

The Scientific and Technical Committee Meeting of ACALAN holding in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 17-18 December 2013

Activities of the Yoruba Cross-Border Language Commission

by

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1. Introduction

At the workshop in Cotonou, Bénin Republic, where the Yoruba Cross-Border Language Commission was set up earlier this year, we members were required, as appears to be ACALAN's standard practice, to indicate and prioritise the activities we intended to carry out in the course of our three-year term of office. We were also required to set them out in a Plan of Action. The various activities we listed then are as follows:

- (1) Harmonizing and fine-tuning the orthography
- (2) Terminology work
- (3) Production of Grammars and Dictionaries
- (4) Production of L₂ Materials
- (5) Language Empowerment
- (6) Writing of Yoruba-medium Textbooks
- (7) Quality Control of Yoruba Film Subtitles
- (8) Capacity building (for civil servants, legislators, teachers, etc.)
- (9) Upgrading of the data base on Yoruba publications
- (10) Promotion of publishing in the language

The Plan of Action worked out in effect under duress at the workshop is as on the third page of the **Appendix** to this report.

The above list of priority activities and the associated plan of action presuppose ready availability of needed funds. But, as we all knew or suspected deep within us that such funds were not likely to be actually available (not even so far from ACALAN, which set up our Commission), we also knew that we would be able to undertake and accomplish whatever we could only on our own individual and/or group efforts. Regrettably, this has mostly been the trend since work started as far back as anyone can recall on the development of the Yoruba language.

2. Advocacy Work

We also realised, however, that, for this trend to change for the better, we would have to undertake both general and targeted advocacy of the language. As luck would have it, I had in a way been doing just that kind of thing before becoming chairman. Thus, I did it first at the continental level with a paper written in 2012 and titled 'Official Language Policies in Africa' (to appear in Olanike Oḷa Oriḗ and Karen W Sanders (Eds.). 2013. *Selected Proceedings of the 43rd Annual Conference on African Linguistics*. Somerville,

MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, pp. 68-76. Now available online at <http://www.lingref.com/cpp/acal/43/index.html> or www.lingref.com, document #2956), and next at the national level with another paper written also in 2012 and titled 'Why We Should Develop Nigerian Languages' (Ndimele, O M, Yuka, L C and J F Ilori (Eds.) 2013. *Issues in Contemporary African Linguistics: A Festschrift for Oladele Awobuluyi*. Port Harcourt: Linguistic Association of Nigeria, pp. 347 – 61.).

Apparently partially taking his cue from this latter paper, Prof. Akinwumi Işola, a renowned Yoruba writer and member of the Yoruba Language Commission, wrote and delivered at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, on 20 March 2013, a commissioned Convocation Lecture titled '*Kín ni A Fẹẹ Maa Fi Èdè Yorùbá Şe?*' / 'What Really Do We Want with the Yoruba Language?' The lecture was delivered entirely in Yoruba, but an English version of it was available for non-Yoruba members of his audience. It was the very first ever of its kind in any Nigerian university, and it amply demonstrated, among other things, that the heavens would not fall for using an indigenous language rather than English to discuss a serious academic and social issue in that type of formal setting. The two versions of the lecture were rather ingeniously published within a single booklet and made available for sale at the venue of the lecture.

Many more lectures like it are to be expected from now on. Indeed, thanks to Prof. L O Adewole, another member of the Commission who also happens to be the current dean of the Faculty of Arts, Obafeми Awolowo University, Ilé-Ife, Oşun State, I have been commissioned to deliver a Faculty Lecture in Yoruba in that Faculty, thereby completing appropriately at the community level the third and final member of my language advocacy papers. For the lecture's title, I chose the Commission's motto: '*Yorùbá kò gbodo kú*', which translates roughly as 'Yoruba must not Die Out' in English. The lecture has actually been ready for quite some time now, and has only been waiting for a date to be fixed for it sometime after the ongoing strike by lecturers in Nigerian universities has been called off, and staff and students have returned in full force to their respective campuses. It is written to accomplish several things simultaneously. The first of them is to educate the Yoruba community as a whole (the lecture will enjoy full media coverage) about how languages actually get developed – not through divine intervention but mostly through the conscious and active agency of their respective speakers and users. The second is to point out what existing state governments can each easily do under existing laws to promote and empower the language. And the third and last of them is to enlighten the different educated groups within the existing Yoruba community as to how they can each promote the language using their training and God-given talents. It will be published in soft copy on the Commission's website when ready and also in hard copy like Professor Işola's, and will be available subsequently to be sent beforehand to specific individuals and government officials considered to be in a position to significantly assist the aims and efforts of the Commission.

3. Website for the Commission

This somehow escaped being listed as a priority matter for the Commission, but it became very clear at the Cotonou workshop that it was actually a matter that the Commission had to work on very early in its life. Accordingly, at its very first regular

meeting the Commission gave Dr Tunde Adegboḷa, an ICT expert among its members, the duty of arranging urgently for the construction of its official website. Regrettably, however, that still has not been done, mostly because of Dr Adegboḷa's frequent commitments outside the country.

Members of the Yoruba Diaspora who have heard about the existence of the Commission and would like to assist it in every way they can have suggested that the website be made interactive, such that it permits the permanent recording of donations and donors. They would also like to see such donations properly utilised. By implication, they would like complete transparency in our management of the Commission's finances, and that is what partially informs the financial regulation referred to under its Funds and Fund-raising Committee (see the **Appendix** to this report). When up and running, the website in question will definitely further publicise the Commission's activities and need for financial assistance with them.

4. Harmonization and Fine-tuning of Yoruba Orthography

The last major reform of Yoruba orthography took place in 1971 and was officially approved for general use in 1974. And as that particular orthography somehow found its way into Bénin Republic across the Nigeria-Bénin border sometime after this latter date and has been in continuous use among Yoruba scholars and writers there since then, harmonizing it for Nigeria, Benin, and Togo became only a simple matter of printing it officially for use in those three countries. That is what CASAS and CBAAC in effect did with their *A Unified Standard Orthography for the Yorùbá Language Cluster (Nigeria, Republics of Benin and Togo)*, published in 2011. Other than updating it as necessary and also systematizing it much more than hitherto, that is what the Yoruba Cross-Border Language Commission will also do with its ongoing work on it, which is now circulating for comments in draft form. Publishing and selling copies of it to publishing houses, writers, teachers, and their students/pupils is expected to generate income for the Commission.

5. Terminology Work

There is ongoing work on this (for Yoruba linguistics, literature, culture, and pedagogy) by the Yoruba Studies Association of Nigeria (YSAN), of which all of us in the Commission are members. Work is also being done on it (for ICT, legislation, commerce and industry, and mass communication) by the Centre for Yoruba Language Engineering in Ibadan, headed by one of our colleagues in YSAN. Also there are existing proposed terms for Engineering Physics, Primary School Science and Technology, and legislative terms. Given the financial resources to do so, the Commission will in future harmonize all these and other terms from whatever source, and publish them in a single handy volume. Such a publication will also generate future income for the Commission.

6. Capacity Building

The Commission has, through one of its members in the person of Dr Durotoye Adeleke, approached the Oṣun State government with a proposal for improving or enhancing the competence of its civil servants in the use of the Yoruba language. Any lessons learned

from that exercise will later be used to refine and replicate it for other Yoruba speaking states in Nigeria. The same Dr Durotoye Adeleke currently also serves as consultant to a television programme on Galaxy Television called *Èdè mi, àṣà mi* 'My language and my culture', whose aim is to rekindle interest in the Yoruba language in school children all over Yoruba land.

It will also be helpful for the Commission to organise as soon as possible workshops to familiarize science teachers with the Yoruba science terms contained in Dr J K Fakinlede's new primary school Science and Technology book (see directly below), so as to enable them to use the language better as an unofficial supplementary medium of teaching those two subjects at that level.

7. Recent Yoruba-Medium Publications

A number of new literary works are said to have been published this year. But as their particulars are yet to be received as of this writing, all that can be safely reported here concerns the following two technical works:

Fakinlede, Kayode J 2013. *Ìwé-Ìlẹ̀wọ̀ Èkọ̀ Ìmọ̀-Ìjìnlẹ̀ àti Ìmọ̀-Èrọ̀ / English-Yoruba Science and Technology Handbook*. ISBN: 0-678902-4-1. 150 pages. The book, written in Yoruba and English, covers the following topics: Biology (Cells, Animals, Plants, the human body with its various systems), Health Science, Air, Water, Agriculture, Chemistry, Physics, Earth Sciences (Geology, Meteorology, Oceanography, and Astronomy), Soil Erosion, and Environmental Sciences. It also contains 34 pages of English-Yoruba glossary; and 35 pages of Yoruba-English glossary. The author's hope is to gradually wean Science teachers and their pupils from the English to the Yoruba medium. That is why he wrote it in those two languages rather than in Yoruba alone. He has published the book for now as an e-book, because, according to him, he cannot afford the rather high cost of publishing it in hard copy, having published a much bigger book (a dictionary of English-Yoruba scientific terms) several years earlier at his own expense.

Awobuluyi, Oladele 2013. *Èkọ̀ Gírámà Èdè Yorùbá* ('A Course in Yoruba Grammar'). Oşogbo: Atman Limited. ISBN: 978-978-935-725-3; xv + 313 pages. The book was published for use in tertiary institutions at the author's expense, because commercial publishers would not publish such books for now, as they are not likely to sell in such numbers as would guarantee them hefty profits every year.

Books such as these clearly suggest that the Commission needs to consider setting up a publishing outfit of its own as soon as it is able to do so, to publish deserving Yoruba-medium books that commercial publishers will not touch for now for purely economic reasons. Such an outfit, if properly managed, would be a steady source of income for it.

8. The Commission's Expectations of ACALAN

The Commission held its fifth and last meeting for the year on 14 November 2013. The four earlier meetings were held on 20 April 2013, 18 May 2013, 22 June 2013, and 12 September 2013. Members paid their individual ways to those meetings at Obafemi

Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, while our host, Prof. L O Adewole, paid out-of-pocket for the refreshments served there. Most of the meetings were concerned with issues of policy and logistics. Prominent among the logistic issues is that of how to fund attendance by members from Benin and Togo at meetings in Nigeria as well as of members from Nigeria at meetings in Benin or Togo. Work on the Commission's logo, letterhead, and website has been held up in part by problems of funds also, and at our last meeting on 14 November 2013 it became known to members, alas for the very first time, that the Commission cannot legally open and operate any bank account in Nigeria now until it has been officially registered as an NGO. And that kind of registration, we learned, involves legal fees as well as the cost of two newspaper advertisements of the Commission's name, trustees, and objectives.

All these sharply reminded members of the Commission at that meeting of the distinct impression given them at the workshop in Cotonou nearly a year ago that ACALAN would by now have already organised a capacity building workshop for it, with emphasis on how to attract grants and donations from external bodies. Members were also reminded of the impression they got that ACALAN would by now have given us some grant, at least for our initial operating expenses.

Failure by ACALAN thus far to meet these expectations left us all wondering whether we had not in fact all along been labouring under a serious misapprehension.

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