

## **A Survey of the Yoruba-English Translation Skills of Secondary School Students in Ogun State, Nigeria**

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### ***Abstract***

Language and culture are Siamese twins that share the same heart. Yoruba idioms form a large window for showcasing culture through communication and by their interpretation into English language which is not only a central language in Nigeria but also the leading international language. This study investigated the knowledge of Yoruba idioms among Yoruba-speaking secondary school students in Ifo Local Government Area of Ogun State. It also examined their ability to properly give a contextual interpretation to the idioms in English language. It also looked into the possibility of employing the English language itself as a metalanguage to revive and teach proper interpretation of Yoruba idioms into English language. Data collected from twohundred teachers and a focus group of fifty students was analysed using the chi square statistics and the descriptive survey method. Findings show that students have a poor knowledge of Yoruba idioms and they cannot properly interpret the few they know into English language. This already endangers a linguistic feature of the Yoruba culture. Recommendations include the use of modern technology and the English class in the promotion and the interpretation of Yoruba idioms into English language.

**Keywords:** Yoruba idioms, Culture, Communication, Interpretation, English class.

## **Introduction**

The jugular vein of cohesion for any group of people is their language, both in the verbal and the non-verbal forms. Countries with different tribal groups come up with a lingua franca to have a common language for national interaction. Language is the chief tool through which any human society make themselves known to the outside world and through which they expose their culture because even the non-verbal form of language is defined through the verbal form. The intra-transmission and the inter-transmission of culture are two components of the functions of language. One prominent cultural practice of the Yoruba is to strengthen their communication with special linguistic features like idioms and proverbs. This researcher observed that the use of Yoruba idioms was no longer common especially among Yoruba-speaking secondary school students. These were students who were doing well in the English class and who did not find it difficult to translate the ordinary day-to-day Yoruba statements into English. Elderly speakers avoid the use of idioms where these students act as interpreters. This research set out to find out the level of the ability or otherwise of these students to comprehend and translate the idioms into English as a means of exposing a linguistic aspect of the Yoruba culture.

Staaque (2022) delivers that every language has idioms which are expressions that cannot be interpreted from the literal denotation of the words. The linguistic utility of idioms is emphasised by Sederstrom (2023) who submits that idioms exhibit cultural understanding and kinship. In agreement with Sederstrom (2023), Bhanoo (2023) confirms that idioms are cultural shorthand as they are culturally specific. Writing on Yoruba idioms, Simwa (2022) describes them as enriching Yoruba culture and showing real wisdom.

The United Nations (2019) has warned that some languages had the possibility of going into extinction in the future. This warning is

reinforced by Gruenbaum (2023) calling on the Commonwealth to preserve its linguistic diversity. A language begins to slip into degeneration with a gradual loss of its linguistic features. It was in view of this that this work proposed to investigate the state of the absorption and the understanding of Yoruba idioms among the present-day generation of Yoruba-speaking secondary school students.

The result of this research will help policy makers, teachers and students to recognize the link between one's first language and culture. This will guide them to take decisions that will function to promote and preserve clear and correct interpretation of Yoruba idioms into English language.

### **Literature Review**

**Language and the Digital Age:** The internet has become a common medium for all aspects of life and human development. Language is not left out. According to Maini (2012), many websites have sprung up to leverage social networking for language learning purposes but all of them are focused on learning the most popular languages for which vast dictionaries, recordings and resources are widely available. This is why, in this digital age, there must be a conscious effort to correctly present the Yoruba language in its natural form on the internet. Maini (2012) believes that language preservation by using new technology should be carefully considered.

Obonyo et al (2011) cited by Maini (2012) acknowledge the development of technological tools that could be part of human learning kits to revitalize one's language. The English Language class can be used to revive and strengthen the already weakened aspects of the Yoruba language. When this is done, globally reliable materials can be developed and stored on the internet. Maini (2012) claims that the social media have attracted imaginations of their roles for other meaningful purposes which include language preservation. The writer further submits that focus should be on the younger generation, arguing

that the main problem is to bridge the technological gap between the youth and the elders.

Digitalisation has impacted on approaches to communication. Roshong (2019) classifies communication as a cardinal leadership skill, stating that the way people communicate has experienced a paradigm shift in this digital age. Hinting at message fidelity, Lee (2023) prioritises the conveyance of intended message without any ambiguity. It is necessary to create an environment that motivates people to learn their language with the use of appropriate technology. This falls in line with the thought of this researcher to target the native Yoruba-speaking secondary school students.

**Language and Culture:** Many writers have exposed the undisputable relationship between language and culture. Lado (1957) cited by Onoja (2015) writes that individuals transfer the forms and meanings of their language and culture to the foreign language and culture both productively and receptively in an attempt to grasp and understand the language and culture as practised by the natives. Asemota (2015) points out that culture is an inseparable part of language. This is in line with Deji-Afuye and Obadare's (2015) submission that language is part and parcel of people's identity as people are culturally displaced when language is lost. Language is not just language, it is an attitude of a group of people, which is an integral part of what is termed culture. Adebisi et al (2015) declare that language is an important aspect of human life used to learn and communicate with others among other things and to establish rules and maintain culture. Ezea (2006) explains that Igbo language is being taught to promote Igbo cultural heritage and their worldviews and to enable an Igbo express himself in his mother tongue "applying the correct idioms and figurative language in Igbo." Vela (2019) attributes a complementary relationship to language and culture. The scholar clarifies culture as an agent of core traditions and the fashion in which people interact while language is presented as a

means of facilitating interaction. Kong (2019) couples language with culture stating that the requirement for understanding a language is knowing the culture that surrounds the language.

Use of Yoruba idioms is a culture within a culture. The death of that particular part of the Yoruba language is the death of a particular part of the Yoruba culture. Iraki (2004) warns that the death of a culture will almost certainly be followed by the demise of the language associated with that culture. Guessabie (2017) clarifies that language learning is cultural learning, so language teaching is cultural teaching due to the interdependence of language and cultural learning. SIL (formerly Summer Institute of Linguistics) (2018) states that culture provides the environment in which languages develop, even as it influences how they are used and interpreted. UNESCO (2022) states that indigenous languages are inherently associated with the sustenance of cultural diversity, and that they are conducive to a methodical approach to culture.

**Language Interpretation:** Idioms are expressions that should not be decoded literally as they are figurative in use. Chalker and Weiner (1994) define an idiom as a group of more or less fixed words having a meaning that is not deducible from those of the individual words. Barber (2007) affirms that text is differently constituted in different social contexts. It is averred therein that what a text is considered to be and how it is considered to have meaning, varies from one culture to another. Language Scientific (2018) writes that interpreters must possess the intellectual capacity to instantly transform idioms, colloquialisms and other culturally-specific references into analogous statements the target audience will understand. Odeh and Musa (2015) have specified that language is for communication and that mutual intelligibility is needed for effective and successful communication. They continue that an interpreter should be conscious of the fact that it is the speaker that is communicating with the audience.

Allen et al (2022) citing Burgess (1984) warn that translation goes beyond a matter of words as it centres on making a whole culture clearly evident. Highlighting the skills needed to be displayed by its interpreters, the United Nations (2023) writes that interpreters must identify adequate cultural equivalents and they must also take cultural context into consideration. Emphasis is placed on proper knowledge of both language and culture.

If pragmatic specifics of the Yoruba language like idioms are not revitalized and sustained, there is a looming danger of the language becoming an L2 to coming generations. Olaoye (2006) stresses that the curriculum of any language programme should lay emphasis not only on phonetics and phonology but also on linguistics, particularly psycholinguistics and pragmatics in order to enhance the students' communicative competence. Emenanjo (1996) cited by Ndukwe (2006) states that Nigeria has not given the teaching and the learning of languages the priority they deserve.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. Ho : There is no relationship between an adequate knowledge of Yoruba idioms and an effective interpretation of Yoruba statements into English language.
2. Ho : There is no relationship between the application of Yoruba idioms in communication and the Yoruba culture.
3. Ho : There is no urgent need for the teaching of the interpretation of Yoruba idioms into English language.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study was to investigate the level of understanding acquired by native Yoruba-speaking secondary school students in the translation of Yoruba idioms into English language. The objectives are to inquire if a high score in English Language by a student guarantees a good performance in the translation of Yoruba idioms into English

language; to examine if the translation of Yoruba idioms into English language in communication is a tool for the manifestation of Yoruba culture; and to find out if a conscious teaching of the translation of Yoruba idioms in the English class will improve the performance of students.

### **Research Methodology**

The data analysed in this work was generated from onethousand six hundred responses of twohundred teachers and fivehundred responses of fifty students that made up the sample for this study. Each of the three hypotheses was tested with a selection of a number of items relevant to it in the questionnaire. Teachers' questionnaire enabled respondents to specify their level of agreement or disagreement. The items were computed on the Likert scale. The chi-square statistical method was used in calculating the data outcome for each of the hypotheses. For the students' data, the descriptive survey method was used to analyse the responses.

The questionnaires were developed by the researcher. The teachers' questionnaire consisted of eight items on Yoruba idioms, culture and interpretation. The questionnaire was on a four-point Likert scale of SA, A, D and SD for each item. Two hundred teachers were randomly chosen as respondents. The students' questionnaire consisted of ten open-ended items on the translation of some common Yoruba idioms into English. The respondents constituted a focus group of fifty students randomly selected.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

Twenty secondary schools were selected from Ifo Local Government Area in Ogun State of Nigeria as sample for this study. These schools were selected because they possessed the same characteristics of other secondary schools in the local government area. Random sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents.

**Results and Discussion**  
**Data Presentation and Analyses**  
**Section A**

HYPOTHESIS 1 : Ho – There is no relationship between an adequate knowledge of Yoruba idioms and an effective interpretation of Yoruba statements into English language.

**Table 1**

Items	Frequency				
	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1. Language is used to teach and to learn language.	167	33	0	0	200
2. Verbal and written communication are the strongest forms of expression.	118	59	21	2	200
8. Efforts should be made to teach the translation of Yoruba idioms into English.	146	54	0	0	200
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>600</b>

The chi square statistical method was used to calculate the data outcome for the hypothesis with the following result:

$X^2$  calculated = 62.05

Level of significance = 0.05

Df = (4-1) x (3-1) = 6

$X^2$  value on chi-square table = 12.592

Items 1, 2 and 8 on the questionnaire were used to test this hypothesis. Out of the 600 responses obtained, 577 (96.17%) showed that there was a relationship between the two variables while only 23 (3.83%) showed otherwise. This outcome established a relationship.



The outcome aligns with Obonyo et al as cited by Maini (2012) that the revitalisation of one's language is of paramount importance. Maini (2012) has also written that language preservation from a linguistic approach should be carefully considered. Chalker and Weiner(1994) have called our attention to the fact that the meanings of idioms are not deducible from the meanings of their individual words. Staake(2022) has stated that idioms are expressions that cannot be interpreted from literal meanings.

Since  $X^2$  calculated is greater than ( $>$ )  $X^2$  value on chi-square table, the null hypothesis is rejected. The implication of this is that there is a relationship between an adequate knowledge of Yoruba idioms and an effective interpretation of Yoruba statements into English language.

HYPOTHESIS 2: Ho – There is no relationship between the application of Yoruba idioms in communication and the Yoruba culture.

**Table 2**

Items	Frequency				
	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
3. Language is one of the means through which culture is revealed	159	41	0	0	200
4. Yoruba idioms show the richness of Yoruba language.	162	38	0	0	200
5. Yoruba idioms are beautiful non-literal expressions.	51	103	33	13	200
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>600</b>

The chi square statistical method was used to calculate the data outcome for the hypothesis with the following result:

$X^2$  calculated = 188.93

Level of significance = 0.05

Df = (4-1) x (3-1) = 6

$X^2$  value on chi-square table = 12.592

Items 3, 4 and 5 on the questionnaire were used to test this hypothesis. Out of the 600 responses obtained, 554 (92.33%) indicated that there was a relationship between the two variables. The remaining 46 (7.67%) indicated otherwise. This outcome established a relationship. This echoes Asemota's (2015) assertion that culture is an inseparable part of language. This also corroborates the statement of Deji-Afuye and Obadare (2015) that language is part and parcel of people's identity. Adebisi (2015) joins the group with his submission that language is used to maintain culture. Guessabie (2017) clarifies that language learning is cultural learning. The United Nations (2023) declares that interpreters must have proper knowledge of language and its culture. This submission is supported by Sederstrom (2023) and Bhanoo (2023). Allen et al (2022) write that translation revolves round making a whole culture evident.

Since  $x^2$  calculated is greater than ( $>$ )  $x^2$  value on chi-square table, the null hypothesis is rejected. The implication of this is that there is a relationship between the application of Yoruba idioms in communication and the Yoruba culture.

**HYPOTHESIS 3:** Ho – There is no urgent need for the teaching of the interpretation of Yoruba idioms in English Language classes.

**Table 3**

Items	Frequency				
	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
6. Students cannot easily translate Yoruba idioms into English language.	51	126	23	0	200

7. Students' weakness in translation will distort the message.	105	59	13	23	200
	156	185	36	23	400

The chi square statistical method was used to calculate the data outcome for the hypothesis with the following result:

$X^2$  calculated = 68.74

Level of significance = 0.05

Df = (4-1) x (2-1) = 3

$X^2$  value on chi-square table = 7.815

Items 6 and 7 on the questionnaire were used to test this hypothesis. Out of the 400 responses obtained, 341 (85.25%) showed that there was an urgent need for the teaching of the interpretation of Yoruba idioms in English classes. Only 59 (14.75%) disagreed with this. This outcome established that there is an urgent need for the teaching of the interpretation of Yoruba idioms in English class. This supports Maini's (2012) expression that focus should be on the younger generation for the preservation of language. Ezea (2006) is in agreement with this, affirming that Igbo language is being taught to enable the Igbo to express themselves in her mother tongue, using correct idioms and figurative expressions. Lee (2023) has emphasised the importance of conveying intended messages without any ambiguity.

Since  $x^2$  calculated is greater than ( $>$ )  $x^2$  value on chi-square table, the null hypothesis is rejected. The implication of this is that there is an urgent need for the teaching of the interpretation of Yoruba idioms in English classes.

### **Section B**

A focus group of fifty students was given ten Yoruba idioms to translate into English. These were students who scored above fifty percent in English Language in their last promotion examination. They

were given ten common Yoruba idioms to translate into English. The idioms and the computed responses are presented below.

### **The Yoruba Idioms**

1. Ọbẹ̀ kì í gbéínuàgbàmi.
2. Díẹ̀ díẹ̀ n'ímúḗlédè fi n' w'ogbá.
3. Jẹ̀gbònrínèṣíl'óbẹ̀.
4. A n' pegbénàgbènà, eḡèkókó n' yojú.
5. Wà á jeyán ẹ̀ n'íṣu.
6. Ọmọyènlèsòsánd'òru.
7. Gbogbowon jubaehoro.
8. Wóntiyegifún un.
9. Ó tigbéwon gun ẹ̀ṣinaáyán.
10. Wóntif'orijá'léagbón.

### **Literal Interpretations of the Yoruba Idioms**

1. Soup does not shake in the stomach of an elder.
2. It is little by little that the nose of a pig enters a calabash.
3. Eating last year's antelope in one's soup.
4. We are calling for a carpenter, the wood pecker (bird) surfaces.
5. You will eat your pounded yam just as yam (not pounded).
6. That child can turn an afternoon into a midnight.
7. All of them bowed for the rabbit.
8. They have shifted the wood for him.
9. He is placing them on a horse of cockroach.
10. They have unsettled the bee hive with their heads.

### **Correct Linguistic Interpretations of the Yoruba Idioms**

1. An elder does not leak a secret or utter unguided words.
2. It is gradually that some little acts become a big deed.
3. Relying on outdated information or knowledge.

4. We are looking for an expert or a knowledgeable person, but it is an unqualified person or a novice that shows up.
5. You will be dealt with.
6. That child tells great lies.
7. They all ran away.
8. He had been hanged (killed).
9. He is deceiving them.
10. They are in a great trouble.

**Table 4: Percentages of correct translations and of students' scores**

Correct translation	N	%		Score	N	%
Item 1	10	20		10	0	0
Item 2	9	18		9	0	0
Item 3	11	22		8	0	0
Item 4	8	16		7	0	0
Item 5	18	36		6	1	2
Item 6	9	18		5	3	6
Item 7	7	14		4	5	10
Item 8	21	42		3	10	20
Item 9	16	32		2	22	44
Item 10	12	24		1	6	12
	<b>121</b>			0	3	6
					<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 shows a cumulative of 121 correct responses out of a possible total of 500. This translates into 24.2%. Table 5 shows that only 8% of the respondents scored 5 and above while the remaining 92% scored less than 5. Only 4 (8%) students out of 50 scored 5 and above in the translation exercise. 5 students (10%) scored 4 while the remaining 41 students (82%) scored 3 and below. The cumulative total of correct responses was 121 (24.2%) out of a possible total of 500. This outcome does not contradict teachers' responses to Items 6, 7 and 8 on their own

questionnaire. This creates a clear picture of an uncomfortable academic and cultural distance between the students and Yoruba idioms. It therefore underlines the urgency of the attention needed to be given to the conscious teaching of Yoruba idioms and their interpretations into English language.

### **Discussion of Findings**

A cultural revival with Yoruba idioms as the centrepiece has become not only needful but also exigent. It is a mission that demands the involvement of primary stakeholders in Yoruba society. Parents readily come to one's mind. Day-to-day conversations at home can be purposely spiced up with Yoruba idioms to expose the children to the use and the meanings of the idioms. An impeding factor is that a substantial number of today's young parents are as guilty as the children as they are also culturally deficient in the knowledge of Yoruba idioms. This is why it is imperative for Yoruba elders to consciously take up the redeeming task of formal and informal teachings of Yoruba idioms. Every form of social gathering should be seen as a mode of access to the target population. Teachers of Yoruba Language in secondary schools should make generous use of texts that have Yoruba idioms, in addition to using Yoruba idioms in their presentations in the classroom.

This network of concerted efforts will sow a seed that will germinate into a flourishing resuscitation of the use of Yoruba idioms. As a consequence, Yoruba culture will not only be strengthened but will also become manifest to the global language community.

### **Summary of Findings**

The study found out the following:

1. Yoruba idioms form an integral part of Yoruba culture.
2. The use of Yoruba idioms is dying.
3. Native Yoruba-speaking secondary school students are not familiar with Yoruba idioms.

4. A good score in English Language does not guarantee a good performance in the interpretation of Yoruba idioms into English.
5. The use of Yoruba idioms in communication may gradually go into extinction.
6. There is an urgent need to revitalize and sustain the use of Yoruba idioms especially among native Yoruba-speaking secondary school students.
7. There is an urgent need to start a conscious formal teaching of the interpretation of Yoruba idioms in the English class for native Yoruba-speaking secondary school students.

### **Conclusion**

Adequate knowledge of Yoruba idioms is needed for a correct and an effective Yoruba-English translation. The employment of Yoruba idioms in communication is a representation of the Yoruba culture. These realities underline the urgency of the need to expose native Yoruba-speaking secondary school students to Yoruba idioms with an emphasis on their meanings. Modern means of communication, especially the internet, should be made use of in the quest to popularise Yoruba idioms and their meanings among native Yoruba-speaking secondary school students.

### **Recommendations**

Following from the study above, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. The use of English Language class to teach the translation of Yoruba idioms into English in secondary schools in Yorubaland.
2. A deliberate exposure of native Yoruba-speaking secondary school students to Yoruba idioms in day-to-day activities.
3. An organised use of modern technology to promote Yoruba idioms and their translations into English language.

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