

# **Yoruba Language Use in Lagos State Legislative Assembly: Challenges and Prospects**

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## **Abstract**

This study examined the challenges and prospects of the use of Yoruba Language for legislative business in the Lagos State House of Assembly. The Assembly adopted the use of Yoruba language for its deliberation every Thursday in 2007. This study made use of in-depth interview guide to elicit responses from research subjects, who were drawn from among the Legislative officers, aides, and assistants, totalling ten. In addition, we consulted archival notes, Order Paper, Proceedings of the House, newspapers, and other recorded material. Our findings revealed that there are insufficient number of Yoruba legislative reporters, and some legislators are still trying to grapple with the use of Yoruba. Similarly, most statutory committee members do not speak Yoruba language during meetings or public hearings. The prospects of the initiative include, among others, bringing legislative practice to the doorstep of the common man. The House has now passed a bill into law making Yoruba language compulsory both as a subject and a language in Lagos State public schools toward the growth of the economy of Lagos State.

**Keywords:** Legislature, Yoruba, Bill, Order paper, Economy

## **Introduction**

Nigeria's attainment of democratic rule on May 29, 1999, reached its heights in political history. However, 22 years after democracy, it has grown

from its initial stage to a seemingly ideal type of government far different from military rule. The legislature in particular has grown to the extent that both the National Assembly (Upper and lower chambers) as well as the State Legislative Assembly are saddled with various responsibilities by the Nigeria 1999 Nigeria Constitution in order to further deepen democracy growth.

The Nigeria 1999 Constitution conferred power on the State Legislative Assembly to make law for the state through section 4 (6)-7. This section also empowered the State legislature to enact laws the unity and peaceful existence as well as any other matter. The second schedule of the constitution includes the Concurrent Legislative that lists and sets out various state legislatures' roles.

The Nigeria 1999 Constitution also provides in section 128 (1-2) that; State Legislative Assembly is empowered by resolution of the state government to make an inquiry or probe; any issue or matter on which it has the power to make laws; Or better still, has the responsibility for dispensing passed by the State Legislative Assembly; administering monies by such House; enact laws on any matter within its legislative competencies and correct any lapses in existing laws; and exposes wastage and virement in the disbursement of fund appropriated by it within its legislative competences.

Section 129 of the Nigeria 1999 constitution empowered the State legislature or its statutory committee members the means to get evidence (Written or oral ) and; to assess all persons as well as witnesses whose evidence may be material; to require such evidence to be given oath; to summon any person in Nigeria to give evidence at any place or produce any document or other items in his possession or under his control and as well examine him as a witness and; to issue warrant compelling the attendance of any person. The State legislative through its special and standing committee examine the whole daily activities and engagements of government (MDA) -Ministries, Department, Agencies, Corporation, units or other agencies for probity, accountability and effective performance and checking of excesses and corruption.

Members of the State Legislative Assembly make use of bills (Laws) motions, resolutions and deliberations in the hallow chamber to give expression to the needs of their constituents. Members also bring issues that affect their constituencies under matters of urgent public importance to the attention of the House. Oftentimes, when these issues are raised at the hallow chamber, the whole members led by the speaker make a necessary discussion out of them and take prompt action.

Section 120 (3) -(4) of the Nigeria 1999 constitution conferred on the State Legislative Assembly power of exercising its oversight roles (which include the control and monitoring of government funds). The State legislature is mandated to give approval to the annual appropriation bill; the mandate to assess the entire sum of funds given to a statutory corporation or other government

agencies to meet public expenses and as well invite such organ of government where need be to make clarification before the State Assembly or brief the appropriate legislative committee on their daily preoccupations.

Section 271 (1), 197 (c) and 198 of the Nigeria 1999 constitution empowered the state legislature with screening responsibilities of public officers such as commissioners, Chief Judge of the State and the Chairmen and members of statutory bodies or agencies under the state government. In the same vein, section 103 of the Nigeria 1999 constitution empowered the state legislature to conduct an investigation into any public complaints or grievances and to summon any person involved, either public or private to give clarification on any matter before the House.

The State legislature is conferred with the power of impeachment through section 198 of the Nigeria 1999 constitution. The legislature may remove the state governor or his deputy through impeachment. When either or both are found guilty of negligent in carrying out their professional responsibilities. Similarly, the Nigeria 1999 constitution also states through section 292 procedures and modalities for the removal of the State Chief Judge by the State Legislative Assembly where he is unable to perform the roles saddled with his office or for dereliction of duty of the Code of Conduct. Hence, the Lagos Legislative Assembly is one of the 36 States' Legislative assemblies. It is the second arm of the Lagos State Government. Just like other states' legislative Assemblies, it is established by section 90 of the Nigeria 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It comprised forty (40) legislators elected to represent their constituencies for a period of four years. The Lagos State Legislative Assembly has witnessed nine (9) Assembly sessions (1<sup>st</sup> Republic: October 1<sup>st</sup> 1963 –January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966), (2<sup>nd</sup> Republic: 1<sup>st</sup> LAHA Assembly, October 1979-September1983), 2<sup>nd</sup> LAHA Assembly, October 1983 –December 1983), 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic, January 1992 –November 1993), 4<sup>th</sup> Republic: 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1999 – 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2003), 5<sup>th</sup> Assembly: June 2003 – May 2007), 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly (June 2007-May 2015), 7<sup>th</sup> Assembly: June 2015 – 2019 ) 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly: June 2019 – May 2023).

However, in 2007, the tenure of Speaker, Adeyemi Ikuforiji adopted the motion to use Yoruba language for legislative business in Lagos Legislative Assembly on February 5. This motion stipulates that at every Thursday sitting, the Yoruba language would be adopted as means of deliberation as well as communication in the legislative chamber. 14 years after, this study tried to examine the likely challenges and prospects of this law for effective governance in Lagos State.

## **Research Questions**

**(RQ1) What are the challenges confronting Yoruba Language use of Legislative business in the Lagos State Legislative Assembly?**

(RQ2) What are the prospects of Yoruba language Use of Legislative business in the Lagos Legislative Assembly?

### **Lagos State Legislative Assembly (LSLA)**

The Lagos State legislative law-making arm of the Lagos State Government. It is one of the 36 State legislative Assembly created by Section 90 of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution as amended and mandated to legislate as well as carry out representative and oversight roles. The Lagos legislative Assembly Lagos State is located in the state government secretariat in Ikeja. The All Progressives Congress (APC), the political party controlling Lagos State, presently controls the legislative Assembly. The first legislative assembly came into being on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1979 under the administration of Alhaji Kayode Lateef Jakande. The legislative assembly the present study is attempting to examine was inaugurated on 6 June 2011. The House of Assembly comprised 40 legislatures voted in by their constituencies for four (4) years. The speaker of the 9th Lagos legislative Assembly is 'Rt. Hon. Mudashiru Obasa.

The forty (40) constituencies in Lagos are varied across the twenty (20) Local Governments. Accordingly, besides the 1999 constitution, the state legislature has the business, rules and standing order through which, it coordinates its internal affairs and other daily engagements. The business, rules and Standing Order is the major tool of the House. It serves as the official regulatory document guiding the internal affairs, proceedings, operations and conducts of its members. The 1999 Constitution Section 101 provide that "a legislative Assembly has the mandate to coordinates its daily procedure for summoning and going on recess".

Again, Omoyele (2011) claims that there is a salient constitutional provision in the State Legislative Assembly. Section 90 of the Nigeria 1999 constitution state that there shall be a state legislative Assembly for each state in Nigeria. Each of these States shall have a legislative Assembly that consists of more than the number of seats that the State has in the House of Representatives.

Section 92 (1) of the Nigeria 1999 Constitution provides that both Speaker and his Deputy must be duly elected by the members from among themselves. In the absence of the Speaker and his deputy, section 94 (2) of the 1999 states that such member of the legislature elected for a purpose shall preside. Section 96(1) of the Nigeria 1999 constitution stipulates that the Quorum of the

State Legislative Assembly shall be one-third of all members of the sitting legislators.

Section 97 of the Nigeria 1999 Constitution provides that the business of the State Legislative Assembly shall be deliberated in English, but the state legislature may use the English language to conduct the business of the legislature as well as one or more languages spoken in the State by resolution. Section 98 (2) of the Nigeria 1999 Constitution states that any decisions in the state legislature require a simple majority. Section 100 (1) of the Nigeria 1999 constitution mandates State Legislative Assembly to enact laws through bills passed by the state legislative Assembly and assented to by the Executive Governor.

Section 100 (5) states that the Executive Governor have the right to withhold assent and the bill passed by the state legislative Assembly. This bill when withhold becomes law and the assent of the Governor shall not be necessary. Section 104 of the Nigeria 1999 Constitution states that the state legislative Assembly shall deliberate for a period of not less than 181 days in a year. Section 105 (1) of the constitution states that the state legislative Assembly stands dissolved at the conclusion of a four-year tenure.

Section 105 (3) of the Nigeria 1999 Constitution states that the elected Governor of a state is conferred with the power to make a proclamation for the sitting of the first session of the state legislature immediately after being elected. Section 107 of the Constitution states that a person is deemed qualified for election if he is Nigerian; attained the age of 30 years; educated up to at least the Senior School Certificate hold or its equivalent; is a member of a registered political party and is sponsored by the party he belongs. Section 108 (1) of the same Constitution states that a Governor of a state is to attend a meeting of the state Legislative House of Assembly to deliver an address on state affairs and at times to make a statement on germane issues.

Section 92 (1) of the 1999 Constitution makes provision for the Speaker and his Deputy to be elected by the members of the state legislature. Rules 31 (a) of the Lagos State legislative Assembly provides that: "Nomination for the election of leaders and Whips shall be by the majority of the Members of the respective political parties and approved by a majority of members of the state legislative assembly "The principal of the House includes: Speaker who is responsible for interpreting the rules of the House and keeping order maintain a quorum in the Chamber and Gallery. He ensures that Rules 51 of the House has complied with by members and also interprets the Business and Standing Order of the State Legislative Assembly. Accordingly, (Rule 24 (6) as well as the Constitution vide House (Rule 24 (6) as provides that except as stated in the Nigeria 1999 constitution, any question for put up decision shall be decided by a majority of members at the legislative sitting. In case of stalemate

during a debate, the Speaker or the chairman of the state legislative shall cast a vote for the issue to be resolved.

The Deputy Speaker nomination and election are clearly stated by Section 95 (1) of the Nigeria 1999 Constitution that “in the absence of the Speaker, his deputy shall preside “The Deputy Speaker is the assistant of the Speaker of the state legislative and performs all his functions and duties. In the absence of both the Speaker and his deputy, the Nigeria 1999 constitution provides for the Speaker Pro-temporee in Section 95 (2) and by virtue of Rule 26 of the state legislative Assembly. In Lagos State Legislative Assembly, the majority leader assumes these roles based on mutual agreement among members. The majority leader is nominated and installed by fellow legislators as prescribed in Rule 27 of the Lagos State Legislative Assembly. The majority Leader is the master strategist of the state legislative assembly.

### **6<sup>th</sup> Lagos State Legislative Assembly**

6<sup>th</sup> Lagos State legislative Assembly Session adopted the motion for the Yoruba language as a tool of Legislative business. The Assembly was installed by His Excellency, the State Governor, Babatunde Raji Fashola on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2007. According to Omoyele (2011), Mr Olatunji Taiwo was the Clerk, and Adeyemi Sabit Ikuforiji was re-elected as the Speaker for the second term while Hon. Adefunmilayo Tejuosho was elected the Deputy Speaker. Unfortunately, Mrs Tejuosho was impeached and replaced by Bola Badmus-Olujobi (Amuwo-Odofin 11). Hon Avoseh Hodewu Suru (Badagry1) was elected as the minority leader and was replaced by Hon Taofeek Adedoyin Adeniyi, (PDP) member from (Ibeju – Lekki Constituency 1). In the same session, on Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2010, the House lost one of its legislators, Hon Olasiji Rotimi Sotomiwa (Ikorodu 2), after a brief illness. A Bye-Election was conducted on Thursday, December 23, 2010. The Bye-Election was won by Olugbenga Akinwale Oshin of the People Democratic Party who was sworn-in on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2011.

The principal officers of this session also include among others, Hon Kolawole Taiwo (Ajeromi-Ifelodun 1) (Majority Leader), Hon Taofeek Adedoyin Adeniyi (Ibeju – Lekki 1) (PDP), Hon Abdul Rasaan Mobolaji (Surulere 11), Hon Dr Adeyeye Ajibayo (Kosofe 1) (Chief Whip) Hon (Mrs) Akande Lola Fibiola, (Deputy Chief Whip).

Yoruba language use for deliberation in the House takes place on Thursday. The Votes and Proceeding of the House is prepared in the same language Yoruba is also adopted as a language of conversation (for presenting a motion which is a matter of urgent public importance, information from the governor). The Thursday deliberation includes putting on Yoruba traditional wear.

Ikuforiji also headed the **7th legislative assembly** inaugurated on July 4, 2011. The legislative session runs its course till July 3, 2015. The Deputy Speaker is Hon. Kolawole Taiwo.

It is imperative to state that due to the success of the Yoruba language used in the Legislature, the Lagos State Government took a step further by passing into law a bill titled the Yoruba Language Preservation and Promotion Bill. The bill also referred to as Yoruba Language Preservation and Promotion Law 2018 attempts at providing for the preservation and promotion of the use of the Yoruba language and for connected purposes. According to the Bill, it is compulsory for all school students (Primary, secondary and tertiary institutions) in the state to include teaching the Yoruba Language as a core subject at all levels. The bill also provides that all the laws in the state would be translated into the Yoruba Language.

The law also mandates all state government-owned tertiary institutions to include the use of the Yoruba Language in the General Studies (GNS) courses. The law also provides that: “Yoruba Language shall be an acceptable means of communication between all stakeholders in the state.

Section 2 of the law makes provisions for those who contravene the law. The law stipulates that any institution found guilty of contravening it commits an offence and is liable on the first violation to issuance of a warning and on a subsequent violation, be shut down and make to pay a fine of N500,000.00. The law makes it compulsory for all prospective candidates seeking admission into tertiary institutions owned by Lagos State Government to secure a credit pass in Yoruba at SSCE. The Lagos Yoruba Preservation Law is in line with the International Mother Tongue Language Day of UNESCO designed to ensure the survival of indigenous languages.

## **Method of Study**

The study is a qualitative paper with the interview as the research method and the interview guide as a research instrument. The study generated responses from ten staff of the Lagos State legislative Assembly, mostly, Legislative staff and Legislative assistants. The study also made use of archival material, legislative Order Paper, Votes and Proceedings of the House as well as newspaper and other secondary recorded material.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### **What are the challenges confronting Yoruba as a tool of deliberation in the Lagos State Legislative Assembly?**

All respondents (10) are of the opinion that there are many challenges confronting the Yoruba language use as a tool of deliberation in the Lagos

State Legislative Assembly. These respondents claimed that the challenges include the inadequate provision of Yoruba interpreters; insufficient number of Yoruba legislative reporters among Legislative staff, the designation of Thursday only for Yoruba deliberation; the inability of legislators to pronounce Yoruba words, statements and deep interpretations; non-use of Yoruba language in House committee meetings and Public hearings; inadequate use of Yoruba for writing memoranda, petition and complaints by invited publics to the state legislative public hearings; Impromptu preparation of order paper in Yoruba, mixing up of English words and statement at times during deliberations by legislative members.

In the first place, all the responses are of the opinion that there is inadequate provision of Yoruba interpreters in the House; this affects the smooth preparation of the order paper and other items necessary for the weekly legislative business. According to Respondent 1, there are not enough Yoruba interpreters in the House. Yoruba interpreters are those professionals who are trained in the skill of recording legislative proceedings and interpreting them into a local language. This invariably slows down the operation of the legislative deliberations during Thursday deliberation.

Again, respondent 3 stated that there is an insufficient number of Yoruba legislative reports among legislative staff. According to him, a Yoruba legislative reporter is a professional who studied B.A. (Yoruba language) in tertiary institutions and is trained in the use of Yoruba for reporting legislative business. This professional is trained in the use of Yoruba language in the preparation of Votes and proceedings, Order paper, Hazards and even the presentation of matters of urgent public importance. The insufficient number of these professionals hinders the smooth operation of Legislative activities on Thursday.

Respondent 2 emphasised that there is the problem of pronunciation of Yoruba words, statements and even interpretation among legislators. The respondents claimed that most legislative members while making presentations in the hallow chambers find it difficult to use of deep Yoruba language proverbs, quotes and even folktales to illustrate their presentation. This situation, according to Olajide (2021), compounds the problem of Legislators to give deep understanding of their expression and thought.

Respondent 4 revealed that the use of Yoruba language is not being used in all the activities of the House. According to her, some of the legislative members still do not use Yoruba language during the committee meetings. According to her, a committee meeting is one of the Legislative functions of the legislators. The legislative Assembly has statutory committees and also puts in place an ad-hoc committee to address emergencies. The English language is still widely used in the Yoruba language.



Respondent 5 equally shares the same view, confirming that Statutory committees such as Human Rights and Public Petitions, Physical Planning and Urban Development, Housing, Infrastructure and Water Development still transact their committees' deliberation in the English Language.

According to respondent 6, the Legislative Assembly designated Thursday as the only day for using Yoruba language out of three days (Monday, Tuesday and Thursday) meant for Legislative business. To the respondent, the choice of one day is inadequate. In his view, "Monday should have been included among the days for the Yoruba language. Monday is the first day of the week and the busiest day out of all the rest days in the week. Monday offers a greater number of people the need to have access to legislative deliberation and participation".

Respondents 7 and 8 are of the view that even the Yoruba language use in the Lagos legislative Assembly hinders equal opportunity for the heterogeneous residents in Lagos. According to these respondents, "Lagos is cosmopolitan in nature and as well heterogeneous. Aside Yoruba people, there is a sizeable number of Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, Ibibio, Anang, Nupe, Ebirá, Ogu and Ijaw people residing in Lagos. These people may not understand Yoruba language and are therefore denied the opportunity of understanding the Yoruba deliberation of the House.

Both Respondents 9 and 10 are not happy with the hurried manner in which the Order paper (One of the tools used for deliberation in the Legislative) is being prepared. According to them, "due to the insufficient number of Legislative reporters in the House, the Order paper is also prepared in an impromptu manner. The situation is just that the use of Yoruba is still in the embryonic state and the staff involved in the preparation of Yoruba Order paper are just learning the trend"

### **(RQ2) What are the prospects of Yoruba language Legislative business in the Lagos Legislative Assembly?**

All the respondents pointed out some salient factors as major prospects of Yoruba language use for deliberation in the Lagos Legislative Assembly. First, it does not address the heterogeneous nature of Lagos. It is a platform for showcasing the viability of the mother tongue for legislative business. It is a means of further promoting Yoruba's tangible culture in the global sphere. It is a viable means of disseminating legislative deliberation to grassroots and dwellers.

According to these respondents, Yoruba Language is also being adopted as a medium of communication during Public Hearings. The language now affords constituents and voters the platform for interactivity and interdependency.

The respondents are also of the opinion that during stakeholders' meetings, the grassroots dwellers stand to contribute meaningfully, especially in the area of education, health and even transportation matters. The use of Yoruba language will also make it possible for visitors to the legislative complex to express their thoughts even in a creative way thus paving way for meaningful participation in the legislature.

### **Challenges**

It was discovered in the course of carrying out the study that: there are insufficient number of Yoruba legislative reporters among Legislative staff; Yoruba deliberation comes up only on Thursdays. Some legislators are unable to pronounce Yoruba words, statements and read Yoruba presentations fluently. Most committees do not communicate in the Yoruba language during meetings and Public hearings on the designated day. Members of the public have not fully embraced the use of Yoruba for writing memoranda, petition and complaints to the House; preparation of order paper in Yoruba done at the last minute due to inadequate number of Yoruba Legislative staff; and that some legislators usually mix up English and Yoruba language during deliberations.

### **Prospects**

Yoruba Language use will ultimately address the diverse need of Yoruba people in Lagos; further promoting Yoruba culture in the global sphere. It is a viable means of disseminating legislative deliberation to grassroots and dwellers. The Yoruba Language has the potential of being adopted as a language of communication during Public Hearings. There is a high possibility of constituents and voters to adopt Yoruba language use with the legislators. There is also a high possibility of rural dwellers to contribute meaningfully in Stakeholders' meeting with legislators in the Yoruba language; the use of Yoruba language will also make it possible for visitors to the House to express their thought freely thus paving way for meaningful participation.

### **Conclusion**

As revealed by the study, the benefits of the adoption of Yoruba language use in the Lagos legislative Assembly outweigh its challenges, thereby making it a welcome development. It is a way of promoting the mother tongue of the majority of the residents for the conduct of governance.

The study recommended that the Lagos State government will do better by instituting Yoruba as the language for financial transactions in both bilateral and multilateral relations and as well promote Yoruba foods and other tangible aspects of the culture. The study recommended that government should

abolish the tradition in primary and secondary schools where Yoruba language is considered a vernacular. There is also the need for the review of Yoruba Language Preservation and Promotion Law 2018.

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