

## SUSTAINING THE YORÙBÁ LANGUAGE THROUGH WRITING: A CASE FOR THE MODIFICATION OF YORÙBÁ NECO AND WAEC MARKING GUIDES

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### Abstract

This research is informed by recent reports from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and some Nigerian dailies that some African languages are endangered and that after the next fifty years some of the African languages including the Yorùbá language may cease to exist if certain steps are not taken to address the ugly situation. We argue in this research that, to save the Yorùbá language from dying, orthography in marking guides should attract more marks than what obtains at present where other sub-sections of essay writing such as subject matter, arrangement, idioms and proverbs are rated much higher than orthography. We argue further that the marking guide planners of African languages should identify the peculiarities of the African languages and emphasize them so as to help the African languages to continue to exist as written languages despite the challenges posed by the languages of the colonial authorities.

**Keywords:** orthography, writing, interference, endangerment, marking guides

### Résumé

Cette recherche s'appuie sur des rapports récents de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'Éducation, la Science et la Culture et de certains quotidiens nigériens selon lesquels certaines langues africaines, y compris la langue yoruba, sont en danger et que, dans les cinquante prochaines années, certaines de ces langues pourraient disparaître si certaines mesures ne sont pas prises pour remédier à la situation déplorable. Nous observons que certaines différentes catégories d'écrivains en langue yoruba n'utilisent pas les signes diacritiques requis dans leurs écrits, violant ainsi l'orthographe en yoruba. Des études ont révélé que le non-usage de signes diacritiques entraînant une violation de l'orthographe est en partie attribuable au guide de correction élaboré et utilisé par NECO et WAEC pour noter les papiers Yoruba. Comme nous le constatons, les guides ne soulignent pas l'importance des signes diacritiques en yoruba. Nous soutenons dans la recherche que, pour éviter la disparition de la langue yoruba, l'orthographe dans les guides de correction devrait attirer davantage de notes que vous souhaitez obtenir à l'heure actuelle, où d'autres sous-sections d'écriture aisée, telles que sujets, arrangements, idiomes et proverbes, sont beaucoup appréciées, plus élevée que l'orthographe. Nous soutenons en outre que les planificateurs des guides de notation pour les langues africaines devraient identifier les particularités des langues africaines et les souligner afin de permettre aux langues africaines de continuer à exister en tant que langues écrites malgré les défis posés par les langues officielles.

**Mots-clés:** signes diacritiques, orthographe, écriture, interférence, mise en danger, guides de marquage.

## 1. Introduction

Orthography is defined as the system of spelling in a language and according to Williamson (1984:7) who says “orthography must agree with the sound system of the language for which it is intended” (see also Capo 2015). However, Ìkòtún (2014:47) reports that

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“although, there are languages like English and French in which the spelling and pronunciation norms are at odds, this is not the case with Yorùbá”. According to Ikòtún, “the Yorùbá spelling and the sound system must not be at odds”. Unlike the previous orthographic representations of the Yorùbá language, evidence from recent studies conducted on Yorùbá phonology, morphology and syntax is in agreement with Ikòtún’s position that the Yorùbá spelling and the sound system must not be at odds (see Oyèláran 1971, Awóbùlúyì 1978, Akinlabí, 1985, Owólabí 1989, Bámgbóṣé, 1990, Oyèbádé 1998, Ajíbóyè 2005, 2007, Abíódún, 2010, Ikòtún 2014). For example, Ikòtún (2014:5) reports that what the Yorùbá language endorses are Oládiípò from Oládipúpò and Diipò from Dipúpò (Riches have become many) after deletion and assimilation and not Oládipò from Oládipúpò and Dipò from Dipúpò as most people do write.

What is of interest to the present work is the use of diacritics in Yorùbá. Diacritics are extra symbols used along with vowels and consonants in the orthography of a language. In the Yorùbá language, diacritics are attested in some Yorùbá sounds which include some vowels and some consonants. The sounds can be divided into three categories. The first category comprises some oral vowels, nasal vowels and the two nasal consonants. The sounds are ‘a’, ‘e’, ‘i’, ‘o’, ‘u’, ‘ã’, ‘ĩ’, ‘ũ’, ‘m’ and ‘n’. Any of these sounds can take the high, low, and mid tones. For example,

- i. wá (come)
- ii. wà (dig)
- iii. wa (look for)

The second category consists of some oral vowels and nasal vowels which have a mark that is placed under them. They are as follows: ‘ε’, ‘ɔ’, ‘ε̃’ and ‘ɔ̃’. For example,

- iv. rò (to be soft)
- v. rọ (to wither)
- vi. ró (to fill)

The palato-alveolar fricative ‘s’ belongs to the third category. The sound ‘s’ can be found in words like ‘sùgbón’ (but), ‘sẹ̀sẹ̀’ (just now) and ‘se’ (do) to mention some examples. It will be recalled that the proper use of diacritics helps learners, readers, listeners and writers of the Yorùbá language to distinguish Yorùbá words from another as already shown in examples i, ii, iii and iv, v, vi above. Our position is that the roles of the diacritics in Yorùbá as far as reading and writing of the language are concerned are indispensable. Therefore, some questions that will be addressed in this paper are:

1. do the Yorùbá writers recognize the importance of diacritics in the Yorùbá orthography?
2. do the Yorùbá-speaking states and the Federal Government of Nigeria employ teachers for the teaching and learning of the Yorùbá language?
3. do the examination bodies such as National Examinations Council and West African Examinations Council emphasize the importance of diacritics in their marking guides?

## 2. Literature Review

Although it has been argued in existing literature that the role of English in Nigeria has made it to interfere with Yorùbá, some suggestions have been given to help ensure the survival of Yorùbá despite the overwhelming interference of English with the language. For example, Adégbitẹ (2004) submits that with enlightenment programmes, Nigerians’ negative attitudes to Nigerian languages can be checked. Owólabí (2007) admonishes that the Yorùbá should wage a war against the non-use of the Yorùbá language and suggests that more loan-words should be borrowed into the morphology of the Yorùbá language so as to make the language viable and more relevant to modern-day needs. Ikòtún (2013) is also of the opinion that code-mixing and linguistic borrowing have posed serious dangers to the existence of indigenous languages in colonies where colonial authorities’ languages are in use and that African language curriculum planners and teachers must extract the various patterns that can be utilized in teaching code-mixing and linguistic borrowing so as to ensure the survival of indigenous languages from the

onslaught of foreign or colonial authorities' languages in bilingual or multilingual countries like Nigeria.

While we do not disagree with the submissions of the previous researchers that the Yorùbá language, like any other Nigerian language, is endangered, we argue also in this paper that the marking scheme planners for the students in the senior secondary school are also contributing to the endangerment of the Yorùbá language. This is because the marking scheme designed by the planners does not recognize the crucial role played by the Yorùbá orthography in the reading and writing aspects of the language. However, we are interested in the writing aspect of the Yorùbá language in this paper and we submit that the Yorùbá National Examinations Council (NECO henceforth) and the West African Examinations Council (WAEC henceforth) marking schemes should be reviewed or modified and that preference or greater emphasis should be placed on the learning/teaching and examination of the Yorùbá orthography and not on issues the candidates or learners can develop on their own as they grow up in the society. Our position that the learning of the Yorùbá orthography should be emphasized is premised on the fact that it is the knowledge of orthography that is required for competence in reading and writing of the Yorùbá language and not non-linguistic issues that deal with subject matter, arrangement or paragraphing, idioms and proverbs.

### **3. Methodology**

The data that were used in this project were collected from four sources. The first source included investigations that were carried out in 2011/2012, 2012/2013, 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 academic sessions to examine the ability of some undergraduate students in writing the Yorùbá language. In each academic session, a total of 100 Part Three students of Èkìtì State University, Ado-Èkìtì were examined and this brings the total number examined to 400 students for the four academic sessions. The course in which the students were asked to translate some English lexical items to Yorùbá is a part three course and the course is entitled "Survey of Applied Linguistics". The course deals with language teaching and language acquisition. Some of the areas that are covered in the course include listening, speaking, writing and reading. According to the mentalists, competence in language teaching and language learning can also be acquired or enhanced through reading, speaking, listening and writing (see Chomsky, 1957). The students, whose knowledge of the Yorùbá language was tested, had passed either the NECO or WAEC Yorùbá at the credit or distinction level and that was why some of them were considered for admission into Bachelor degree programmes in Humanities/Arts.

We also conducted translation of some English lexical items into Yorùbá lexical items among some SS3 students in some State and Federal Government Colleges. We made use of the marks allocated to the four components of letter-writing. The components include subject matter, arrangement/paragraphing, language use such as idioms and proverbs and orthography which includes spelling of vowels and consonants, use of tones, diacritics and punctuation. Information that had to do with the number of teachers teaching the Yorùbá language in the Yorùbá-speaking states and Federal Government Colleges that was collected in the state and federal ministries of education formed part of our data. The essence of this information is to confirm whether the Yorùbá-speaking states and the Federal Government of Nigeria encourage and support the teaching of the Yorùbá language in schools owned by them. Similarly, data drawn from some other sources such as information from the works of some other categories of Yorùbá writers were considered. The Yorùbá writers included Yorùbá newscasters, Yorùbá drama groups and lecturers.

#### 4. INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE WRITING OF THE YORÙBÁ LANGUAGE

Some English words and the students' translation that are drawn from our investigations are shown below.

ENGLISH	YORÙBÁ
1. sand	erupe
2. hand	owo
3. but	sugbon
4. book	iwe
5. just now	sese
6. okro	ila
7. hand bill	iwe ilewo
8. boy	omokunrin
9. straight street	opopo gbooro
10. chair	aga
11. garden	ogba
12. head	ori
13. brave man	akin okunrin
14. coward	ojo
15. rain	ojo
16. mat	eni
17. farm	oko
18. stone	oko
19. respect	owo
20. two hundred	igba

A careful examination of the translation of the English words to Yorùbá shows that all the students ought to have failed woefully either the NECO or WAEC Yorùbá Examination. This is because the students failed to recognize the Yorùbá sounds that have diacritics. The only three words that were translated correctly are 'ojo' (coward), 'oko' (farm) and 'igba' (two hundred) because the three do not have sounds that have diacritics. However, the corrections were done and they are as follows:

ENGLISH	YORÙBÁ
21. sand	erùpẹ̀
22. hand	ọ̀wọ̀
23. but	ṣ̀ùgb̀ón
24. book	ìwé
25. just now	ṣ̀ẹ̀ṣ̀ẹ̀
26. okro	ilá
27. hand bill	ìwé iléwọ̀
28. boy	ọ̀mọ̀k̀unrin
29. straight street	òpópó gbọ̀ọ̀rọ̀
30. chair	àga
31. garden	ọ̀gbà
32. head	orí
33. brave man	akin ọ̀k̀unrin
34. coward	ojo
35. rain	òjò

36. mat	ẹní
37. farm	oko
38. stone	òkò
39. respect	òwò
40. two hundred	igba

Similarly, the undergraduate students are not the only ones that are guilty of non-recognition of the importance of diacritics in the Yorùbá language. Many Yorùbá language writers for ceremonies such as funerals, birthday thanksgiving and advertisements to mention a few are also guilty of not recognizing the importance of diacritics in their publications. For example, an extract that is taken from a birthday thanksgiving programme is reproduced below.

PSALM 23

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. The LORD is my Sheperd, I shall not want ;  | OLUWA li Oluso-aguntan mi; emi ki yio se alaini                       |
| 2. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters;          | O mu mi dubule ninu papa-oko tutu; o mu mi lo si iha omi didake roro. |
| 3. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake... | o tu okan mi lara; o mu mi lo nipa ona ododo nitori oruko re...       |

Whereas the verses should have been rendered as shown below:

PSALM 23

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 4. The LORD is my Sheperd, I shall not want ;  | OLÚWA li Olùşọ-àgùntàn mi; èmi kì yíò şe aláíní                           |
| 5. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters;          | Ó mú mi dùbùlẹ̀ nínú pápá-oko tútù; ó mú mi lọ sí ihà omi dídákẹ̀ rọ̀rọ̀. |
| 6. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake... | Ó tu ọkàn mi lára; ó mú mi lọ nípa ọ̀nà òdodo nítorí orúkọ rẹ̀...         |

Some other categories of Yorùbá language writers who do not use diacritics include the Yorùbá newscasters, the Theatre/drama group members as well as some teachers/lecturers who use data written in Yorùbá in their publications or writings. For example, the Yorùbá newscasters would write 'Akojopo iroyin ojokanri' instead of 'Àkójòpò ìròyìn ọ̀jọ̀kanrì' (The full news at noon). The drama group members too would write "Awon osere" instead of "Àwọn ọ̀şẹ̀rẹ̀" (The drama group members). A certain University philosophy lecturer also who was teaching an aspect of African philosophy wrote on the chalk-board "Aje ke lana, omo ku loni" when he should write "Àjẹ̀ ké lánáá, ọ̀mọ̀ kú lóní" (The witch cried yesterday, the child died today). However, in an interview with some of our respondents on why their knowledge of Yorùbá is very poor, some said "Distinction làwa ní ní WAEC" (We have distinction in WAEC (Yorùbá)) while some said "Credit làwa ní ní Yorùbá NECO" (We have credit in Yorùbá NECO). Some also said "Bá a ti şe ñ kọ̀ niyẹn tá a sì ñ gba mark tó dáá" (That is how we have been writing and we have been getting good marks). But, the questions that arise therefore are: (1) why did the students pass NECO or WAEC Yorùbá either at the distinction or credit level when they could not write most Yorùbá words as the language demands? (2) why is it that some other categories of Yorùbá writers did not use diacritics or the correct orthography in their publications or writings? To answer these questions, it is important to examine the NECO and WAEC marking schemes/guides for the Yorùbá language.

#### 4.1. THE NECO AND WAEC MARKING SCHEMES/GUIDES

In this sub-section, we present the NECO and WAEC marking schemes. The marking schemes are used for assessing the competence of the Senior Secondary School Students. It is assumed that a candidate sitting for this examination must have spent at least three years at the Senior Secondary School. The NECO and WAEC marking schemes are as follows:

##### NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL (NECO)

1. Èrò i.e. subject matter	:	15
2. Ètò i.e. arrangement / paragraphing	:	5
3. Ìlò Èdè i.e. language use: idioms, proverbs etc.	:	5
4. Àkọ̀tọ́ i.e. orthography – spelling of vowels, spelling of consonants, use of tones, and punctuation	:	<u>5</u>
		<u>30</u>

##### THE WEST AFRICAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL (WAEC)

1. Èrò i.e. Subject Matter	=	12
2. Ètò i.e. Arrangement/paragraphing	=	3
3. Ìlò Èdè i.e. language use: idioms, proverbs etc.	=	7
4. Àkọ̀tọ́ i.e. orthography – spelling of vowels, spelling of consonants, use of tones, and punctuation	=	<u>3</u>
		<u>25</u>

From the allocation of marks to the four components of letter writing, it is evident that if a candidate should score zero in orthography, the major pillar of the language, the candidate can still pass the Yorùbá language very well. In our opinion, this system of zero in Yorùbá orthography which does not translate to a poor result in the Yorùbá language mastery is not the best for the language. It is another potential danger for the future survival of the language in a British colony where the language has restricted educational and social functions. We can also say that the Yorùbá marking scheme planners must have been wrongly influenced by their knowledge of English. For example, the English marking scheme indicates that candidates sitting for the WAEC examination in English must be assessed using the criteria listed below:

1. Adequacy of treatment of subject matter.
2. Originality of approach
3. Appropriateness of language
4. Clarity of exposition or narration or argument etc
5. Balance
6. Mechanical accuracy.

There is no doubt that a careful examination of these six criteria shows that they emphasize the importance of concord or agreement as an indispensable component of English language. We want to observe that a transfer of the English marking scheme to Yorùbá without reference to the peculiarities of the language is another evidence of suppressive interference from English to Yorùbá and this interference is negative and not in the best interest of the Yorùbá language (for more information on suppressive interference from English to Yorùbá especially in the areas of phonology, morphology and syntax, see Èkúndayò, 1987:8-13, Ìkòtún, 1999:107-109, 2013:201-205). We submit that any form of negative interference between a foreign language and a mother tongue, if not prevented, may make the mother tongue to be endangered and later go into extinction. In fact, this phenomenon of extinction is already reported in some

Nigerian dailies that several languages are going into extinction (see *The Sunday Tribune* of March 6, 2016). It had earlier been reported in *The Nation* of November 13, 2013 that:

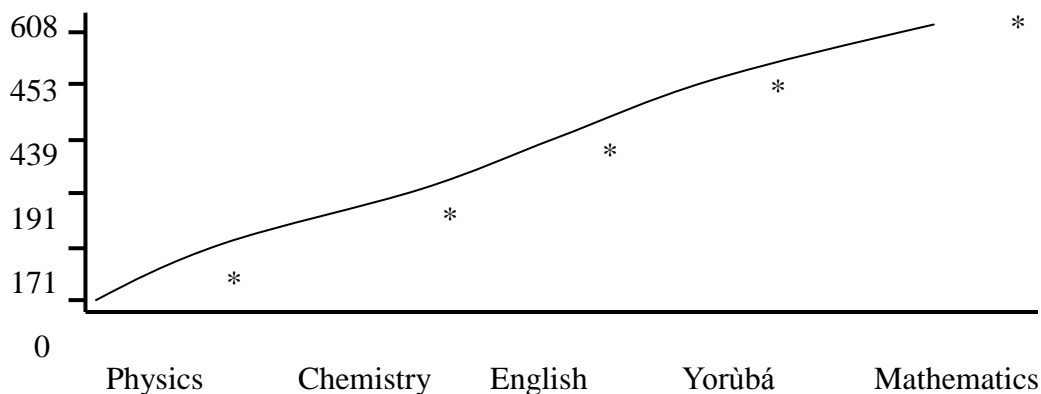
According to latest figures from the database of UNESCO there are currently 6,912 languages in the world. Out of this figures Africa has 2,092 languages, representing 30.3 percent of the world’s languages, while Asia which is the world’s most populous continent has 2,269 languages or 32.8 percent of the world’s languages. According to languages experts at least 3,000 of the world’s languages represent about fifty percent are about to be lost, unless serious efforts are made to stem the tide. As is often the case, Africa has a high share of these endangered mother tongues.

Tracing the reasons for the endangerment of the Yorùbá language to the Yorùbá elites the daily continues:

While the attitude of many Yorùbá adults towards their culture is reprehensible, what is happening to the younger ones as far as mother tongue is concerned is both alarming and disquieting, for many children born and raised in the cities by elite Yorùbá parents cannot even utter one word in their mother tongue. Nowadays especially in homes of educated elites, it is increasingly becoming the norm for children to have their first tongue in English, the language of Nigeria’s former colonizers.

It has been shown in this paper that it is also the Yorùbá educated elites who design Yorùbá marking schemes or guides that sabotage the efforts of State and Federal Governments on Yorùbá language from being threatened by extinction. For example, a research carried out in some of the Yorùbá-speaking states in recent times by the present researchers on the number of teachers for English, Yorùbá, Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics as well as the number of teachers for the Yorùbá language in some Federal Government Colleges domiciled in the Yorùbá-speaking states showed that the State and Federal Governments have spent and are still spending so much on the teaching of the Yorùbá language in the Yorùbá-speaking states or even in Nigeria. Information in some Graphs and a Table below shows the number of university and NCE<sup>2</sup> graduates teaching the subjects mentioned above in Yorùbá-speaking states.

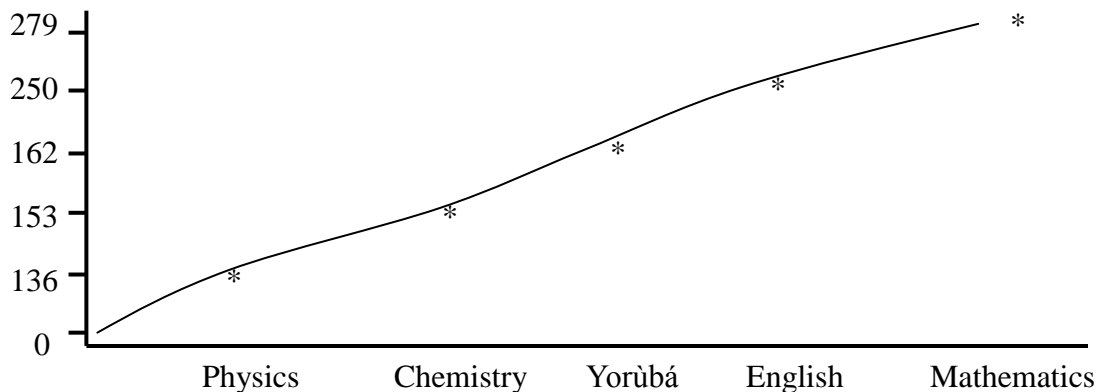
**GRAPH 1: NUMBER OF UNIVERSITY AND NCE GRADUATE TEACHERS IN ÈKÌTÌ STATE TEACHING SERVICE COMMISSION**



<sup>2</sup> National Certificate of Education (NCE) (The certificate is awarded by Colleges of Education)

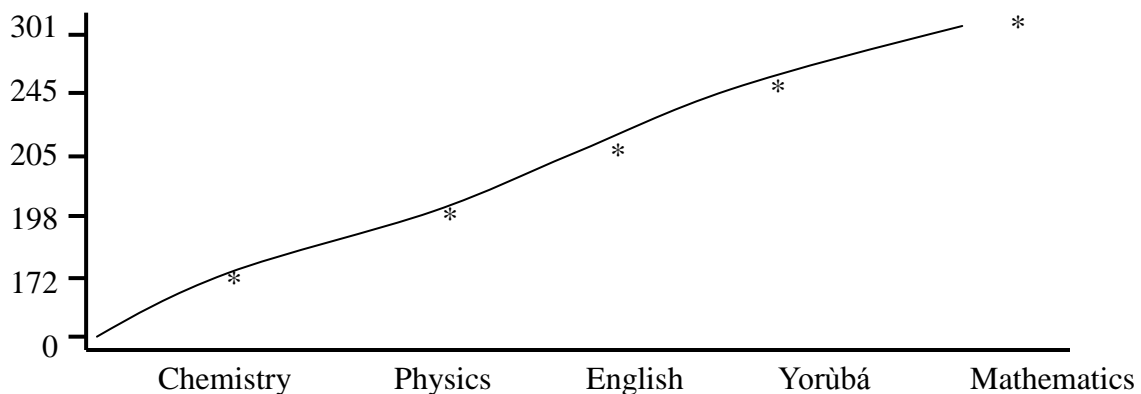
Information from Graph 1 above shows that the number of Yorùbá teachers is more than the number of English, Physics and Chemistry teachers. This shows that the teaching of the Yorùbá language has not been neglected at least in Èkìtì State.

**GRAPH 2: NUMBER OF UNIVERSITY AND NCE GRADUATE TEACHERS IN ÒṢUN<sup>3</sup> STATE TEACHING SERVICE COMMISSION**



Graph 2 above shows that the number of Yorùbá teachers is 162 whereas the number that teaches physics is 136 while the number that teaches chemistry is 153. This shows that the teaching of the Yorùbá language is also emphasized in Òṣun State.

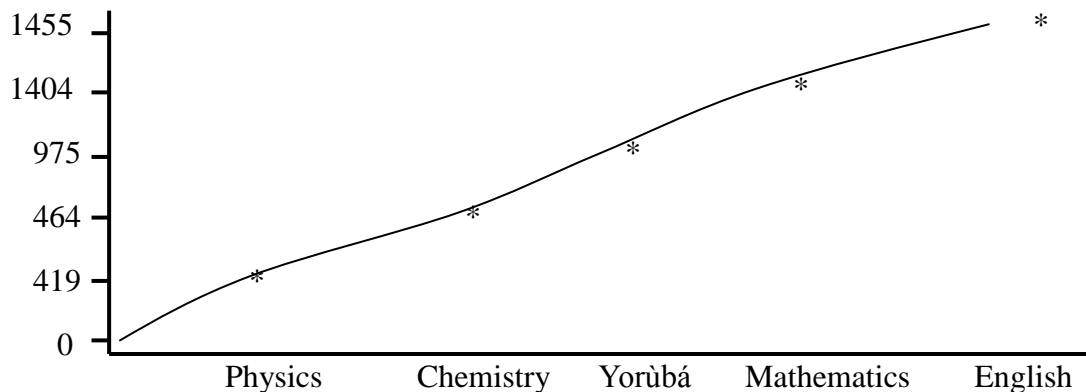
**GRAPH 3: NUMBER OF UNIVERSITY AND NCE GRADUATE TEACHERS IN ÒNÐÓ STATE TEACHING SERVICE COMMISSION**



Information in Graph 3 also shows that the number of Yorùbá teachers is more than the number of English, Physics and Chemistry teachers. Again, this shows that the teaching of the Yorùbá language is highly encouraged in Ònḍó State.

<sup>3</sup> The Òṣun State Teaching Service Commission is divided into three namely Central, East and West. The figure in the Graph is for East and West.



**GRAPH 4: NUMBER OF UNIVERSITY AND NCE GRADUATE TEACHERS IN OYO STATE TEACHING SERVICE COMMISSION**

Graph 4 shows that the number of Yorùbá teachers is more than the number of Physics and Chemistry teachers and the number has not done badly when compared with English and mathematics teachers. We can also say that the teaching of the Yorùbá language has not been neglected as well in Oyo State.

**Table 1: NUMBER OF TEACHERS TEACHING YORÙBÁ LANGUAGE IN SOME FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COLLEGES IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA**

We present in the Table below the number of teachers of the Yorùbá language in the service of the Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja for some Federal Secondary Schools that are domiciled in Southwestern Nigeria.

S/N	Name of Federal Government College	BA/B.Ed Holders	NCE Holders	Total
1	FGC <sup>4</sup> , Ìkirun	8		8
2	FGGC <sup>5</sup> , Ìpetumodù	5		5
3	FSTC <sup>6</sup> , Ilésà	3	2	5
4	FGC, Ìdòàní	2	1	3
5	FGC, Ìkòlè	3	1	4
6	FGC, Lagos	2		2
7	FGGC, Àkúrẹ̀	7		7
8	FSTC, Yaba	8		8
9	FGGC, Èfòn	5		5
10	King's College	3		3

<sup>4</sup>Federal Government College and it is for male and female students.

<sup>5</sup>Federal Government Girls College and it is for female students only.

<sup>6</sup>Federal Science and Technical College and it is for male and female students.

Another area of interest to our present research is a response by the Lagos State House of Assembly to the publicity given to the UNESCO release that some world languages may die if their non-use is not addressed. The response of the Lagos State House of Assembly is reproduced below:

‘Lagos State House of Assembly will hold a summit to promote the speaking of Yorùbá in Southwest on June 2. Stakeholders in language will participate in a series of lectures at the Academy Hall and Inn on Lateef Jakande Road in Agidingbi, Ikeja. Addressing reporters yesterday, Chairman of the House Committee on Education, Olanrewaju Ogunyemi lamented that steps taken on the issue by the lawmakers through motions and resolutions were abortive. He said school children should learn more about their language, adding: “The National Policy on Education in Nigeria emphasizes the importance of teaching local languages in schools. Most Nigerian parents discourage their children from speaking local languages, but they speak their indigenous languages in Germany, Russia, France and other countries of the world.” Ogunyemi went on: “We observed that our local language is not being taught in our schools. So we are organizing a stakeholders’ meeting on the importance of Yorùbá Language in the Southwest states. After the summit, we still go round to ensure that there is compliance in all the schools in the state.”’(see *The Nation* of Tuesday, May 17, 2016 p.4 )

Our findings which show that Yorùbá-speaking states and the Federal Government of Nigeria encourage the teaching of the Yorùbá language are at variance with the claim that our local language is not being taught in our schools. In fact, one of the present researchers taught the Yorùbá language for nineteen (19) years in three different federal government colleges. Notwithstanding, we believe that the states and the federal government of Nigeria can still do more by assigning some educational and social functions to our local languages so as to ensure the survival of the languages. However, despite the huge amount of money being spent on salaries of the Yorùbá language teachers, the NECO and WAEC marking guides that have been discussed earlier in this paper are sabotaging the efforts of Yorùbá-speaking states and the federal government of Nigeria. We are therefore of the opinion that the information in our proposal

below should be adopted so as to help the language to continue to exist despite the danger posed to it by the English language.

**RECOMMENDED MARKING GUIDES FOR YORÙBÁ NECO**

1. Èrò i.e. subject matter	=	3
2. Ètò i.e. arrangement / paragraphing	=	3
3. Ìlò Èdè i.e. language use: idioms, proverbs etc.	=	3
4. Àkọ̀tọ́ i.e. orthography – spelling of vowels, spelling of consonants, use of tones or diacritic, and punctuation	=	<u>21</u>
		<u>30</u>

**RECOMMENDED MARKING GUIDES FOR YORÙBÁ WAEC**

1. Èrò i.e. subject matter	=	2
2. Ètò i.e. arrangement / paragraphing	=	2
3. Ìlò Èdè i.e. language use: idioms, proverbs etc.	=	2
4. Àkọ̀tọ́ i.e. orthography – spelling of vowels, spelling of consonants, use of tones or diacritic, and punctuation	=	<u>19</u>
		<u>25</u>

Our reasons for the information in our proposal or recommendation above are many. For example, the three linguistic categories of letter writing which include subject matter, arrangement, proverbs and idioms can be acquired or learnt either formally or informally or better still outside the classroom domains especially when the elders speak in social interactions. Proverbs and idioms can also be learnt through listening to Yorùbá Radio and Television programmes and reading of books especially literary texts. They can be learnt as well through listening to those who take part in drama programmes when plays are staged in the Yorùbá language. But, what is true of subject matter, arrangement, proverbs and idioms is not true of Yorùbá orthography. In most, if not in all cases, the Yorùbá orthography is only learnt in the classroom domain and majority of those who pass out at the Senior Secondary School level do not have anything to do with Yorùbá as a written language thereafter. In fact, Oyètádé (2001:24-25) observes:

Many students coming to the university to study Nigerian languages are doing so not out of genuine interest. Some only use them to secure admission with an intention to change over to courses of their interest. I have been approached by no fewer than five students each year wanting to change over to other courses, as a result of their negative attitude to Yorùbá or Igbo. In some cases, students still exhibit profound ignorance about the usefulness of a course like Yorùbá or Igbo. When all efforts to change to other “reputable” or “lucrative” courses fail, some settle for a combined honours degree in Igbo or Yorùbá with Linguistics. This derives from the stigma that is attached to the indigenous languages.

So, in view of Oyètádé’s finding also, we suggest that the teaching and examination of the Yorùbá orthography should be emphasized at the senior secondary school level because of the language’s restricted educational and social functions after the senior secondary school level. We also suggest that the marking scheme planners of other African languages can benefit from our recommendation. They should identify the peculiarities of the African languages and emphasize

them so as to help the languages to continue to exist as written languages despite the challenges posed by the languages of the colonial authorities.

## 5. Conclusion

We have examined the writing of the Yorùbá language by some University students as well as some other categories of Yorùbá language writers who claimed to have passed either the NECO or WAEC Yorùbá examination at the distinction or credit level. We have shown that these different categories of the Yorùbá language writers do not recognize the importance of diacritics in their Yorùbá orthography. We have also shown that the non-recognition of the importance of diacritics in the writing of the groups studied is traceable to the Yorùbá NECO and WAEC marking schemes and not to the State and Federal Governments that have spent and are still spending so much on the teaching of the Yorùbá language. We have argued that the two marking schemes/guides do not recognize the important and inevitable role of the Yorùbá orthography to the Yorùbá language but that the two marking schemes/guides are patterned along the English marking scheme which is another suppressive interference from English to Yorùbá and which is another factor for the endangerment of the Yorùbá language. We have argued further that the marking scheme planners of African languages should identify the peculiarities of the African languages and emphasize them in the marking schemes so as to help the languages to continue to exist as written languages despite the challenges posed by the languages of the colonial authorities.

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