

A Review of Isaac Oluwole Delano's Pioneering Works on Yoruba Grammar, Orthography, Lexicography and Cultural Education

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This is a reproduction and an improved version of our opening chapter on *Selected Works of Chief Isaac O. Delano on Yoruba Language*. In it, we reintroduce the seminal works of the legendary writer and language educator, I. O. Delano. Many of these works have become obscure to the reading public due to an apparent lack of intentional publicization. Delano, known for his prolific writings, wrote a few books relating to Yoruba language and grammar.

This segment looks at four major non-fiction works of Chief Isaac O. Delano. For the most part, the segment deals with his efforts on Yoruba language, but to some extent, too, it looks at some additional non-language related writings often embedded in his works on language. For example, in Appendix I of his 1965 book, *A Modern Yoruba Grammar*, the author provides an array of proverbs and sayings in the language with their English equivalents. In Appendix II, Delano infused two old texts into the book, which comprise of a sermon and an essay on schooling.

Clearly, Delano seems to have a penchant for dissemination of relevant cultural education in all his works. Indeed, one could say Yoruba Cultural education has always been apparently one of Delano's passions as well as hidden agenda in writing his books, and he does so relentlessly. In what follows, we

examine the four works in no particular order, although the *Modern Grammar* is given a relatively more detailed review and summarization. The four books are: *A Modern Yoruba Grammar*; *Àgbékà Ọ̀rọ̀ Yorùbá: Appropriate Words and Expressions in Yoruba*; *Conversation in Yoruba and English*; and *Atúmọ̀ Èdè Yorùbá*.

Isaac O. Delano and *The Modern Yoruba Grammar*¹

Background

Judging from the varieties of his works, Chief Isaac O. Delano is multi-talented. He could be seen as among the pioneers of modern Yoruba studies as touching creative writing, grammar, orthography and lexicography. The multidisciplinary effort of the author has yielded valuable works in essence of a dozen publications, all of which have passed the test of time as they have served generations of scholars in the broad field of Yoruba language and literature, and they have been handy to casual users of the Yoruba language as well.

Among some of I. O. Delano's other works are *The Soul of Nigeria*, *Atúmọ̀ Èdè Yorùbá* (A Yoruba Dictionary with a Short Grammar), *Aiyé D'Aiyé Ọ̀yìn bó, Ìran Ọ̀run, Conversation in Yoruba and English, LỌ̀jọ̀ Ọ̀jọ̀ Un, Ìrántí Ànfāní Series, Àgbékà Ọ̀rọ̀ Yorùbá* (Appropriate Words and expressions in Yoruba), etc. The ingenious assemblage of *A Dictionary of Monosyllabic Verbs* is chief among the author's contributions to the lexicography of the language. The laborious effort of documenting and entering the unique lexical items into a voluminous text for the Institute of African Studies of the then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in Ile-Ife. In this first part of the essay, we focus on the seminal work, *A Modern Yoruba Grammar*.

Prior to Delano's time in working on Yoruba, various efforts had been made at providing books or at least monographic materials on Yoruba grammar. From as far back as the early 1840s there were activities of missionary educators like the Reverend (later Bishop) Samuel Ajayi Crowther, and other cultural and intellectual activists who saw the essentiality of documenting the language of the people so as to be able to preach to them, read the Bible to them in their language, plus the fundamental need to promote literacy among their new converts. In other words, what we had then was a group of people with an ulterior motive for ensuring the Yoruba language became a written one, and the people became literate. It all prompted them to commence the writing of Yoruba grammar intensively and extensively.

1 I. O. Delano. *A Modern Yoruba Grammar*, London, UK: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd. 1965

All references to the text are with the orthography as originally written in the book.

More than one century after those efforts, individuals like I. O. Delano rose up to the challenge and continued in those same efforts even in a more aggressive manner. The well circulated article of J. F. Ade Ajayi (1960) provides a historical narrative of the social and religious atmosphere that birthed these activities. Indeed, going as far back as 1817 and predating the colonization of much of West Africa, were the activities of one young British traveler, who would later become a consulate officer attached to the diplomatic corps of the British colonial government in Ghana (the country then known as The Gold Coast), a man by the name Thomas Edward Bowdich. In addition to his work on the ethnography of the Ashante of Ghana, Bowdich collected a number of words in the Yoruba language in 1817. These were published in his classical book, *Mission to the Ashante* in 1819. Bowdich's work would actually be regarded as the earliest, albeit rudimentary, documentation of any lexical item in the Yoruba language.

The Content of Delano's Yoruba Grammar: A Summary

The grammar of any language is the totality of the syntactic structure of the language of the said people, including their speech act, semiotics, pragmatics, phonology, morphology, and everything that defines their language use. The grammar of a language reflects the mental worldview of the people's orality. This explains why it is often said among sociolinguists at the turn of the century that the best definition of a language is "culture in sound." In other words, nothing that comes out of any speech or the speech act that does not reflect the culture of the speaker. This is also why the much-cited hypothesis of linguistic relativity, otherwise known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, clearly asserts that the finest way to understand the culture of a people is to study the grammar of the particular language of the said people. The corollary to this assertion is that the people's total perceptions of their world are only relative to the language they speak and the grammatical structure of that language. Oral literature, written literature, including novels, plays, etc., and even the pragmatics and semiotics of the language, could all be observed, analyzed, and understood in the context of the grammar of the same language. Thus, by providing the grammar of the Yoruba people and publishing it in 1965, Isaac O. Delano became one of the earliest modern indigenous writers to expose the intricacies of the Yoruba language and its corresponding culture.

The 13-chapter work of grammar could be divided into five major segments. In a nut-shell, the first segment is what the author calls "The Basic Facts of the Yoruba Language." This is found in the first chapter of the book. The second segment comprises of annotations of the various grammatical categories found in the language. This segment comprises of chapters 2-11. The third category is what the author titles, "Essay Writing." This is an aspect of

the stylistics of writing in Yoruba and comprises of chapter 12 of the book. The fourth part of the book is the prescriptive category of the work. Titled “Common errors,” this is found in chapter 13. The fifth and final segment of the book are the two appendices. The first one provides a catalogue of 150 Yoruba wise saying and their English equivalents, while the second one showcases two older texts to demonstrate the use and significance of tone-marks in Yoruba. In what follows, then, we take a quick look at the five segments.

The Basic Facts of the Yoruba Language

This first part of Delano’s *A Modern Yoruba Grammar* addresses 17 generic information for informed learners of the language. In it, the author reminds his readers of the century long history of the documentation of the Yoruba grammar. Thereafter, he speaks to the erroneous representations of the various aspects of the said grammar, due in part to the incongruences of the Yoruba language and the English language counterpart as the two are often used. He critiques the semantic relativity as it affects translations across the two languages. Delano here argues that the phonology (and tonology) of the Yoruba language are significant to the understanding of the semantics of the language.

To Delano, and as has been well documented, tone is not just a semantic marker in Yoruba, it is the most significant identifier of meaning in the language, whether in lexical isolation or in the context of phrases and sentences. This falls in line with the 1958 work of the anthropological linguist, David Olmsted.² Delano argues conclusively that the rationale for tone-marking is to enhance meaning and that since tone does not play that role in all ramifications, it is better to only mark relevant syllables when necessary. He will further talk about this in his “Common Errors” in the speaking and writing of the language. The segment is capped with various exercises to demonstrate the significance of tone in Yoruba.

The Grammatical Categories

Grammatical categories are what many old school grammarians call “Parts of Speech.” And of course, the author, Chief I. O. Delano, is a quintessential old school grammarian. The greatest strength of the old school is the tendency to examine the grammar of the language in its rustic simplicity without the labyrinths of algorithmic mumbo jumbo. For the most part, definitions are usually fixed and almost always prescribed. But in the Chomskyan grammar, for example, in Noam Chomsky (1969)’s *Syntactic Structures*, the author argues that, “Grammar is best formulated as a self-contained study independent

2 See David L. Olmsted (1951) “The Phonemes of Yoruba,” *WORD*, 7:3, 245-249.

of semantics.”³ Chomsky is at variance with the old school heeree. One aspect of the old school's weakness is the fact of the absence of flexibility and evolving tendencies of language in use. The old school often makes definitions of concepts something that is static. For example, Delano opens this segment by defining what a sentence is. He writes, “A sentence is a group of words so arranged to make complete sense.” To cap this definition with examples, Delano provides the following:

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|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. <i>Òjò sún</i> (sic). | Òjò sleeps. |
| 2. <i>Òjò gùn</i> . | Òjò is tall. |
| 3. <i>Akin rà</i> (sic) <i>asọ</i> . | Akin buys cloth. |
| 4. <i>Eni mi ni</i> . | He is my friend. |

These examples are true and define true sentences, but only to the old school. There are more ways to define sentences as, for example, in the standpoint of descriptive grammar. Imagine Noam Chomsky's 1957 book, *Syntactic Structures*, in which he argues against the necessary “senseness” of a sentence as believed by prescriptive grammarians. He (Chomsky) then gives a semantically nonsensical sentence, “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.” By the matrix of a sentence, which is $S = VP + NP$ Chomsky's sentence is syntactically corrected, grammatically accurate but semantically nonsensical. For him, the semantic nonsensicality does not make the sentence non-sentence. In other words, he dismisses the semantic from the grammatical. In other words, for the Chomskyan School, sense and sentence are mutually exclusive as a true sentence does not have to make sense semantically but in context if it follows the grammatical (or syntactic) rule, it is a legitimate sentence. In essence, rather than prescribe what a sentence is, Chomsky proposes a description of what it could be. The segment further provides a good deal of discussion on the components of syntax – sentence, clause, phrase, words, etc., and defines what Delano refers to as “parts of speech in Yoruba.” With these, the author (Delano) identifies 11 of them and defines them also according to the Old School. Let us take a look at one of them. Take for example, according to Delano, a noun is defined as “A word which gives a name to an individual person, a thing, or a place.” Our question, then, is this: what happens when an individual writes a sentence that follows the pattern here: *Go is what I just wrote*. “Go” in this context would fail the test of Delano's or any of the old school's definition of a noun because it is not the name of a person, neither is it a place or a thing. Yet, since it follows snugly the syntactic arrangement stated earlier,

3 N. Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*, p. 106.

Chomskyan grammar would argue that the word “go” in this context is a legitimate noun phrase.

Other ten “parts of speech” identified in Delano’s book and which are annotated in the segment include pronoun, adjective, verb, adverb, preposition, conjunction, interjection, auxiliary, numerals, and particles. Examples are provided and various aspects of their contextual usages are discussed. There are exercises at the end of each chapter to assess the comprehensive skills of the learner. In all, these are useful presentations of prescriptive grammar that were so much needed at the outset of understanding modern Yoruba grammar.

Without a doubt, most writers of the time had strong training in the English language or in other European languages for that matter, but they had less training in theoretical linguistics, and virtually none in the intellectual aspect of the Yoruba language itself. Linguists such as Ayo Bamgbose, Oladele Awobuluyi, Sope Oyelaran, and a host of others in their generation, have applied their own training in theoretical linguistics to the Yoruba language and consequently overhauled some of the rigid prescriptive works with their knowledges of the more contemporary descriptive grammar.

Essay Writing

Another addition to the book is Delano’s instruction in essay writing. This segment is also intrinsically prescriptive. In a way, it could be classified as systemic text linguistics, which simply looks at the text in the language and subjects it into conventional criteria for writing, and writing well. Right from the outset, the author systematically provides the various steps in writing a good essay in Yoruba. Altogether, 50 strong issues are raised. Those issues include the following first 12 points for the essay writer to bear in mind: selecting materials for a good essay, forming the outline, jotting down important facts or points, organization of ideas into coherent points, scribbling down of the essay, starting and ending an essay, ensuring the authenticity of points to be made, connecting themes from one paragraph to another, observing the etiquette or pitfalls of writing, revising whatever has been written immediately after completion, using the tone-marks when meaning could become ambiguous without them, the use of shorter and tighter sentences, and logical arrangement of facts. These are some of the strictly recommended points of reference for good essay writing.

The essay itself is giving 10 yardsticks for measuring the qualities of acceptability and excellence. They are: the introduction of subject; providing correct sentences; paragraph formations; correct word links; acceptable use of grammar; marking the open vowels and applying other diacritics; sensitivity to syntactic arrangements; use of punctuation marks; simplicity of

constructions; and clarity. Delano details each of these points in the segment. One quite interesting aspect of the remaining parts of the 50 points, which is not in the first few highlighted above, is the warning against the confusion of punctuation marks with the tone marks. While a competent user of the language would not confuse either of the two, one would assume that the novel status of writing the language as of the time of Delano's book might have been instrumental in the thought of confusing the two even though ordinarily, they should not be.

Common Errors

This is the "corrective" segment of the grammar book, with also pitches it along the line of prescriptive grammar. In it, the author identifies 35 errors that are common to users of the language. Some are specific to day-to-date communications, while some are found in print media and books. To him the oral usage of the language transfers to the written form. If the former is anomalous, the latter will be the same. In other words, the author's argument is simply that "If an effort is made to speak Yoruba carefully and correctly, there will be little difficulty in writing it correctly." Let us take a look at the first few classical errors common to users of the language. Starting from an accurate syntagmatic arrangement of words in the language, he discourses the significance of tones, tenses, colloquial constructs, otherwise known as slang, the use of interrogative markers, punctuations as well as elisions and contractions in the language. The plethora of errors, again, points to the prescriptive nature of Delano's work as well as the care the author takes in taking the users and learners of the language to the level of competence in language use.

Appendices

This is the final segment of the book. The first part provides proverbs and idiomatic expressions in Yoruba. Rendered in the alphabetical order, the author documents 150 of commonly used proverbs and wise sayings in the language. He provides the English equivalent of each of the samples without any form of annotations. The second part is a prosaic data of what the author identifies as "Original texts showing uses of Tone Marks." The first one is *Ìwāsù Kan* (One Sermon); and the second is an essay titled, *Ilé-Ìwé Àtìjọ́* (The School of Old). The goal of the segment is to advance the argument that tone-marks are not necessarily needed in all circumstances. Provided the context of a word gives away the meaning it conveys, the use of tone-marks is redundant. However, whenever there is ambiguity in the sound of a word without the tone-marks, such words should carry the diacritics that delineates the tone on each of the syllables found in the said word.

Delano's *Àgbékà Ọ̀rọ̀ Yorùbá: Appropriate words and expressions in Yoruba*⁴

The next seminal work of Chief Isaac Oluwole Delano is *Àgbékà Ọ̀rọ̀ Yorùbá: Appropriate Words and Expressions in Yoruba*, published by the London branch of Oxford University Press in 1960. Unlike the book of grammar, this one is a less technical work. It is a compilation - an anthology of sort, of word usages and idiomatic expressions in the language. It is almost a reminder of the Berlitz (2011) *African Phrase Book*,⁵ a handbook that comprises of phrases in twelve African languages or even the fairly voluminous anthologies of Yoruba taboos by C. O. Thorpe, titled *Àwọ̀n Èèwọ̀ Ilẹ̀ Yorùbá*. In essence, this 160-page work of I. O. Delano is another book of reference put together to serve users of the Yoruba language and those particularly interested in its culture and verbal communication nuances.

The acknowledgement to this book says it all, underscoring the fact that Delano derived professional support from a professional linguist, one senior lecturer from the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, Mr. J. Carnochan, who advised the author not just on the general organization of the material collected for the work, but in making sure that the translations to the English language were quite accurate. Whether by design or devise, the publication of the work coincided with the 1960 independence of Nigeria, and as could only be expected, it probably was one of the works that triggered the literacy renaissance in the country, after all, the only available university in the country at that time was the University College of Ibadan (UCI), which was actually a branch of the University College of London, England. Among the goads of the optimisms and enthusiasm of Delano was also the fact that the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London and even UCI were showing interests in Yoruba studies at that time. This development, couples with the growing interest of the Yoruba Historical Research Scheme that was sponsored by the Government of the then Western Region in Nigeria, which was considering integrating the study of the history of people to its educational curricula.

Delano's "Introduction" to the book is, at the risk of sounding like an oxymoron, a detailed summary of the entire work. In it, borrowing various phrases in the context of the people's rhetorics to exemplify his points, the author speaks to the dynamic nature of the language, a sociolinguistic phenomenon common to all living languages. In addition, he laments the dying art of certain aspects of the Yoruba lexis in their original forms, but equally admits

4 I. O. Delano. *Àgbékà Ọ̀rọ̀ Yorùbá: Appropriate Words and Expressions in Yoruba*. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.

5 C. O. Thorpe. *Àwọ̀n Èèwọ̀ Ilẹ̀ Yorùbá*. Ibadan: Onibon-Oje Press, 1967.

to the need for the creation of new words. He then lays down, in greater details, the different sections of which that the book is comprised.

The actual work is divided into four separate segments. The first comprises of idioms in the language. These are further divided into four parts. The first part comprises of a list of idioms relating to names of the same part of the body. The second contains the list of those with names of living beings. The third is a list of twelve idioms that show the way of life among the Yoruba. The fourth and last part contains a list of 120 idioms as arranged alphabetically. The second segment, referred to as Part II, contains what the author calls "Yoruba proverbs, with situational notes and translations." The third segment, or Part III, is the annotated list of monosyllabic verbs in the language. The fourth and final part is the section on miscellaneous items in the language. This is sectioned into six units. In what follows, we examine the work with more comprehensive viewpoints.

Because many words and idiomatic expressions in the Yoruba language are fast going out of circulation, the need for the documentation of available ones are real, and cannot be overstated. In any language, words are more than a mere arrangement of phonemes; they convey meanings so as to gain a deeper understanding of the referent; and, in fact, borrowing the speech act theory of J. L. Austin, they go beyond surface meanings; they, literally and figuratively, do things.⁶ Again, going by the hypothesis of linguistic relativity cited earlier, culture melts away as its language erodes. Whether for mere proficiency, competency or performance, language left unpreserved is precursor to the dying of a culture. In the controversial and widely read *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*,⁷ Chomsky separates competence and performance. For him, competence has to do with the fact of knowing the language, while performance is all about doing something with it. Both competence and performance would be of no relevance in a language culture that is threatened with annihilation. All these seem to be a part of Delano's thought processes, not in the theoretical sense but in deduction. Therefore, we sense that Delano is of the opinion that when words and phrases that define proficiency, competence, and performance in Yoruba language go, culture, norms, values, and everything in the mix, go with them. This was among the stimuli that triggered his determination to document these significant aspects of Yoruba. When Delano wrote one-half of one century ago in the decades of the 1960s and early 1970s, he lamented the modest state of Yoruba usage. One can only imagine what the cultural icon would feel in a post-independence Nigeria, where it is

6 See J. L. Austin. *How to Do Things With Words*. Oxford University Press (1962).

7 See Noam Chomsky. *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1965.

no longer fashionable to speak the language in the household and parents are the first to chastise their children for speaking Yoruba instead of English or any European language for that matter. And, sadly too, those who speak the language professionally today, including newscasters and other electronic and print media personnel, do so quite poorly. While not condemning the generation, Delano's argument is that one who is equipped with a larger repertoire of the various aspects of the language would be able to express him or herself in circumstances of relevant communications. The corollary is that such individuals would be able to contribute more intelligently in dialogs.

In the first sixty-one pages of the book, which forms the first part of the book, and titled, "Idioms", the author looks closely at idiomatic expressions in the language and separates them into four categories: the names associated with parts of the body; those that contain names of living beings; those which have special references to Yoruba customs and traditions; and those that do not fit any of the other categories. One could say the approach here is purely semiotic in nature. We will only take a look at the first few items showcased in the first sub-section:

1. *Àiyà* (Chest) as in
Àiyà fò mí
(Chest takes off from me or chest flew out of me), which means I am afraid.
2. *Apá* (Arm); as in:
Şe apá kitipo
(Take arm strong), which means to be strong in the language.
3. *Ara* (Body); as in:
Rẹ ara
(Pluck the body), which means to be picky.
4. *Àtàrí* (Skull); as in
Àtàrí òfo
(Empty skull), which means unsuccessful or dull.
5. *Ehín* (Teeth); as in
Jẹ ehin
(Grind tooth), which means empty boasting.
6. *Etí* (Ear); as in
Fà létí
(Pull in the ear), which means to warn against an offence committed and forgive the person.
7. *Ẹhin* (Back); as in
Tì lẹhìn
(Push in the back), which means to support.
8. *Ẹjẹ* (Blood); as in

F'ẹ̀jẹ̀ sínú, tutọ́ funfun jáde

(Hide blood in the inside, spit out the white saliva in the outside), which means to pretend.

As earlier noted, the remaining parts of this first section are those idioms associated with those that contain names of living beings; those with special reference to Yoruba customs and traditions; and those that don't fit any of the other three categories.

The second part comprises of Yoruba proverbs. The introduction segment appropriately opens with the popular metalingual axiom, which underscores the significance of proverbs in the culture: *Òwe ni ẹ̀şin ọ̀rọ̀, bí ọ̀rọ̀ bá sọ̀nù ọ̀we ni a fi íí wá a*. Delano translates this as, "A proverb is the horse of words; if a word is lost, a proverb is used to find it." The section provides a compendium of wise sayings in the language. This section is arranged under four headlines. The proverbs come with an explanation in Yoruba and English, and they address the specific situations in which such expression would most likely be used.

The third part focuses on the monosyllabic verbs in the language. The segment is cognizant of an aspect of the phonology of the Yoruba language – the three identified tones. The low, mid, and high tone arrangement facilitates an easier read for the segment. This theme is one of the areas in which Delano has written a full volume book, the well-read *A Dictionary of Yoruba Monosyllabic Verbs*.

The fourth part is appropriately titled *Onírūrú Àpẹ̀rẹ̀* (Miscellaneous). This one is divided into six different sub-sections, which are related to things that have to do with greetings, blessings, incantations (although the author calls this charms and spells), advertisement or hawking (the author calls this cries), daybreak language, and interrogative phrases.

This is an interesting work of I. O. Delano. By far, the most fascinating of the book is its first part. What sets this first part apart from the rest of the book is that the content is purely monosyllabic. Although we cannot say this with certainty, one could think that this would be the first major work of its kind done only in the Yoruba language. The segment is a compendium of selected idiomatic expressions which interpretations and annotations are done in the Yoruba language. In essence, the work targets only users of the language with competence in the technical use of the language. The remaining three parts that follow this segment are rendered both in the Yoruba language with English translations and interpretations.

No doubt, this book is another excellent addition to Delano's work and very relevant to the study of Yoruba language and culture. It provides not just the pedagogical value of teaching individuals how to use and what to use in

Yoruba idioms, it is a work that gives the historical record of how the language was used in the past, including the time of Delano. It also shows the progress that have been made since the time the book was made on the gradual development of the Yoruba writing system. Someone with more than just a casual understanding of the language use over time would quickly realize that the current stage of Yoruba orthography is far more advanced than what it was when Delano was working on this book.

Delano's *Conversation in Yoruba and English*⁸

This is a 93-item traveler's handbook. It is a handy work that targets people in a variety of situations and provides the formulae for communicating at such times. The pivotal document is not designed for researchers or serious users of the language; it is a guide most especially to travelers because, in the words of the author, "The first few days of one's visit to a foreign country may be termed "the period of dumbness". This is marked by inability to say anything beyond easy expressions and halting "pidgin" sentences, composed laboriously on the spur of the moment, which can never give satisfaction to either the speaker or the hearer... If he is unable to communicate readily and intelligently with the market women, or the farmer by the roadside, he will be missing the fun and the understanding of the Yoruba people, for which purpose he is visiting the country."⁹

Delano is right, the need for cross-cultural communication exchange is pivotal to the active engagement of a nation with the outside world. Also, as he points out, since the English language had become not just a second language for many in the country but has become the common language for official communication and education for the people, the book was designed to encourage cross-cultural/multicultural communications, which could be of no mean service to both the visitor and his or her hosts or hostesses.

Nigeria has always drawn tourists and traders most especially from neighboring West African countries like Republic of Benin, Cameroun and, to a limited extent, from northern neighbors of Chad and Niger Republics.¹⁰ Many of the tourists from these regions are not likely able to speak English either,

8 I. O. Delano, *Conversation in Yoruba and English*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1963.

9 *ibid.*, ix

10 We refer to visitors or tourists from these northern neighboring countries as possible users of such guide only "to a limited extent" because since the boundaries between them and Nigeria are artificial, entering the country from that part does not require the use of English as parameters for communication and inability to communicate in the English language cannot be an impediment for them because people from the two nations are mostly of all Hausa-Fulani ethnic continuum who spoke Fulfulde or Hausa.

even if they come to the southwest region of the country, where the Yoruba language is predominantly spoken. The other group of tourists, which actually constitutes the bulk of the targeted ones would be those from European countries, most especially United Kingdom and Western Europe. These are those who speak the English language and would benefit tremendously from the handbook in its present form. The author's caveat is clear: "The present work, which provides for the emergencies of daily conversation, must not be regarded as standard literary Yoruba, good enough for written examinations."¹¹ Therefore, the aim of the effort was not necessarily to serve the academic or professional community; but one could see it as an extension of the social services that Isaac O. Delano relentlessly performed for the young nation.

Delano's *Atúmò Èdè Yorùbá*¹²

Atúmò Èdè Yorùbá is probably the most intellectually endowed of I. O. Delano's works in the Yoruba language. The book comprises of a carefully organized grammar and proposed orthography of the language. These would precede the dictionary aspect of the work. Unlike what its name suggests, which one would presume to be only a dictionary, the book outlines critical aspects of the grammar of Yoruba. Even though the bulk of this book comprises of the dictionary, the focus of this section will be on the segment on grammar. But first, we make a rapid critique of the dictionary.

Strengths and Limitations of *Atúmò Èdè Yorùbá* (Yoruba Dictionary)

There is not much to say about the section of the Dictionary in the present Delano's book. It is, like any dictionary, an assemblage of the lexicon in the language with their attending meanings. The lexical selections were based on the alphabetical order of the language. The most unique aspect of the Dictionary, however, is the fact that it is monolingual. Indeed, it would be right to say that one of the most pivotal contributions of Chief Isaac Oluwole Delano to Yoruba studies is his pioneering effort of making monolingual dictionaries in the language. Such courageous pacesetting effort should not go unnoticed but it seems for Delano, his efforts particularly on this ground-breaking pedagogy have gone unnoticed for many decades.

Prior to Delano, no one attempted to offer explanations of Yoruba lexical items using the Yoruba language to proffer expositions and discourses. As already noted, there had been attempts at providing dictionaries in the language. Efforts of missionaries like Bishop Ajayi Crowther or researchers

11 Ibid. ix

12 I. O. Delano, *Atúmò Èdè Yorùbá*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

like R. C. Abraham yielded some documentations of notable lexicographical items, but none was done with the Yoruba language as the medium of explanation. In essence, such works were not done to target native users of the language. Delano's various attempts at making Yoruba monolingual dictionaries are, therefore, laudable. Yet, they are not without their problems as we have pointed out earlier. One of the problems noted was the mixing grammatical categories and the solo efforts that typifies his dictionary-making endeavors. These must always constitute a problem because the rigorous scrutiny and the protracted time factor required for the assemblage of words in any language before becoming a viable dictionary would presuppose the unacceptability of a solo effort.

S. Ayotunde Ekundayo raised some issues in Delano's attempt to make a monolingual Yoruba dictionary. One of the former's concerns was the fact that as of the time of Delano's efforts, activities were still on-going bearing on the standardization of the Yoruba writing system. Citing examples in his critique, Ekundayo notes:

A casual glance at Chief Delano's dictionary of monosyllabic verbs will convince one that agreement among scholars on form classes may have to precede the compilation of the dictionary. In a dictionary such as Delano's, items like *gùn* (to be tall), *ga* (high, to be high) are classified as verbs, cf. *Olaoye gùn* (Olaoye is tall), *Olaoye gígùn* (tall Olaoye) . . . Items like *gùn* and *ga* are treated as 'verbs' by Delano in 1965 and Bamgbose in 1966, and as 'predicative adjectives' by Afolayan in 1968. Now, if they really are 'verbs', then it is difficult to justify Delano's *Comparison of Adjectives* . . . where Delano's verb is what is actually compared. It appears that if items like *dára* (to be good), *ga* (to be tall), etc. are verbs, then there should only be a comparison between verbs and no comparison between adjectives.¹³

Suffice to say that the lexicographical effort and to a lesser extent, his proposed orthography and grammar of Chief Isaac Delano even though innovative and quite ambitious could not rise up to the acceptable expectations not because of the quality of those works but because of the prevailing unstable status of the Yoruba writing system as of the time of his writings. Yet, those works set the stage for subsequent activities on the writing system of the Yoruba language as well as its grammar.

13 S. A. Ekundayo, "Thoughts on a Yoruba Monolingual Dictionary." In Adebisi Afolayan (ed.) *Yoruba Language and Literature*. University Press Limited, and University of Ife Press, 1982, pp181-206.

Grammar and Orthography

It is interesting to see the unprecedented activity of the late Chief Isaac Oluwole Delano on the grammar and the orthography of the Yoruba language. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s were fraught with mega efforts in the metalingual stabilization of the Yoruba language and its writing system. These were the eras of serious experimentations with various aspects of the Yoruba language scholarship. The University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, the then University of Ife, and the University of Ilorin were centers for debates on many, sometimes quite conflicting, aspects of the grammar of the language. The possible standard and standardized orthographical models of Yoruba scholarships generated even more controversies. This was understandable as any adventure into a new territory in scholarship is expected to bring about such controversies.

It was during this time that Ayo Bamgbose, for example, single-handedly produced his recommendations of what he called the Yoruba orthography,¹⁴ which, by his own account, was based on one single lecture he gave to the Ègbé Ìjìnlẹ̀ Yorùbá in Ibadan on March 5, 1964. The work, which has been revised a few more times after its original production, generated a great deal of dialogues among fellow Yoruba enthusiasts of the time because of some of the proposed models of the grammar of the language that did not fit the general trend of the time. For example, in the following:

...the nasalized (open vowel) *o* sound which is spelt *a* after *n* to be spelt (open vowel) *o*, e. g. ònà “road” to be spelt ònò...

The spelling *an* for the nasalized vowel to be replaced by *on* e.g. *òkàn* “heart” to be spelt *òkòn*...¹⁵

Furthermore, his discussion of certain phonological features in the language were deemed incomprehensible for those experimenting on the grammar and writing of the language. For example, in his assimilated low tone recommendation, Bamgbose wrote:

There is one other tonal feature which is not generally taken account of either in the description of Yoruba or in the orthography. This is a tonal feature that results from the elision of a syllable bearing a low tone. You will find this feature in contractions of combinations of verb and noun and in certain single items. Supposed the combination of verb and noun in the sentences *ó ní ọwọ̀* “she has a broom” and *ó ní ọ̀wọ̀* “she is respectful” ...It

¹⁴ See Ayo Bamgbose, *Yoruba Orthography*, Ibadan University Press, 1965.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p 31.

is therefore suggested that whenever a low tone is displayed in a contraction, a dot should be put to indicate this.”¹⁶

While a good number of Bamgbose’s recommendations formed significant aspects of acceptable writing formats, this particular proposal was considered peculiar and consequently never attained any form of acceptance beyond the Ibadan School of Yoruba language and linguistics.

Looking at Delano’s work, in the grammar and orthography section of *Atúmò Èdè Yorùbá*, one could not but be impressed by the author’s contribution to modern Yoruba studies. It should be with a pleasant surprise to know that much of what came to be accepted in the decades of the 1970s, and up until today were recommendations that Delano already proffered as far back as 1958, as documented in this book. Take for example, in the section that he calls “Ìṣọlórúkọ” (grammatical designation), he made the following proposals:¹⁷

Òrò-ìṣe	Verb
Òrò-ìrànlọ́wọ́	Auxiliary
Òrò-Orúkọ	Noun
Arọ̀pò-Orúkọ	Pronoun
Òrò-Àpẹ̀júwe	Adjective
Òrò-Iye	Numeral
Òrò-Àpọ̀nlé	Adverb
Aṣíwájú-Orúkọ	Preposition
Òrò-Alásopò	Conjunction
Ele-Òrò	Particles
Òrò-Ìyanu	Interjection

The most intriguing aspect of all these entries was the fact that the vast majority of what were eventually acceptable as the standard orthography and metalingual words and phrases as applicable to the grammatical categories in the language came from Delano’s proposed words and phrases in this 1958 book. Indeed, all the above eleven concepts are still being used in the Yoruba language scholarship even today. Yet, while debates were heated in the metalingual discourse in the late 1970s, not much reference was made to Delano’s seminal work. Whether this was an error of judgment, omission, or it was all owing to the fact that by the late 1970s, Chief Delano had retired from active

16 See Bamgbose, *Yoruba Orthography*, p.17.

17 See Delano, I. O. *Atúmò Èdè Yorùbá*, p. x.

engagement in his tireless university activities, especially at the University of Ife, it is not quite clear and would certainly remain an enigma.

Educating the world on Yoruba culture seems to be at the center of his many decades of works. For example, in addition to some other aspects of the culture and traditions of the people, in the subsection he christens *Ìfikún* (Addition or Addendum), the author documents names that are traditionally given to Yoruba children at birth. He classifies them into five distinct categories. These are:¹⁸

(A) *Orúkọ Àbíkú* (Names given to a special child known to be born and die as a spiritual commitment to the child's other life). Examples he gives are:

1. Igbekoyi
2. Okóya
3. Kosoko
4. Malomo
5. Duro-Orike
6. Bamijoko
7. Durojaiye
8. Durosinmi

(B) *Orúkọ Àmútòrunwá* (Names given by virtue of the natural birth of the child)

1. Aina (A child born with the umbilical cord around its neck)
2. Ajayi (A child born with its face down)
3. Taiwo (First in a twin birth)
4. Kehinde (Last in a twin birth)
5. Idowu (The child born following the birth of a set of twins)
6. Alaba (The child born after Idowu)
7. Ige (Breach birth – born with the leg coming out first)
8. Oke (A child born still wrapped in the sack membrane)

(C) *Oríkì tí ó Di Orúkọ* (Praise Names that Have Become Real Names)

1. Ajagbe (male name)
2. Ajani (male name)
3. Alade (male name)
4. Alao (male name)
5. Abebi (female name)
6. Ayoka (female name)
7. Awero (female name)

18 See Delano, I. O. *Atúmọ̀ Èdè Yorùbá*, p. 208.

8. Asabi (female name)

D. Àníjé (Ìnagijẹ) tí ó di Orúkọ (Nicknames That Have Become Real Names)

1. Alátìşẹ (male name)
2. Gbajúmò (male name)
3. Ajòmàlẹ (female name)
4. Àkònké (female name)

E. Orúkọ Oyè tí ó Di Orúkọ (Chieftaincy Titles that Have Become Real Names)

1. Badà
2. Mọgàjí
3. Başòrun
4. Gíwá
5. Òtún

These examples underscore the comprehensive nature of Delano's book and its versatility in addressing issues pertinent to Yoruba studies. As clearly demonstrated in the current book, the work transcends grammar and lexicography. The author even delves into cultural issues and provides a list of words borrowed into the language from English.

Conclusion

In addition to being a pace-setter scholar of Yoruba, one could not but see Isaac O. Delano as a teacher per excellence, an educator whose most important duty is to ensure the success of the learner under his tutelage. Take for example, in his *A Modern Yoruba Grammar*, Delano provides a section on essay writing in which he showcases a copious note on essay writing, which suggests that the man was not just a scholar but a teacher per excellence, an educator whose most important duty is to ensure the success of the learner under his tutelage.

In all, Delano's works remain and will always remain particularly relevant in our understanding of the historical development of the Yoruba grammar. They provide a phase in the relentless effort of indigenous writers to ensure the standardization of the language's grammar, orthography and the Yoruba scholars' urgent quest for metalingual discourses and documentations. In spite of its limitation in the application of theoretical linguistics to the study of Yoruba grammar, *A Modern Yoruba Grammar*, for example, is a relevant launching pad for the more aggressive contemporary study and writings of Yoruba grammar, its language and literature. If indigenous epistemology is a

hallmark of intellectual advancement of a people, Delano fought hard to ensure this is a relevant paradigm applicable to Yoruba scholarship. Otherwise, how else could one explain his insistent and consistent production of works that were monolingual in Yoruba even in colonial times when the only language construed (or misconstrued) as being relevant to national development was the language of the colonial administrators, the English language?

There is an empowering quality that typifies indigenous epistemology, especially when the language of discourse is the language in the universe of the user.¹⁹ It is common knowledge that thinking is an integral part of language; and “language itself is a system of communication composed of symbols and a set of rules permitting various combinations of these symbols.”²⁰ Language itself Africans as a people must be able to forge their own epistemologies that do not have to borrow a semblance of western epistemologies or of any foreign epistemologies for that matter. As noted earlier, it is an irony that in spite of all his unfathomable depth of contributions to Yoruba studies, Delano is probably one of the least recognized among contributors to Yoruba scholarship. Critics of Yoruba writers worked more in the 1970s on other Yoruba writers like D.O. Fagunwa, C. L. Adeoye, J. F. Odunjo, Adebayo Faleti, Sobo Arobiodu, and a host of others than they did on the works of Isaac O. Delano. Peripheral and scanty works done on him did not reflect a fraction of his contributions to Yoruba studies. Take for example, the small article of Adeboye Babalola, “*Iran Ọrun: Ìwé Ọrọ̀ Ìyanju Láti Ọwọ̀ Olóyè Olúwọ̀lé Délà̀nò* (O.U.P. 1949), in *Yoruba*,”²¹ which was a critique of the usages of the Ègbá dialect in the creative work, the article, which was written in the Yorba language did not enjoy an appreciable readership. Very little is known to us of other serious works done on Delano's writings.

However, what these four works of the author have demonstrated is that Delano used his talent to serve as the intellectual megaphone for the earlier efforts of the missionaries, especially the Church Society of Nigeria, and consequently situated himself as the foremost macebearer of the modern Yoruba grammar. Few, if any, have had the visionary views of the Yoruba language as a major language of academic discourse than Isaac Delano, even though his visions did not become and empirical reality in his lifetime. There are many other works of Chief Isaac Oluwole Delano that are not language-related, as showcased earlier. Those works pitch him among the most creative of writers

19 See Michael Oladejo Afolayan, “Yoruba Epistemology, Art, Language and the Universe of Meaning.” *Yoruba Studies Review*, Vol. 2(1), 2018: 239-254.

20 See Abdul Karim Bangura, *Toyin Falola and African Epistemologies*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. p43.

21 Adeboye Babalola. “*Iran Ọrun: Ìwé Ọrọ̀ Ìyanju Láti Ọwọ̀ Olóyè Olúwọ̀lé Délà̀nò* (OUP. 1949),” *Yoruba: Journal of the Yoruba Studies Association of Nigeria*, 1976: 71-75.

in the Yoruba language of all times, and possibly among the most productive Africans scholars of his time. Yet, for the last forty years, having died December 15, 1979, not much of anything is known of Delano's works but for the timely intervention of Toyin Falola.

Falola has single-handedly provided a pivotal and comprehensive work on Isaac Delano. Titled *Cultural Modernity in a Colonized World: The Writings of Chief Isaac Oluwole Delano*, this work is not a phatic communion, that is sheer communications that serve only social functions with no redeeming qualities. This book on Delano is a deliberately researched engagement prompted by an inner (almost supernatural) push, a "divine touch" that gave birth to a warping 757-page document comprising of 373 bibliographical references; 119 images from the archives; 14 appendices, and 17 chapters that are collectively divided into four parts. The book is the product of what theologians often refer to as "Righteous indignation" on the part of Dr. Toyin Falola who expresses his motivation for writing the book in the most succinct way:

Fortunately, the epoch that Chief Isaac Oluwole Delano represented was one when a minority had become literate in the English language and Yoruba, and their thoughts were documented in books, journals, newspapers, periodicals, personal records and the like. Although many scholars have written on major actors such as Samuel Johnson and D. O. Fagunwa that took these media to mirror to generations after them the reality of the times they lived in and their takes on the evolving society, none (of such documentations) exists on Chief Isaac Oluwole Delano. This is a tragedy. It was (this) tragedy of slighting Chief Delano that instigated the intensity of (my) passion to write this book. The tragedy...occurred in spite of Delano's numerous breathtaking contributions. Then, one begins to wonder if there is actually something in the "stars" of those whose attentions have been gained by scholars in the past, because when it comes to publication, thought and involvement in various capacities to impact the society for all generations, it is not flattery to see the stellar contributions of Chief Delano. The silence has just been deafening. It is as if the Yoruba lost an entire library.

Falola's sentiment is a tragic reminder of the sobering words of the legendary scholar and griot, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, who has often been credited to the statement that: "When an old man dies in Africa, it is like a library set ablaze." This fact is even more tragic in the case of Chief Delano because in reality, Bâ was referring to the loss of oral traditions – folklore and folklife that still reside inside the older people when they die, not for the likes of Delano, who not only was himself a custodian of oral traditions but an iconic

documentarian of all aspects of Yoruba studies. But as fate would bridge the living with the dead, it all turned out to be *ilé ọba t'ó jó, ẹwà l'ó bù sí i* (the burning down of the palace brings out untold beauty). The forty years of the rebuilding is worth the waiting. But, in reality, we are at a critical watershed moment in our nation's history. We do not have another forty years to wait in order to unearth another buried treasure like Chief Delano. And there are still many like him all around us!

Finally, Toyin Falola, in his Preface to the book, wrote: "Sacredness, I once argued, determines the originality and relevance of a text. Sacredness is created through scarcity, some others have argued. It is hoped that with this publication the tomb of intellectual productions of Delano has been opened, with the knowledge therein exhumed for further examination by scholars across various fields of humanity. I hereby proclaim, henceforth, that this tomb will forever remain open" (xviii).

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