilities were very positive

Table 16.3a Respondents' self-expressed disposition to the Yoruba google search engine and other Yoruba-medium Internet materials

S/N	Response item	Strongly positive	Positive	Negative	Strongly negative	Total
1	The provision of Yoruba-medium pages on the Internet is a mere waste of resources.	14 (4.67%)	96 (32%)	64 (21.33%)	126 (42%)	300 (100%)
2	Yoruba-medium pages on the Internet are a welcome development.	41 (13.67%)	89 (29.67%)	123 (41%)	47 (15.67%)	300 (100%)
3	Yoruba-medium Internet materials can never compete with their English-medium counterparts.	12 (4%)	50 (16.67%)	87 (29%)	151 (50.33%)	300 (100%)
Total		67	235	274	324	
Average Total		(7.45%)	(26.11%)	(30.44%)	(36%)	
Grand Average Total		33.56%		66.44%		100%
		Positive Total		Negative Total		

while 26.11% were simply positive, thus making a total of 33.56%. It is noteworthy that 33.56% is not by any standard near what is required to promote a language among many others struggling for supremacy in this age of globalization. It is also worthy attention that the greater percentage of that group (26.11%) belongs to the borderline between very positive and negative, thus highly susceptible to lose its little interest.

Also, while 30.44% simply indicated a modestly negative disposition, a greater percentage (36%) indicated a strongly negative disposition, thus making a total of 66.44% negatively disposed responses. This means a strongly positive disposition scores only 7.45% while the strongly negative scores an intimidating 36%. While the former has the type of disposition that can promote the language, the latter belongs to the group that seems to have gotten irreversibly lost necessary linguistic identity, people that suffer from "Native Language-Prejudice Syndrome" (Owolabi, 2006: 16).

Research Question 3: What is the rate of the English-Yoruba bilinguals patronage of Yoruba-medium web pages?

Table 16.3b The English-Yoruba bilinguals' rate of disseminating the news of the presence of Yoruba google search engine

Response item	Through a friend	Through google itself	Total
How did you become aware of the Yoruba google search engine?	13 (6.6%)	184 (93.4%)	197 (100%)

Table 16.4 The English-Yoruba bilinguals' patronage of Yoruba-medium web pages

Response item	Never	Less than 5 times	5-20 times	More than 20 times	Total
How many times have you deliberately visited a Yoruba-medium web page?	157 (52.33%)	139 (46.33%)	4 (1.33%)	NIL	300 (100%)

Table 16.4 indicates that 157 (52.33%) of the respondents had never deliberately visited a Yoruba-medium website, 139 (46.33%) had visited Yoruba-medium web pages less than 5 times all their lives, only 4 (1.33%) had done so from 5 to 20 times while none had done so more than 20 times. This shows the respondents' gross disinterest in their indigenous language. The answer to Research Question 3 is, therefore, that the rate of the English-Yoruba bilinguals' patronage of Yoruba-medium web pages is extremely poor.

Since there are various mechanisms put in place to monitor the rate of visits to websites, this lackluster patronage of Yoruba-medium web pages is a known fact that can discourage further investment into the venture. On the other hand, if traffic to the web pages is heavy, the providers would be encouraged to invest in upgrading the facilities.

Conclusion

The prospect of getting the rich resources available on the Internet robustly translated into Yoruba language for the use of Yoruba people at home and the diaspora as well as for the propagation of the language globally is very slim considering the discouraging disposition of the owners of the language to the project. The negative disposition is manifest in the fact that many Yoruba-English bilinguals are not aware of Yoruba-medium Internet resources because those that are aware do not see the development as a significant piece of information to disseminate excitedly. They do not patronize the resources but would rather limit themselves to the English-medium resources.

One of the implications of this negative situation is that aggressive translation of materials on the Internet into Yoruba will be discouraged as its economic viability is extremely poor. Secondly, massive contribution to the upgrade of the materials is rendered impossible since most native speakers of the language that should participate are either unaware or do not care to even consider using them. Ultimately, while other languages expand the geographical and conceptual scope of their use and prominence in this era of globalization by leveraging the ample opportunities afforded by the Internet, Yoruba may be among the ones to shrink or disappear because its supposed speakers are slumbering.

Recommendations

- 1 Aggressive advocacy by the government and various language interest groups for extensive use of Yoruba language in all domains is one of the measures to be put in place to redirect Yoruba people's linguistic preferences. Heavy investments should be made into public enlightenment programs addressing the advantages of language revitalization.
- 2 Government commission experts to work on extensive translation of many Internet resources found to be in high demand into Yoruba after satisfying all copyright requirements. No amount of money should be regarded too much for this because there are governments in the contemporary world that invest heavily in propagating their languages because they are convinced of good returns on such investments.
- 3 Government should provide incentives to individuals and groups interested in showcasing their Yoruba-medium innovations and patents on the Internet. This can serve as means of drawing people's attention to the language on the Internet. The impact of social, scientific, technological, medical and economic products of English speaking nations on the propagation of the language worldwide is a good pointer to the prospects of propagating Yoruba language on the Internet through literature on non-linguistic products.
- 4 The stipulation in the National Policy in Education that Nigerian indigenous languages should be used for school instruction till the end of the third year should be enforced to cultivate good disposition to Nigerian indigenous languages and thereby learn to appreciate materials in such languages online and even take active parts in propagating them.

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Bios of Contributors

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Ahmad Shehu Abdussalam, PhD, is Professor of Arabic and Applied Linguistics in the Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin. He studied and served in Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Malaysia. He holds a PhD from University of Khartoum (1990) and was elevated to the Professorial rank at International Islamic University, Malaysia (2002). His area of study and publication covers Arabic Syntax, Semantics, Applied Linguistics, Pedagogical Linguistics, Discourse Analysis and Translation Study. His current research is on sociocultural linguistics of texts. He was Dean of Faculty of Arts (2015–2017), Head of Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ilorin (2009–2015) and Head of Department of Arabic Language and Literature, International Islamic University, Malaysia (1996–1998).

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Sola Timothy Babatunde, PhD, is Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Ilorin. He has numerous published books, chapters in books and journal articles in reputable national and international outlets. As an applied linguist, he has published in virtually all areas of English studies but with emphasis on English language in Nigeria, Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics, Semantics and Syntax. Professor Babatunde has been teaching these courses for over thirty years both in Nigeria and in other international institutions. He has also served as external examiner

and visiting professor for many universities within and outside Nigeria. As a mentor, he has successfully supervised many doctoral, masters and undergraduate students' works in the University of Ilorin.

Olutola Opeyemi Akindipe, PhD, has a Bachelor's degree in Psychology as well as Master's and Doctoral degrees in Educational Psychology from the University of Georgia, USA. She is a seasoned educator with over 10 years of college teaching experience of which several were in different administrative capacities. Some of her areas of research interests include students' motivation, achievement, parental involvement, home-school collaboration and gender issues. She is also very passionate about education and enjoys working with students of all educational levels. She has facilitated and presented in several local and international conferences and volunteers for educational non-profit organizations within her local community. She is a member of several professional bodies such as the American Psychological Association, American Educational Research Association and the Graduate Student Committee of the Kappa Delta Pi, an international Honor Society in Education. Dr. Akindipe is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor of Psychological Science at Salem College, North Carolina, USA, where she teaches Introduction to Psychology and Developmental Psychology.

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Rotimi Williams Omotoye, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Religions at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. He is the author of "The Study of African Traditional Religion and Its Challenges in Contemporary Times", in the Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies (2011); "The Use of African Traditional Medicine, Orthodox Medicine, and Christian Faith Healing in Yorubland, South Western Nigeria" in the Ilorin Journal of Linguistics (2103). He is an editor for Science and Religion in the Service of Humanity.

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Taofiq Adedayo Alabi, PhD, is a Reader and a researcher in the Department of English, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, where he works. His research interests are in the areas of Stylistics, Cognitive Linguistics and Phonology. His papers have appeared in learned journals nationally and internationally. Among these are Journal of Nigeria English Studies Association, Journal of Linguistic Association of Nigeria, US-China Foreign Language and World Englishes. He is currently working on stylistics of a second language with particular focus on the Nigerian varieties of English.