
Lingua – Cultural Identity, Diversity between the Jews and Yoruba People of Nigeria: A Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined Lingua- Cultural Identity, Diversity between the Jews and Yoruba people of Nigeria. The work critically discussed the liberals' opinion on language, culture, identity and diversity, overview description of the Jewish and Yoruba lingua-cultural identity, areas of diversity as well the factors aiding the causes of diversity was also examined. Critical and comparative analysis of data collections was used to carry out the information. The findings revealed that most of the Yoruba people of Nigeria have relegated their language, culture, custom, and heritage by adopting western language, culture and custom. This flaw was as a result of our government policy on language, lacks of parental guide and death of the native speakers. This paper thereby concluded and recommended that language is the heart beat of any ethnic society; hence, government should establish a law that will make Yoruba language a core subject in our primary and secondary schools just like English language and GNS (General Nigeria Studies) for both undergraduates and postgraduate students in our Universities. The role of parents cannot be underrated; they too must encourage their children to speak their mother language.

Key Words: *Lingua-Cultural, Identity, Diversity, Jews and Yoruba.*

INTRODUCTION

The role played by language in aggregation and social identification is undisputable. It contributes to define the identity of a human community, no matter how small the community that recognizes in the linguistic cohesion, this is the basis for a distinct set of shared historical, traditional and cultural values.¹ Language is the most essential and certainly the most immediate perceptible in lingua-ethical mixed social contexts, the acceptance of basic democratic values, including the fundamental truth or law of non-discrimination and pluralism, defined on the basis of language and ethnic identity which is frequently accompanied by the provision provided by authorities of positive measures aimed at safeguarding and promoting the linguistic and cultural identity of not only individuals, but also minority groups² The concept of cultural identity which is closely connected to the concept of diversity and cultural pluralism, in practical and operative situations has increasingly gained recognition within the vast category of humanity. This has occurred partly in response to globalization which aided by the rapid development of the modern communication technologies which logically leads to the emergency of a dominant culture (Anglophone – western culture) and consequent phenomena of homogenization, and this has jeopardized the maintenance of Yoruba language and culture. However, critical and comparative

analysis will be made to Lingua-Cultural identity, diversity among the Jews and Yoruba people of Nigeria, as an antidote for proper maintenance of Yoruba lingua- franca and cultural identity.

LANGUAGE

Language forms a large part of the culture of people as it is through language that people express their folk tales, myths, preserves culture and history. Pinker views language as a cover or more potent characteristic of human behaviour. It consists of a comprehensive and overlapping set of sub-languages with ethically and geographically defined territory known as dialects.³

Among humans, language arises from a need to communicate; Holliday and Jonathan define language as a medium with which human beings communicates with one another.⁴ Thus, language functions in certain situations and environments; as a consequence, language is not experienced in isolation but in relation to actions and events from which the things said or written derive their meanings. Language use at different speech events largely depends on the 'context of situation' based on the linguistic features of field, tenor and mode. These are highly general concepts for describing how the context of situation determines the kinds of meaning expressed.⁵ Etymologically, language is such unique human trait that it cannot be compared to anything found among non-humans and that it must transition from pre-hominids to early man.⁶ Chomsky sees language as an innate faculty that is urgently genetically encoded and a prominent proponent of a discontinuity.⁷ To Functionalist, language is a system that is largely cultural, learned through social interaction.⁸ Pinker further opines that language as being mostly innate, that is, the precedents to be animal cognition.⁹ Tomasello sees language as a socially learned tool of communication, that developed from animal communication in primates either by gestural or vocal communication to assist in cooperation.¹⁰ According to in Fitch, Rousseau, Herder, Humboldt, Darwin and Steven Mithen (an archaeologist) see language as something developed from music,¹¹ while Anderson states that age of spoken language is estimated at 60,000 to 100,000 years,¹² where humans have the ability to learn any language therefore, language is dependent on communities of speakers and due to the way in which language is transmitted between generations, language perpetually changes, diversifying into new languages.¹³ Language emerged in the early prehistory of man, before the existence of nay written records, its early development has left no historic traces and it is believed that no comparable processes can be observed today.

Theories that stress continuity look at animals to see if primates display any traits that can be seen as an analogous to what pre-human language must have been like and early human fossils can be inspected for traces of physical adaptation to language use or pre- linguistic forms of symbolic behaviour.¹⁴ Language may refer to cognitive ability to learn and use systems of complex communication, or to describe the set of rules that makes up these systems, all languages rely on the process of semiosis to relate signs to particular meanings. Language contain a phonological system that governs how symbols are used to form sequence known as words or morphemes and syntactic system that governs how words and morphemes are combined to form phrases and utterances. Language is thought to have originated when early hominins started gradually changing their primate communication systems, acquiring the ability to form a theory of other minds and a shared intentionality.¹⁵ This development is sometimes thought to have coincided with an increase in brain volume, and many linguists opine that

structures of languages as having evolved to serve specific communicative and social functions. However, human acquire language through fluently by approximately three years old. Language is of use deeply in human culture such as sign, personal identity, social stratifications, social grooming and entertainment. Early history considered language to have started in India with Panini, the 5th century BC grammarian who formulated 3,959 rules of Sanskrit Morphology. Sumerian scribes already studies the differences between Sumerian and Akkadian grammar around 1900BC. Subsequent grammatical traditions developed in all of the ancient cultures that adopted writing.¹⁶ In 17th century A.D, the French grammarians developed the idea that grammars of all languages were a reflection of the universal basics of thought. By 18th century,¹⁷ the scientific study of language was broadened from indo-European to language in general¹⁷ while the idea of language as a static system of interconnected units was maintained.¹⁸

CULTURE

The modern term "culture" is based on a term used by the Ancient Roman Orator Cicero in his *Tusculanae Disputations* where he wrote of a cultivation of the Soul or "Cultural animi" using an agricultural metaphor for the development of a philosophical Soul, understood teleological as the highest possible ideal for human development.¹⁹ Veikley took over this metaphor in a modern context but no longer assuming that philosophy was man's natural perfection, but to how human beings overcome their original barbarism.²⁰ Edward opines that a culture meant place tilled and this goes back to Latin *Colere*- to inhabit, care for, till, worship and cultus.²¹ To be cultural is to inhabit a place sufficiently intensive to cultivate it, responsible for it, respond to it and to attend to it, this mean, culture is originally meant the cultivation of soul and mind, to Tylor,²² it is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Thus, culture is defined as a social domain that emphasizes the practices, discourses and material expressions, which over time; express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of a life held in common.²³ Terror Management theory as stated by Tom et al,²⁴ posit that culture is a series of activities and worldviews that provide humans with the basis for perceiving themselves as "person (s) of worth within the world of meaning" revising themselves about the mere physical aspects of existence in order to deny the animal insignificance and death that Homo Sapiens became aware of when they acquired a larger brain. In short, culture is the social behaviour and norms found in human societies. Universally, cultures are found in all human societies, these include expressive forms like art, music, religion, ritual, dance and festivals.

IDENTITY

Identity is the qualities, beliefs, personality, looks and expressions that make a person (self-identity). Weinreich submits that:

"A person's identity is defined as the totality of one's self-construal, in which how one construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future"; this allows for definitions of aspects of identity, such as: "One's ethnic identity is defined as that part of the totality of one's self-

construal made up of those dimensions that express the continuity between one's construal of past ancestry and one's future aspirations in relation to ethnicity".²⁵

Erikson framework as stated by Weinreich and Saunderson²⁶ rest upon a distinction among the psychological sense of continuity, known as the ego-identity, the personal idiosyncrasies that separate one person from the next, known as the personal identity, and the collection of social roles that a person might play, known as either the social identity or the cultural identity. Erikson's work, aimed to investigate the process of identity formation across a lifespan. Progressive strength in the ego identity, for example, can be charted in terms of a series of stages in which identity is formed in response to increasingly sophisticated challenges. The process of forming a viable sense of identity for the culture is conceptualized as an adolescent task, and those who do not manage a resynthesis of childhood identifications are seen as being in a state of 'identity diffusion' whereas those who retain their initially given identities have 'foreclosed' identities. On some readings of Erikson, the development of a strong ego identity, along with the proper integration into a stable society and culture, lead to a stronger sense of identity in general. Accordingly, a deficiency in either of these factors may increase the chance of an identity crisis or confusion.²⁷

A person may display either relative weakness or relative strength in terms of both exploration and commitments. When assigned categories, four possible permutations result: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. Diffusion is when a person lacks both exploration in life and interest in committing even to those unchosen roles that he or she occupies. Foreclosure is when a person has not chosen extensively in the past, but seems willing to commit to some relevant values, goals, or roles in the future. Moratorium is when a person displays a kind of flightiness, ready to make choices but unable to commit to them.²⁸ Finally, achievement is when a person makes identity choices and commits to them, place some explanatory weight on the concept of role-behavior. Psychologists most commonly use the term "identity" to describe personal identity, or the idiosyncratic things that make a person unique. Sociologists, however, often use the term to describe social identity, or the collection of group memberships that define the individual. However, these uses are not proprietary, and each discipline may use either concept and each discipline may combine both concepts when considering a person's identity.

Weinreich and Saunderson Identity Structure Analysis (ISA), is

"a structural representation of the individual's existential experience, in which the relationships between self and other agents are organized in relatively stable structures over time ... with the emphasis on the socio-cultural milieu in which self relates to other agents and institutions".²⁹

Cohen and Bray³⁰ (social anthropologists), concentrated on how the idea of community belonging is differently constructed by individual members and how individuals within the group conceive ethnic boundaries. Boundaries can be inclusive or exclusive depending on how they are perceived by other people. An exclusive boundary arises, for example, when a person adopts a marker that imposes restrictions on the behaviour of others. An inclusive boundary is created, by contrast, by the use of a marker with which other people are ready and able to associate. At the same time, however, an inclusive boundary will also impose restrictions on the people it has included by limiting their inclusion within other boundaries. An example of this is the use of a

particular language by a newcomer in a room full of people speaking various languages. Some people may understand the language used by this person while others may not. Those who do not understand it might take the newcomer's use of this particular language merely as a neutral sign of identity. But they might also perceive it as imposing an exclusive boundary that is meant to mark them off from her. On the other hand, those who do understand the newcomer's language could take it as an inclusive boundary, through which the newcomer associates herself with them to the exclusion of the other people present.³¹

DIVERSITY

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means to understand that individual is unique and recognize individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio- economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive and nurturing environment.³² It is all about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embrace the rich dimensions of diversity contains within each individual. Thus, diversity is more than tolerating difference; it is a set of conscious practices that involve in understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, culture and the natural environment. Building alliances across differences so that one can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination, recognizing personal, cultural and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privilege.³³ In short, Diversity is dealing with how to relate to these above qualities and conditions that are different from which one belongs to. Categories of difference are not always fixed but to give individual right to self identification and recognize that no one culture is intrinsically superior to another.

OVERVIEW DESCRIPTION OF THE JEWISH LINGUA - CULTURAL IDENTITY

The history of the Jews is mainly that of the Fertile Crescent and east coast of the Mediterranean Sea, it begins among those people who occupied the area lying between the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates rivers.³⁴ Historically, the term Jews refers to the people of the tribe of Judah, the name derives from Judah, the fourth son of Jacob.³⁵ Originally, the Hebrew term *Yehudah* (יהודה) referred only to members of the tribe of Judah; later, after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the term Jews was applied for the tribe of Judah, Benjamin, Levi, as well as scattered settlements from other tribes. The land of Canaan which is considered by Jews to be the Promised Land was the place where Jewish identity was formed, although this identity was formed gradually reaching many of her current form in the exilic and post exilic periods.³⁶ By the Hellenistic period after 323 BCE, the Jews had become a self-conscious separated community based in Jerusalem. Hebrew language is regarded as the divine language and means of communication with Yahweh, although, during the Rabbinic Judaism, Aramic took precedence over the Hebrew, and the Jews in the Elephantine Diaspora preferred Greek than Hebrew. It was assumed that certain languages such as Latin, English, and Arabic etc were most effective at religious services.³⁷ Hebrew language continued as the vernacular of the rural population, which comprised the bulk of the Jewish people with the success of the Hasmonean revolt against Syrian-Greek domination and the subsequent regaining of Jewish independence under the Hasmonean dynasty (166-167 BCE). Hebrew letters experienced a renaissance, the

renaissance of Hebrew as a Modern language took its rise in the 18th century movement of enlightenment; its first object was westernization and acculturation of the Jews of the European ghetto. However, the Yiddish and Judaeo- German vernacular was disdained by the enlightenment leaders and employ Hebrew as a medium of instruction and propaganda.³⁸

The revival of Hebrew as a spoken language is connected with the Zionist Colonization of Palestine that began in the 19th century, when Eliezer Ben Yehuda, whose tireless advocacy of resuscitation of Hebrew as a vernacular and whose monumental assemblage of the resources of the language in a complete Dictionary of Ancient and modern Hebrew entitled him the father of modern Hebrew. The necessity for a common language to unify the diverse elements of the Jewish immigration helped Yehuda and his colleagues to persuade the leaders of the Palestinian community of the rightness of their cause, after a critical war of languages in 1913-1914 and the primacy of Hebrew in Jewish Palestine was firmly established. By the time British mandate was instituted Hebrew, the language had come along far enough to be recognized alongside Arabic and English as one of the official languages of the Government since 1922.³⁹ Hebrew language, as in several aspects of their culture, Jewish culture is the international culture of the Jews, since the formation of the Jewish nation in biblical term, Jewish culture in her etymological meaning, returns the linkage to the land of origin, the people study Jewish texts, practice of community charity and Jewish history.⁴⁰ Jewish culture refers to many aspects such as Religion and world view, literature, media and cinema or theater, art and architecture, cuisine and traditional dress, attitudes to gender, marriage, family, social customs and lifestyles, music and dance.⁴¹

YORUBA LINGUA-CULTURAL IDENTITY

The documented history of the Yoruba people begins with Oyo Empire, which became dominant in the early 17th century. Older traditions of the formerly dominant Ife Kingdom are sparse and unreliable because the peoples who lived in Yorubaland at least by the seventh century B.C. were not initially known as the Yoruba, although they shared a common ethnicity and language group. The historical Yoruba develop in a situation out of earlier (Mesolithic) Volta Nigeria populations, by the first millennium BCE. Oral history recorded under the Oyo Empire, derives Yoruba as an ethnic group from the population of the Older Kingdom of Ile-Ife (Yoruba Mythology).⁴² Geographically, the Yoruba have been found mainly on the West Africa Coasts, south of the desert, later with the slave trade movement, a section of the Yoruba were lost to the New World, particularly Brazil.⁴³ The Colonia partitioning of Africa for easy foreign rule by the grouping of many different tribes into a country, divided the Yoruba into many political countries. The Yoruba are now found largely in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, the Southern part of Benin, Southern part of Togo, South-eastern part of Ghana and South-eastern part of Ivory Coast. It could be said that the Yoruba are found in some West African countries like Nigeria, Republic of Benin, Liberia, Sierra Leone, where there were concentrations of the Yoruba slaves as well as in Cuba, West Indies and united state of America.⁴⁴

The concept of culture has a more complicated use of the idea of culture in contemporary anthropology concerns its signal making of difference among human populations on the basis of language, habits customs and modes of thoughts. Culture is concerned as making out the space of systematic reflection about the processes by which people through custom, language and history create themselves in a great collective historical rather than individual process, in which

the term stood for all that human being had created and produced.⁴⁵ Yoruba has some cultural features that are passed down the generations. The Yoruba people believe that cultural values should be preserved and cannot be replaced; they are incredibly protective of their culture. Some Yoruba people still give their kids traditional names instead of following a popular trend to give them English ones and speak their indigenous language (*Yooba*). The people are talented sculptors; they are also creative for their unique clothing patterns and designs as well known for their magnificent wedding. The traditional wedding of Yoruba people pattern that the groom has to seek the consent from the bride's parents for marriage, after the groom is to pay the bride price, follow by the wedding ceremony attended or witnessed by the both families and friends of the groom and bride, then, the bride would be sent to her new home and the groom's parent welcome her there.

AREAS OF DIVERSITY

Speaking one's indigenous language is important to pass oral traditions, knowledge, heritage and diversity through generations. Thus, language is the mega key to the heart of the people and if this key is averted, then, it means that the very essence of the people has been got lost. Obviously, most of the contemporary Yoruba youths have lost their value; that is their traditional language, music, custom, culture, cuisine etc for the adopted western culture. It is quite unfortunate and common to see some Yoruba inhabitants both old and young, academicians and people from other professions who cannot have a simple and fluent conversation in their mother tongue, let alone reciting Yoruba alphabet, numbering (*oonka yoruba*), vowel (*Ate Faweli*) and consonant (*Ate Konsonati*). Moreover, the Yoruba lingua-cultural future is seems far from rosy, although, Yoruba language recognized to be taught as one of the indigenous language in most of the government primary and secondary schools, College of Educations and universities aside some private institutions, yet the language is relegated as a vernacular and not to be spoken in almost all these schools. Unlike the Jews, their values such as language, custom, culture etc are been maintained and inculcated even to their children through imitation, conversation, stories and torah is also learn as their religious guide. To justify this, it means that this ethnic society will soon lose their cultural identity and language, and relegated to historical book in future if they fail to be conscious. However, some areas of diversity are:

i. Dressing

Yoruba people have a lot of distinguishing traditional clothes that separate them from everyone else and showcase their uniqueness, their clothes is make from processed cotton brought by the traditional weavers and the people believe that while wearing these type of clothes, it shows their social status and personality. In the peoples' culture, different occasions require wearing different outfits and these outfits are *Aso- Oke* (cloth of multipurpose color and patterns), *Aso - Alaari* (rich red), *Sanyan* (brown or light brown), *Etu* (dark blue), *Ofi* (white yarned cloth), *Adire* (indigo cloth with different designs) and *Aran* (velvet clothing with silky textures) just like the Jews wearing long beards, long black grabs, black hats and rope (curlis), while female wear shirts, head-scarf (*tichel*) that covers every part of their bodies except their palms and faces.⁴⁶ Contemporarily, things have changed, Yoruba inhabitations have exposed and adopted western crazy and half nudity kinds of dressing such as off – shoulder, micro – mini skirt, mini- skirt, crazy jeans, bomber, etc that reduce their moral rectitude.

ii. Cuisine (Food)

There so many delicious Yoruba meals that people love to consume such as *Iyan* (pounded yam), *Eba*, *Amala*, *Fufu*, *Isu*, *Gari*, and so many other indigenous food as pertain to each tribe and clan. They also contain a lot of health benefits. Yoruba cuisine is rich and absolutely delicious. Although, the Jews doesn't have very delicious meal as such like that of the Yorubas but many of the Yorubas love, admire and prefer to take imported meals (salad, sawama, corn beef, custard etc,) sealed and preserved with chemical that aids rapid spread of diseases in the society today.

iii. Name

Name is most significant to the Yorubas because it portrays the attributes and characteristic of the named. All the embodiments of the being or object named is reflected in the symbolic name given.⁴⁷ Names given to individuals by the Yoruba people reflect their religious, political and traditional ethno-tribal taboos or moral concepts e. g. *Babatunde*, *Yetunde*, *Ojo*, *Iyaduni* etc. however, every name has its own significance, and no person bears a meaningless or insignificant name. Names whether phrase or clause carries a profound and comprehensive meaning and always tends to relate to the prevailing circumstances at birth. Name in Hebrew is 'sem' (שֵׁם), the plura form is 'semot' (שְׂמוֹת). It also communicates sign, memorial, token, fame and renown. Among the Jews, the name is much more than merely the name the bearer is called because it enhances the whole characters (traits) of the person as it is revealed and known to the people.

iv. Dancing

Yoruba people are also famous for their traditional dances, the most popular type of it is *Bata*, *Apala* etc. it is known for its cheerful and dynamic style, another significant is the accompanying of the drum. Bata drummers play a huge role in this dance which is no less important than the actual dancers. This popular Yoruba dance is performed by both men and women, and accompanied by the traditional singers, but this has been substituted with so many foreign dancing that has gradually crumble and corrupt our society such as; Awilo dance, shakushaku dance, and many others.

v. Hair Styles

In the olding days, there were so many excellent hair styles (plating and barbing) by the Yoruba people e.g. *Suku*, *Ipako Elede*, *Adimole*, *Patewo*, *Kokoro alate*, *Kojusoko*, *Eleyele* etc, some of these styles are no more popular today and fashionable because of the foreign culture. Many of the Yoruba native (male and female), most especially the youths are very conversant with the western styles of haircuts and plating such as Ghana weaving, Havening king, Kokombilo, Koko wave, Bubmali, Chunky box braids, Red, black and long Bob, Braided mohawk, Galax, Cabelo afro, June 12 and many others. These styles make them look like masquerade or monster with multipurpose paints apply on their face, lips and fingers. Some will even bourn small part of their hair to any colour they like which is very far from the Jewish styles of haircut and to old Yorubas. However, there are many other areas of diversity that needs to be corrected.

FACTORS AIDING THE CAUSES OF LINGUA-CULTURAL IDENTITY, DIVERSITY AMONG YORUBA PEOPLE

Without language there won't be culture. Today, it is evident that Yoruba language and culture is in dire need of revival, as scholars of the language are fast diminishing. Unlike what obtained in time past, hardly one now have students voluntarily taking up Yoruba as a course of study in our universities because it sounds so ridiculous to them. Indirectly, the citizen of this society are still putting themselves under slavery (language slavery), many see people speaking their indigenous language or dialect uncivilized and village people. This shouldn't have been, if not as a result of government policy on language. The government of this country formulates a language policy that recognizes English language as their Lingua- Franca (official language) of the nation and this attract favourable consideration for the people to study and speak. Lacks of parental guidance; some of the Yoruba parents, most especially, elite ones discourage their children not to speak vernacular (indigenous language) at all; native speakers are persecuted. Practice of adopted and radical career-change also aids rapid lingua-cultural identity, diversity among the Yoruba people of Nigeria.

CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATIONS

It is to be noted in this paper that Yoruba lingua-cultural identity is gradually annihilating due to the unconscious or lackadaisical attitude of the People. Unlike the Republic of China, Taiwan, Mandarin Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei, Singapore, Philippines etc who make their language lingua-franca despite the western venture. As at today, China is the second largest economy in the world and one of largest trading partners of the United States, the nation thrives without allowing its indigenous language to play a second fiddle. Thus, these suggestions are proffers; recently, Lagos State Governor Akinwunmi Ambode, recorded when he signed seven vital bills into law.⁴⁸ The most noticeable of the bills is the Yoruba Language Preservation and Promotion of Law which represents a cognizant reflection of the position which Lagos State prides Yoruba language as the cultural vehicle for fluent communication. With the signing of the bill, the teaching of Yoruba language is now compulsory in both private and public schools in the state. The law also mandates all state-owned tertiary institutions in the state to integrate the use of the language as a course unit into their General Nigeria Studies (GNS).

In order to avoid the extinction of the language, hence, other Yoruba state Governors should enact the language as general course to be studied in their state Universities. The new law epitomizes the revival of Yoruba language and it certain that advocates of the language such as late Prof. Akinwunmi Ishola, and Adebayo Faleti would be grinning in their graves, and appreciate Governor Ambode, who has not allowed the language to die. Yoruba language serves as a tool for the promotion of the culture, custom and tradition that the language embodies. In many Yoruba homes, the means of communication with our children is English Language, and many parents even rebuke their children for speaking in vernacular (Yoruba language). Thus, Parents must encourage their children to study, speak and learn their mother language; this will aids rapid promotion to the peoples' values. This implies that whenever a language is preserved, the culture, custom and tradition that the language represents would equally be enhanced.

Therefore, as the younger ones are being taught the language, they will also be exposed to the diverse culture and tradition that the language epitomizes and this goes a long way in preserving societal moral values.

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