



Indigenous Language Endangerment as the Hearse of Democratic Culture among the Yoruba People of Nigeria

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Abstract

There is a proven intricate interconnectedness between language and culture. Most Yoruba political office holders demonstrate degrees of English language proficiency as evidence of English-medium Western education. It is thus logical to expect them to have become democratic in behavior. However, many that have held political posts in Nigeria have proved undemocratic. One then wonders how they successfully avoided being “infected” by the democratic values of Western cultures. One could logically conclude that a typical Yoruba politician is unable to learn democratic values from Western education because of the long history of the monarchical system of government. This paper, however, probed the existence of democratic values in Yoruba precolonial government. Data were obtained from 200 respondents through a mix of accidental and stratified sampling techniques. A four-item interview guide was administered to the respondents by the researcher. Among the findings is that the Yoruba language is replete with proverbs, aphorisms, and idioms capable of promoting democratic values. Comprehensive implementation of mother-tongue-based multilingual education up to the end of secondary school level is thus recommended for the preservation of the democratic values of their traditional cultures to facilitate adequate understanding of Western democratic literacy.

Keywords: cultural appropriateness, Indigenous-language-medium education, customized democracy, Yoruba democracy, Western democracy, linguistic heritage

Introduction

Democracy has been defined and described in various ways by numerous academics, philosophers, and politicians. It is a pertinent subject of innumerable social discourses. A common consensus, however, is that it is a system of government in which every citizen has a voice, and all people have equal rights to determine how governance is carried out (Salami, 2006; Sampurna, 2016).

Democracy is often seen as the best form of government (Norris, 2017; Omotoso, 2018). It is said that the worst democracy is much better than the best of any other system of government. This is evident in the United Nations, the African Union and sister organizations' widespread condemnation of any disruption of any democratic process occasioned by military coups in a country, as well as the various stringent sanctions imposed on any government that is undemocratic or antidemocratic (Bernatskyi, 2018; Biersteker et al., 2018; Palestini, 2020). Blessing and Sheriff (2019), however, pointed out that the United Nation's decisions by veto power can sometimes be undemocratic and unfavourable to developing countries.

Taking a cue from Norris's (2017) observation of Anglo-American millennials' decreasing enthusiasm about (Western) democracy, it will be wise for Nigerian educational institutions to inculcate tailor-made democracy in its people, drawing heavily from their traditional resources. Also, since the United States is also at risk of "democratic backsliding," "constitutional retrogression" and the less likely "authoritarian reversion" (Huq & Ginsburg, 2018, p. 1), Yoruba people would do well to reconsider a sheeplike adoption of unmodified Western democracy.

In a true democracy, the will of the majority overwhelms the minority. This is the core beauty of this system of government. It empowers the citizenry to vote out any nonperforming elected officer. Every person who holds political office, therefore, has only one honorable decision to make: perform to the satisfaction of the majority while simultaneously doing their best to win over the minority. Thus, the strongest democracies enjoy the greatest degrees of fiscal and infrastructural development, while those with ailing democracies or undemocratic governments, at best, lag behind.

Dryzek et al. (2019), however, caution that demagogues and media manipulators can polarize unsuspecting citizens in a democracy if adequate precautions are not put in place. The politically illiterate majority can be manipulated to make unsound decisions by crooked political elites in a democracy. Olatunji and Kolawole (2010) thus assert that political literacy for all is mandatory if democracy is to flourish in any community.

Interestingly, countries that are guilty of pseudodemocracy are worse off than those that are unashamedly nondemocratic. False democracy (pseudodemocracy) is mouthed by political brigands while their actions are undemocratic, and many times outright antidemocratic. For example, Vatican City, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Oman, North Korea and Eswatini practice absolute monarchy. China, Cuba, Vietnam, and Laos practice communism. There are varying degrees of human rights abuse, and sometimes appalling dehumanization of real or perceived nonconformist citizens in some of these countries. It is, however, pathetic that they enjoy greater indices of fiscal, economic, and technological development than most African countries, including Nigeria, that profess democracy but are actually pseudodemocratic.

Ovie Ejumudo (2011, p. 22) identifies pseudodemocracy as being the basic cause and reinforcement of "the prolonged and protracted environmental injustice that is yet plaguing the Niger Delta" region of Nigeria. Okuchukwu (2015, p. 13) asserts that prevalent ethnocentrism, colossal corruption, maladministration of public funds, electoral fraud and malpractice, blatant neglect for the rule of law, constitutionalism, and abuse of fundamental human rights by political office holders,

politicians and the police that still characterize Nigeria are “clear examples of pseudodemocracy.” The rule of law is an integral part of the foundation of democracy, but all three tiers of the Nigerian government have a penchant for disobeying court orders (Nwozor, 2021). Even President Muhammadu Buhari was observed to have flagrantly disobeyed court rulings at least 40 times from his assumption of office in 2015 to 2019 (Idhalama, Dime & Osawaru, 2021).

It could be noted that Nigerians in general and Yoruba people specifically have become progressively undemocratic over the years. The youths of Nigeria resorted to well-coordinated civil disobedience (END-SARS protest) that was poorly and viciously handled by law enforcement agents, thus resulting in civil unrest in 2020 (Gabriel, 2022). The antidemocratic activities manifest in incessant police brutality, and the reluctance of the executive and judicial arms of government to address the situation resulted in the END-SARS (FSARS was Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad that was dehumanizing and exploiting the youths) protest that shook the western and eastern parts of the country to their foundations. This happened because all steps taken by the citizenry to get the reported cases redressed through democratic steps failed woefully and there was no respite in sight. It is noteworthy that the protest was much more pronounced in the Yoruba-speaking part of Nigeria.

The current study examines the possibility of using indigenous elements from Yoruba people’s historical and linguistic heritage to promote true democracy in the individual as well as the collective psyche of the people of southwest Nigeria, with the aim of eradicating the pseudodemocracy that has made the people less democratic than they were in their precolonial monarchies.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Nativism

As far back as the 17th century, there have been serious debates on the theory of nativism (Rickless, 2007), which has been viewed from different perspectives, giving rise to such colorations as “racist nativism” (Huber, 2011, p. 379), “linguistic nativism” (Holloway, 2020, p. viii), “mad dog nativism” (Cowie, 1998, p. 227), “special nativism” in relation to second language learning (Eckman, 1996), and described as “hostility against foreign immigration” and against “various internal minority groups” (Payne, 2017).

Though nativism has often manifested as violence against foreign things or persons (Grohse, 2017; Ortmann, 2017), the elements of antielitism, intolerance and violence are not encouraged as parts of nativism in the context of the current discourse. Nativism is about situating modern positive concepts within a target population’s cultural roots and traditions, their peculiar realities and making sure that their yearnings for cultural self-respect and autonomy are not compromised (Kumar, 2012). This, to some extent, parallels what Betz (2019, p. 111) refers to as “symbolic nativism” with the primary focus on preservation of cultural identity. Therefore, it is positive nativism that shall be employed in addressing the topic of this current discourse.

Sociocultural Theory

Socrates recognized the significance of innate knowledge, which makes an ostensive student quite different from an ostensive teacher. Each party has innate knowledge, but their difference arises from the differences in experiences. The establishment of a subterranean dialogic relationship between the two parties is what results in meaningful learning (Keehn, 2017). It is noteworthy that this relationship cannot be established if the teacher is too Western to acknowledge and exploit the student’s innate knowledge resulting from the latter’s peculiar sociocultural experience.

Socrates's observations are quite relevant to the sociocultural theory propounded by Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1986). This theory postulates that truly functional education or socialization occurs only through meaningful social interaction. Learning in this context is progressive and must be culture-based. Vygotsky sees an overt, conscious behavior as an offshoot of a covert root (disposition) from the depths of the unconscious part of the individual. This unconscious part is a product of historical, cultural, and social origins that precede the individual's consciousness (dos Santos & Dalla Vecchia, 2018). Therefore, the content and forms must necessarily differ to varying extents from one society to another as a result of variable degrees of differences in cultural orientations. The implications of this theory for the current study include the need to situate the curriculum of Yoruba children's democracy education as close to Yoruba culture and language as possible to ensure that the contents feature consistently in their social interactions in and out of the classroom. This is how what Vygotsky termed the "inner speech" (White, 2018, p. iii) of the typical Yoruba learner of democracy can facilitate the actualization of any democratic principle taught.

Ojo (2020) identifies three ways in which cultural tools can be transmitted from one individual to another. The first is by initiative learning, which happens when one person tries to imitate another. The second occurs through instructed learning, involving remembering and utilizing the instruction of the teacher for self-adjustment. The third is through involvement in collaborative exercises. Each of these processes requires a great deal of interaction. In the social context of a Yoruba person who necessarily must learn and practice democratic principles in collaboration with people who either suffer from Limited English Deficiency Syndrome or are completely English-illiterate, the easiest way to avoid miseducation and information distortion is the use of the medium of communication common to all: the Yoruba language.

Democracy in Nigeria

Nigeria's first republic had its "democracy" truncated in January 1966 through a military coup. The second republic, which started in 1979, was toppled on 31 December 1983 with another military coup. The third democratic experiment, which commenced on 29 May 1999, the longest in the history of the country, is still far from being a success. Nearly every feature of electioneering and governance has been at best pseudodemocratic, laced with an unending series of outright autocratic acts. Political thuggery, assassinations for political reasons, abduction of political opponents and their family members, ballot box snatching, vote buying, alteration of election results, financial misappropriation with impunity, use of security apparatuses to harass voters and peaceful demonstrators, nepotism, religious fanaticism in assigning political appointees, and numerous other vices are the horrible norm in the country (Omotoso, 2018). Nigerians thus suffer abject poverty in the midst of unusually abundant natural and human resources.

A critical examination of Nigeria's current democratic structure reveals that, despite some obvious lapses, the legal framework for a successful democratic government is in place. However, the legal provisions for running Nigeria's democracy cannot suffice in the absence of the right mental attitude of those holding political office, as well as the electorate. The gross democratic deficit is largely a result of ethical and dispositional failure on the parts of both the governed and the governors. After all, attitude or disposition plays a more significant role than any other provision made towards the success of any enterprise (Uță & Mitu, 2017; Jacobs et al., 2018; Sawicki & Wegener, 2018). Unfortunately, most Nigerians are so politically illiterate and poverty-stricken that they readily sell their conscience and all resources to serve the selfish purposes of flagrant political gladiators (Olatunji & Kolawole, 2010; Ezenwa et al., 2021).

One significant impediment to the proper implementation of Western-type democracy in Nigeria can be deduced from Ilik et al.'s (2019) observation that the European Union (EU) is an organ used by European states to influence the cultures of their former colonies. Though the authors posit that the “second coming” of the European states being worked out through the EU is to be a platform for cooperation rather than a master–servant relationship, it can still be reasonably asserted that certain ideals being promoted by the EU cannot be devoid of a degree of imperialism and inappropriateness with respect to the peculiarities of developing member states from Africa (Manku, 2018). Therefore, the EU style of democracy may not always be appropriate for African countries. There may thus have to be a sort of hybrid democracy that appeals to the traditional cultural roots of African states.

Another major roadblock to true democracy in Nigeria is the gross political illiteracy of a majority of the governors and the governed. It should be noted that the conception of literacy has gone beyond basic literacy (the ability to read, write, and do arithmetic) to functional literacy (ability to apply one's knowledge to advance personal and societal wellbeing). This is why scholars now talk of literacies (Chaka, 2020; García & Kleifgen, 2020; Tan et al., 2020). No matter the kind of degree a person possesses, or the number of university degrees, the person is rightly described as politically illiterate without evidence of appropriate political decisions. Political literacy is the possession of adequate information about the political principles, actions, factors, situations, and circumstances in their communities and beyond, development of appropriate attitudes, and masterly deployment of corresponding actions according to personally as well as societally felt political needs and developments. Political literacy thus has cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Zulkifli, 2021). Those in government have failed to imbibe of such virtues and values as integrity, selflessness, equity, sportsmanship, team spirit, and so on. A majority of the electorate, too, lacks these competencies (Wilson, 2016), which are values that a formidable education system should inculcate in its beneficiaries.

It is noteworthy that the type of education to inculcate democratic values in people should be connected to their emotional and sociocultural roots. It should transcend the cognitive to cater to their development in the affective domain. Of the three types of education (formal, informal, nonformal), the informal is that which works best in the affective domain. The more of the content and methods of indigenous-language-mediated informal or traditional education that is blended with the formal, the better we can expect the results to be in terms of democracy education. The farther away the English-language-mediated formal education strays from the indigenous-language-based informal education system, the more terrible the failure to get democratic values rooted in the recipients.

It follows, then, that even the best efforts to instill democratic principles in people through imported education can achieve very little (Li & Dervin, 2018). To worsen the matter for Nigerians, the imported education system is haphazardly coordinated by halfhearted governments that pay lip service to the educational development of the citizenry, since the children of the people in government attend the best and most expensive of schools in foreign countries and private schools in the country (Aladejana, 2007; Adebayo, 2009; Maduewesi & Ihebereme, 2010; Nwokeoma, 2010). Just a few among the many authors that have used the expression “paying lip service to education” in describing the successive governments' handling of Nigerian education are Shehu (2018); Egbedeyi and Babalola (2019); Bolaji et al. (2019); Abari and Orunbon (2020); Abubakar et al. (2020); Omorobi et al. (2021); Umezulike (2021); Muhammed et al. (2022); Sijuola (2022) and Egbedeyi and Babalola (2023).

Also, the inappropriateness of using a nonindigenous language as the medium of school instruction has been emphasized by many scholars. The content of Nigerian education aimed at promoting a democratic culture is taught via English, which is not indigenous to them. Therefore, a

typical Yoruba child may not be expected to master democracy-related learning content in English as well as those for whom it is their mother tongue.

For democratic values to flourish in Yorubaland there must be elements of democratic values in the indigenous or informal education of the people. Only then can the democratic values be rooted in the core of the people's lives. Furthermore, teaching democratic principles that have produced good results in foreign lands to Nigerian students in their indigenous languages up to the end of secondary school holds tremendous prospects, because research has shown that learning content in any subject is best mastered by students at that level when presented in the students' indigenous languages (Obiegbo, 2016).

A pertinent question, then, is whether there is any democracy-promoting content in Nigerian languages and cultures generally and Yorubaland specifically. An attempt to answer this all-important question will require two things: a foray into the historical tradition of the people, and inquiry into their linguistic heritage. The former can be done by examining how the people's precolonial government systems were structured. The latter can be done by collecting a compendium of wise sayings in the form of proverbs, aphorisms, idioms, and so on, used by the people to see if they promote democratic values.

From the historical perspective, there has been a sort of widespread misconception of the system of government in Yorubaland (Kanu, 2015). The kingship system was not exclusively monarchical but had a structure of checks and balances similar to, and even more effective than, what obtains among the executive, legislative, and judicial arms of government in Nigeria's current democratic experiment (Salami, 2006). Kanu (2015) cites the sharing of power and authority of the old Oyo Empire among the *Alaafin* (the monarch), the *Òyómèsì* (a strong decision-making council composed of the heads of the seven nonroyal wards of Oyo city), the *Ogboni* (a spiritual cult), the *babalawo* (diviner), and lesser structures that also wield some level of designated authority. The awesome power and authority wielded by *Aare Ona Kakanfo* (the war generalissimo) and *Basorun* (the head of the *Òyómèsì*) actually rivaled that of the *Alaafin*. There are even records of monarchs in the precolonial Yoruba kingdoms that were commanded by the checks and balances agents to go and commit suicide when found guilty of acting as monsters. Nowadays, the news media are awash with records of acts of "legislative rascality" and executive abuse of power with impunity by elected officers and gross political illiteracy on the part of voters in Nigeria. Unfortunately, many such ignoble acts have not been redressed.

The Indigeneity of Democracy in Yoruba Culture from Ancient Times

The foregoing shows that though many scholars and political analysts have embraced the misrepresentation of the traditional Yoruba system of government as strictly and monstrosly monarchical or oligarchic (Arogbofa, 2007), the principles and values of democracy were much more practically upheld in precolonial Yoruba kingdoms than in modern governments. Thus, it is safe to conclude that democracy, contrary to popular but erroneous belief, was not introduced to Yorubaland by Westerners. The Yoruba had established systems of government with the democratic policy of widespread representation and consultation as far back as 200 to 100 BC (Omobowale, 2018). According to Ajala (2009), however, the people now referred to as "Yoruba" were, until the early 19th century, known by their various ethnonyms such as "Oyo" (Ibarapa, Ibadan, Ilorin and Okeogun), Igbomina, Ife, Ijesa, Ibolu, Yagba, O'kun, Ekiti, Ondo, Owo, Akoko, Ilaje, Ikale, Ijebu, Remo, Egba, Yewa, Egun, Egbado, and Awori. All the same, each had cherished systems of government that espoused democratic values. Oyeshile (2017) considers these democratic elements "much more

important than democracy itself’ because they were the societal ethical values that sustained traditional Yoruba society’s governance.

From the linguistic point of view, proverbs, aphorisms, idioms and other such sayings among Yoruba people will have to be examined to reveal or better understand the democratic values in their culture. The current popularity and rate of use of such expressions in the Yoruba nation will also have to be correlated with the rate of success in democratic governance in the land. If the sayings’ popularity is on the increase or decrease, does the democratic culture also move in the same direction?

The ethical concept of *omolúàbí*, meaning “the virtuous one” but loosely translated as “the ideal being” and vaguely interpreted into English as “gentleman” (Olanipekun, 2017, p. 219), was taught through proverbs and other witty sayings. Since ethics is an integral part of political theory (Olanipekun, 2017), it follows that any instrument used to effectively inculcate it cannot be divorced from their political literacy level. Familiar and culture-based words are immensely powerful raw materials for establishing a strong connection between a people’s sentiments and particular learning objectives. An intimate interaction between the affective system and the cognitive system is what results in lasting cultural intelligence (Fink & Yolles, 2018), which will form a good basis for dignifying participation in a democracy.

Cultural tools enhance autonomous learning behavior (Kaur, 2017). Exploiting material and linguistic cultural facilities to inculcate democratic values in students would thus be a highly profitable venture. Norris (2017) identifies cultural, constitutional, and behavioral factors as the determinants of the success or failure of democracy. Language is both a significant component of a people’s culture and probably the most significant means of cultural transmission, vertically and horizontally. Therefore, examining a people’s linguistic repertoire will show if they cherish democratic values in their culture and are transmitting such values across generations. If the promotion of democratic values is found in Yoruba people’s language, it means it is an integral part of their culture. It then follows that a culturally appropriate version of democracy that can be adapted to the peculiar needs of the Yoruba people can be fashioned.

Ojo (2020) has identified Yoruba folktales, an aspect of oral literature and the linguistic repertoire, as highly effective instruments for morality and sociocultural education that can foster democratic practices among the people. Moreover, according to Omobowale (2018), a typical Yoruba understands and interprets the social world through linguistic symbols. The acquisition of linguistic symbols, such as proverbs, idioms, dirges, and poems, among other things, begins informally at home.

Literature has established the reality of democratic practices in the monarchies that existed in the ethnonyms that constituted what is now known as Yorubaland as far back as 200 BCE (Ajala, 2009; Omobowale, 2018). It has also shown that the linguistic heritage of the people is replete with proverbs, idioms, dirges, poems, etc. that are strong enough to inculcate democratic values and virtues in a typical home. The widespread use of the same in the community could also fortify the values at the societal level, thus making efficient and effective democratic citizens of partisan politicians as well as of the voting populace. The remaining parts of this study will thus present the analysis of current trends as regards the people’s knowledge of the democracy-fostering linguistic symbols among the Yoruba people.

Methods and Materials

The descriptive survey method was employed. Stratified random sampling was used to predetermine that 100 people below the age of 40 and 100 above 40 years of age were to participate in the study. The stratification along the age factor was a result of preliminary investigations that revealed that

Yoruba people who are 40 years and below are those most disconnected from their cultural roots through school curriculum changes that have either relegated Yoruba language and some other school subjects that inculcated distinctive Yoruba cultural elements to the background or completely removed them. The preliminary study also showed that most Yorubas who are 50 years and older attended public primary and secondary schools where speaking Yoruba was not outlawed, unlike nowadays, when private schools that forbid the use of Yoruba are exceedingly popular. However, chance/accidental sampling was used to select the actual participants until the predetermined sample size for each age group was fulfilled.

A four-item interview guide titled “Democratic Value-Laden Sayings in Yoruba Language Investigation Guide” was constructed for data collection and was personally administered by the researcher. Both quantitative (frequency counts and percentages) and qualitative methods were employed to analyze the collected data, which were used to answer five research questions.

Findings and Discussion

Research Question 1: Do Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria have any historical heritage of democratic practices?

The answer to this particularly important question, as clearly shown from the literature reviewed about the ancient Oyo Empire, is emphatically affirmative. There were sacrosanct democratic principles and practices in the monarchical systems of government in ancient Yorubaland. Democracy is not a new introduction from Europe (Salami, 2006; Kanu, 2015; Oyeshile, 2017; Omobowale, 2018). The modest contributions of people from that region to the democratic process in Nigeria should thus not be a surprise.

One of the implications of this finding is that the failure of efforts to bring out the best of democracy in Yoruba people may be due to the imposition of a Western or European type of democracy, rather than fashioning a sort of hybrid from the people’s historical and cultural roots and selected elements of Western democracy found helpful and applicable. Rather than being a welcome improvement on the indigenous democratic values of the people, the wholesale imposition of Western-style democracy has created an imbalance in the Yoruba elites and common people alike. The same tenets of democracy that were strictly adhered to by the Yoruba of old are now found cumbersome to follow by an average modern-day Yoruba.

Research Question 2: Does Yoruba language have any sayings portraying elements of democratic values from their monarchical precolonial culture?

The answer to this question, as can be seen in the following table, is that the precolonial monarchical Yoruba culture was replete with linguistic materials rich in values and virtues that can facilitate democratic disposition. They are among the sayings supplied by the respondents during interactions with them. The translation of each into English has been done in such a way as to make it as close to the original rendition as possible to retain as much of the cultural flavor as possible.

Table 1. Democratic Value-Laden Linguistic Elements from Yoruba Language Supplied by Respondents

S/N	Yoruba Saying	Translation	Democratic Value
1	Àgbájo owó la fi n sòyà	All five fingers are needed to beat one's chest in a boast.	Team Spirit/Strength in Unity
2	Òṣùṣù owò ló le gbálè mó.	A broomstick cannot sweep clean; A bunch does.	
3	Àjèjé owó kan kò gbèrù dórí	Two (not one) hands can cooperate to successfully lift a heavy load to great heights (the head).	
4	Àìkòwòórín omo ejò ní sekú pa wón; Bóká bá síwájú, tí pamólè tèle e, tójòlá n wó ruru bò léyìn, ó ku baba eni tó le dúro domo ejò níronà.	Lone ranging endangers snakes' lives. If a python takes the lead, a serpent/viper follows, and a mighty python crawls majestically behind them, who dares accost them?	
5	Enikan kí jé "Àwa dé"; Òpò èyàn ní í jé jànmó-òn.	A single person does not make a congregation.	
6	Igi kan kò le dágboṣe	A (single) tree does not make a forest.	
7	Eni tó bá jalè léèkan, tó bá dárán borí léyìn ogún odún, aṣo olè ló dàbora.	A thief convicted twenty years ago cannot fault any suspicion that their newly acquired expensive clothes may have been acquired through theft. Once a thief, always a thief.	Honesty, Truthfulness, Dignity and Integrity
8	Òrò ò dùn lénu iyá olè	The mother (family members) of a thief cannot be exonerated from their child's ignoble acts.	
9	Omodé ò jobi; àgbà ò joyè	They that aim at prestigious positions must take care of even the youngest and seemingly insignificant sections of society.	Separation of Power, Interdependence and Specialisation
10	Owó omodé kò tó pepe; tàgbàlagbà kò wo kèrègbè.	Both the young and the old have their exclusive abilities. (A child's hand cannot reach the roof top while an elder's hand cannot enter a thin-necked gourd).	
11	Enikan ò ní gbín àlùbòsà kó hù èfó; ohun a bá gbín lóni ni yóo hù bó dola.	The law of cause and effect cannot be circumvented. Whatever a person sows they will certainly reap.	Karma, What Goes Around Comes Around, You Reap What You Sow
12	Bóo láyà, kóo ṣèkà; Bóo rántí ikú Gáà, kóo ṣòótó.	If bravery pushes you into wickedness, let your knowledge of Gáà (a one-time wicked head of Òyómèsi, who suffered ignoble removal and death) edge you into leading with kindness.	
13	Omodé gbón àgbà gbón la fi dá ilè Ifè.	The wisdom of both elders and the young expanded Ifè kingdom (the cradle of the	Wide consultation

		Yoruba race). (Wisdom is not exclusive to the elders.)	before decision making
14	Eni taa fi joye awodi, o ye ko le gbadiye.	Anyone imbued with authority must learn to exercise it gracefully.	Competent and Graceful Leadership
15	Akukuu joye san ju "enu mi o kaluu".	It's better not to be crowned than to be like a crowned toothless dog.	
16	Benu ba bu akara koja ohun to gba, yoo pofolo.	A mouth overstuffed with food definitely chokes.	Contentment against Greed
17	Olowo kan laarin otosi mefa, otosi di meje.	One rich person in the midst of six paupers is the seventh pauper.	
18	Tara eni lo n dunni ki je ka rogbon tan.	Anyone fixated on their personal problems cannot be wise.	Selflessness and Consideration for Others
19	Ka to domo eye lora, o ye ka fero ro ara eni.	Before hurting a bird, put yourself in the poor creature's shoes first.	
20	Ka too fada gegi nigbo, ka koko fi danra eni wo.	Before cutting a tree down to a bush, first imagine if you were the tree.	
21	"Awa yo" fira re gbodi.	He who says, "We are not hungry" without considering his fellows who may be hungry is a wicked person attracting hatred.	
22	Ibi ko ju ibi; Bi a se beru la bomo.	Both prince and pauper are equal in manner of conception and birth.	Equality and Equity before the Law as Preached by Common of Natural Circumstances of Birth
23	Omo to sole nu ti so apo iya ko	Whoever forsakes their home will eventually suffer terribly for the neglect.	Home is the best place to be. OR, There's no place like home.
24	A ki tori pe a n re Ede ka ba ede je	The wise do not destroy their homestead just because they are travelling to a more cosmopolitan place.	
25	Adie to n to si isaasun; oju ori re lo n baje.	A fowl that urinates in a soup pot is simply desecrating its final resting place.	

If these ethics are inculcated from childhood in a people's language, it is logical to expect that they would develop into sincere and dedicated democrats. For example, Team Spirit/the appreciation of strength in unity which numbers 1-6 are meant to impart could prevent the spirit of "I, me, mine and myself" that produces the "winner takes all" mentality in people that clinch political mandates. The principle of exclusion rather than inclusion robs political-office holders of much-needed cooperation from people outside their political affiliations. Even when the person in power tries to initiate an inclusive regime, the invited people with potential from other political blocs who have failed to internalize team spirit would rather stay aloof and wait for the incumbent to fail.

People either duly elected or who have stolen the people's mandate to occupy political offices in Nigeria have often been noted to distance themselves from the political constituencies they supposedly represent. Most of these who lived among the people from whom they got the mandate soon relocate to an extremely far distance outside the reach of the voters, to show up only when it is almost time for another election. Such politicians obviously lack a sense of the wisdom of working together with the people in their electoral constituencies. There are thus instances in which angry electorates mob their political representatives when the latter abscond for four years only to reappear when another election is imminent, with the aim of cajoling votes out of their former constituents, as usual.

Items 7 and 8 teach honesty, truthfulness, dignity, and integrity. They portray traditional Yoruba people's zero tolerance for stealing. Whoever was found guilty of stealing lost face forever (no. 7). Even their relatives that failed to train them in the path of honesty and did not expose the thief in time would not have a voice in the community (no. 8). This ideology of collective responsibility for one's relative's error is also obvious in the Yoruba saying, "E rójú olè, e ò mú un ni; omo yín ò sagbàfò, ó n káso wálé" transliterated "You know the thief, you simply refuse to expose them. Your child brings home many dresses without being a dry cleaner/lauderer." Relatives and neighbors of thieves also received their portion of the punishment in this cultural context. Unfortunately, in today's Nigeria generally and Yorubaland particularly, because such sayings are unknown, forgotten or ignored, politicians coming out of prison having been convicted of massive looting of public funds are given heroic welcomes by relatives and neighbors alike, thus unashamedly identifying with their thieving heroes and heroines. Such people are oblivious of the Yoruba saying, "Agbèpolájà ò jèbi bí eni tó bá a gbà á sílè," transliterated "He who steals a keg of palm oil from the rooftop is less guilty than he who helps him collect and put it on the ground."

Items 9 and 10 extol separation of power and specialization. Nigerians have had the misfortune to bear unpleasant consequences of unnecessary frictions between the executive and legislative arms of government since the return of the uncivil rule that commenced on 29 May 1999. The judicial arm of government has often been rendered ineffective by the executive, who has a default mode of disobeying court orders.

Items 11 and 12 inculcate awareness of the law of sowing and reaping that has been variously termed the law of divine retribution, the law of cause and effect, the law of Karma, and so on. When Yoruba people were able to properly relate to these and other similar sayings, they were convinced that whether an act took place out in the open or in secret, the actor could never circumvent the consequences. So, for the love of self and others, a typical Yoruba person would refrain from perpetrating evil presumptuously. However, nowadays, most Nigerians, politicians especially, commit unimaginably evil acts with impunity. After all, they are rich enough to buy undeserved favorable judgements and powerful enough to permanently silence any daring accuser with the bullets of expert assassins. The killers of the former Attorney General and Minister for Justice (late Chief Ajibola Ige) and late Funso Williams (an intimidatingly popular and highly promising gubernatorial candidate in Lagos State), among many others, are yet to be identified. And this reveals a lot of rot caused by total disregard for the law of sowing and reaping.

Item 13 advocates wide consultation before decision-making. It emphasizes the fact that even children have useful ideas. This virtue has been significantly replaced by conceit and self-serving tendencies. The recent #ENDSARS protest by Nigerians against the gruesome murders and unwarranted brutalization of Nigerian youths by men and officers of the now defunct Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) is a clear testimony to this. It is noteworthy that this protest came against the backdrop of the government's inability to listen to previous outcries of the youths against several

proven instances of gross dehumanization. Items 14 and 15 extol the qualities of competent and graceful leadership. They advocate declining to assume leadership positions or voluntarily relinquishing such positions in the eventuality of inability to manage the community's affairs gracefully. An unbiased comparison of performance against campaign promises of most political office holders would show that they are either oblivious of the virtue of dignity strongly recommended by items 14 and 15, or they simply don't care. Otherwise, they would have toed the line of dignity by resigning. They would rather seek to have a second term, or more where allowed.

Even though the incumbent president of the country, retired General Mohamadu Buhari, is not Yoruba and may therefore be oblivious of these applicable Yoruba sayings, the Yoruba people that campaigned and voted for his second term have themselves displayed gross illiteracy as regards these sayings. Otherwise, since it is undeniable that he was not able to "kill corruption" (Dauda, 2022, p.10; Assay, 2023, p.68), stop the Boko Haram insurgency and herders' terrorism, or make a dollar equal to one naira as he promised before being elected (Joab-Peterside, 2020; Aruofor & Ogbeide, 2022; Idam & Emeh, 2022), they should have known that allowing him to complete the first term was too much generosity, much less supporting a second term bid from him. It is safe to conclude that such Yoruba people, too, would have sought a second term in similar situations, showing that they cannot relate to the words of native wisdom.

Where the virtues of items 16-21 are upheld, the practice of storing up hard currencies lying fallow inside private buildings and the purchase of expensive houses in foreign countries (Peel, 2006; Page, 2020) would remain unimaginable. This is the height of greed and lack of consideration for the more than 80 million Nigerians who barely survive below the United Nations' identified poverty line of less than one dollar per day (Osam, 2018). Any Yoruba among the perpetrators has certainly lost touch with the wise saying "Olówó kan láàrin òtòṣì méfà, òtòṣì dì méje." meaning a rich fellow in the midst of six paupers is actually the seventh pauper. Nigeria has been described as the "poverty capital of the world" (Otegunrin et al., 2019, p. 1) and the excessively rich Nigerian politicians have not ceased to be a part of that poverty stigma. A well-cultured Yoruba fellow whose life is guided by the rich moral principles in the culture and language of Yorubaland would strive not to be a seventh pauper and would thus do their best to raise wealthy people from among the six paupers around them. According to Ojukwu and Shopeju (2010, p. 15), corruption of the elites in Nigeria is "arguably one of the inherited colonial practices and ethos."

Similarly, item 22 teaches the equality of all mortals by virtue of the similarity of preconditions for conception and manners of birth. However, many Nigerian political leaders look down on the less privileged among the electorate. Such arrogant politicians are not guiltier than the members of the electorate who applaud them. They both act against the principle of equality of all humans that democracy upholds.

Against the ethics preached by items 23-25, most Nigerian politicians patronize foreign medical facilities for themselves and family members, enroll their children in the most expensive schools abroad and buy choice houses on which they pay exorbitant taxes in the developed countries of the world rather than upgrade the facilities in their homeland.

In contrast, the aforementioned items teach that charity must begin at home. It can only be hoped that their inability to access such foreign facilities during the scourge of the coronavirus pandemic helped them realize the wisdom of keeping the homestead in good condition.

It should be stressed that the typical Nigerian politician, including a typical Yoruba politician, is a product of their society. If they are found to lack some ethics of democracy, the society is largely to blame. Furthermore, if a person lacking such ethics is mistakenly elected to office, an adequately

cultured electorate would put him/her back on track. Many Yoruba people give their precious votes away and support politicians that lack democratic principles because they themselves are bereft of such qualities and cannot, therefore, hold the politicians accountable.

While it is rational to assert that the connection of some of the virtues and values promoted by the selected proverbs to democratic behaviors may not be obvious, it is equally valid to consider the fact that behaviors do have remote attitudinal factors that may even be more fundamental than the immediate precipitating variables that can be easily connected. No amount of direct teaching of the technicalities of democracy can be as effective as the impact of attitudes, dispositions and lifestyles naturally imbibed through informal acculturation. The cognitive as well as the affective dynamics of a proverb like “Omo tó solenù ti so àpò iyà kó” can go a long way in inspiring patriotism in politicians and the electorate, to the extent that anything that could hurt the development of their constituencies will be automatic and permanent anathema. The tone of finality and absoluteness as regards the unpleasant consequence of hurting one’s community that the proverb expresses can be a more effective deterrent to antidemocratic behavior than the teaching of a thousand principles of democracy from a foreign culture.

Research Question 3: Are such sayings still widely known and spoken by present-day Yoruba people?

Table 2. *Respondents’ rate of knowledge of democracy-promoting sayings in Yoruba language*

Age	Number of sayings supplied					Total
	20 & above	10 & above	5 & above	Less than 5	None	
Above 40	48	21	20	7	4	100
Below 40	15	9	13	50	13	100
Total	63	30	33	57	17	200

Table 2 shows a significant decline in respondents’ knowledge of the linguistic heritage for democratic values. The younger generation of Yoruba people knows little of their ethics-laden linguistic inheritance. This means that unless concerted efforts are made to preserve and propagate these linguistic treasures for future generations of Yoruba, the sayings will go extinct (Fakuade et al., 2018; Jerome & Voloshina, 2019).

Research Question 4: Do Yoruba people think there is a decline in the manifestation of democratic values among their people?

Table 3. *Respondents’ rating of manifestation of democratic values among their people*

Age	Declining	Increasing	Stable	Unsure	Total
Above 40	91	4	3	2	100
Below 40	70	11	10	9	100
Total	161	15	13	11	200

Table 3 shows that respondents from both the older and younger generations generally observed a rapid decline in the demonstration of democratic values among their people. As expected, a greater percentage of the older generation expressed a stronger conviction about this decline. This is understandable because the more elderly have the privilege of a longer period of hindsight.

Research Question 5: Do Yoruba people think the rate of application of these sayings in speech and conduct impacts the success of democracy among their people?

Table 4. Respondents' perception of the impact of democracy-promoting linguistic heritage on Yoruba people's actual democratic practices

Age	Has impact	No Impact	Unsure	Total
Above 40	97	2	1	100
Below 40	81	11	8	100
Total	178	13	9	200

Table 4 shows agreement between the two age groups that the farther removed from Yoruba the southwestern Nigerian are, the farther they slip into one of the conditions Bogaards (2018, p. 1481) refers to as “de-democratization,” “democratic deconsolidation, backsliding, regression, and erosion” and “diffusely defective democracy.” This thus corroborates the position that wholesale adoption of Western systems of government, rather than a hybrid of appropriate elements from former colonial masters' and traditional elements in African settings, is an aberration (Akinlabi, 2019).

Conclusion

The irreversible fall of capitalism and the uprising against totalitarianism sweeping across Tunisia, Syria and other nondemocratic regions of the world indicate the imminent worldwide triumph of democracy (Sampurna, 2016; Koca, 2017). The earlier Nigerians transform their current pseudodemocracy into a true democracy and construct a good democratic foundation through appropriate education, the better for the country. This can be achieved by taking the people back to their historical and linguistic heritage through Yoruba-language-medium education from cradle to the end of secondary school. Otherwise, a total collapse may be inevitable, significantly caused by what Akwara (2019, p. 2) refers to as “the artificiality of western democracy.”

Recommendations

1. The Nigerian government should change the existing policy that stipulates Yoruba language as a medium of instruction only up to the end of the fourth year of basic education in Yorubaland.
2. The use of Yoruba as a medium of school instruction should be extended to the end secondary education to enhance the mastery of democratic concepts in southwestern Nigeria.
3. The facts of the existence of democratic structures in ancient Yoruba monarchies, as well as the linguistic elements for the promotion of democratic values in Yoruba language, should be consciously and copiously promoted through appropriate school subjects throughout the primary and secondary school years to engrave the virtues in Yoruba children's hearts.

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