

Book Review

A. Y. Schleicher. *Colloquial Yorùbá: The Complete Course for Beginners*. New York and London: Routledge, 2008. 295 pp.

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The book presents Yoruba in the basic and simple everyday conversational context of use among native speakers which is an attempt by the author to “give learners the opportunity to learn Yorùbá with or without a teacher” (p. xii). The book describes how Yoruba is used by native-speakers communicatively and functionally. Accordingly, with this aim, each unit begins with a number of basic functions and dialogues that learners will be able to perform in real native speaker situations and contexts. These functions also serve as learning goals for every unit. Additionally, every unit is accompanied by audio activities to assist learners in speaking and listening skills, as well as in understanding the tone patterns of the language in real native speeches.

Colloquial Yorùbá consists of 15 chapters with a separate introductory section. This introductory section presents the alphabet and sounds of the language including significant features like tones and nasal vowels which gives the learners a foundational knowledge of the sound structure of the language. The first and second chapters are based on conversation at a friend’s house and include learning activities such as forming greeting, showing appreciation and asking polar questions. The third chapter “Sísòrò nípa ènìyàn,” (Talking about people) demonstrates how to talk about people’s nationalities, likes and dislikes and age (this title is also repeated for chapter 8, where the author explores other aspects of talking about people). Chapter 4, “Wíwá ilé láti rẹ̀ntì,” (Looking for a house to rent) discusses housing and rent; chapter 5, “Nńkan ojà àti aṣọ,” (Market and clothing things) examines market products and clothing; chapter 6, “Sise oúnjé,” (Cooking food) focuses on cooking and also how to ask questions on types of foods. In chapter 7, “Nípa ilera ara

re,” (About your health) and chapter 9, *Şisàpèjúwe èniyàn àti ilú,*” (Describing people and places, the author explains how to talk about one’s health and describing people and towns. The remaining chapters (10–14) deal mostly with building the learner’s ability to ask questions in different situations such as finding one’s way, fixing a problem, visiting new places and making inquiries from people to find out more information about them. Essentially, the author cover different contexts of situations where Yoruba could be used in interaction by native speakers. The chapter “Grammar summary” sums up the key grammatical points of the previous chapters and offers brief linguistic details on parts of speech in Yoruba.

Every chapter is followed by a list of important vocabulary words used in the dialogues and utterances. These lists are useful to the learner since they offer insights into the denotations of words in isolation separately from the context of the dialogues and translation. Hence, aside from the functional knowledge of the language that is targeted through the dialogues and conversations, the list helps with vocabulary development of learners. The “Language Points” provide grammatical information such as tense and aspect, prepositions, verbal particles, plural markers, etc., and structures such as questions forms, noun phrases, etc, while the “Culture Notes” introduce cultural information where appropriate to the learner, for instance, a young boy prostrating to greet and a young girl kneeling to greet older people in the Yoruba community (p. 17). The exercises given at the end of every unit help the learner to practice the lessons while the “Key to Exercises” (pp. 223–261) serves as means for learners to evaluate their progress in the language.

Colloquial Yorùbá is a pedagogical textbook presented in a functional context and not just a formal context showing linguistic analysis of Yoruba structures. The author presents aspects of Yoruba language in real situations where native speakers use language paying attention also to sociocultural aspects of the language such as gestures, power relations, age, etc. The self-assessment provision for the learner, through the answers given at the back of the book, contributes to the author’s goal of helping learners learn Yoruba even without a teacher.

This book will be a valuable resource for those interested in learning Yoruba or even working on the language from a more functional perspective in terms of dialogues and conversations. However, more vivid pictorial representations may be expedient in facilitating the learners’ progress in the language. For instance, the diagram (eyes and arms) used to illustrate health in (pp. 93) may just only connote parts of the body without situating them in a health context (more relevant pictures may also be used). Also, some chapter titles are repeated (chapters 3 and 8) which might be confused by a learner as talking about the same thing. In fact, chapter 8 could have been more aptly

named “Talking about Family” since that was the main goal of the chapter. In any case, *Colloquial Yoruba* is a fascinating and functional contribution to the study of the Yoruba language and will undoubtedly enhance the proficiency of learners in the language.

