

# The Role of Yorùbá Dialects in Selected Yorùbá Novels

**AROWOSEGBE Deborah Bamidele (Ph. D)**

Department of Linguistics and Languages, Adékúnlé Ajáṣin University, Àkùṅbá Àkókó,  
Oṅdó State, Nigeria, West Africa.

## Abstract:

There are variants of Yorùbá dialects, which are mostly in oral form. They are reduced to writing to become a national language of the Yorùbá people of South-West, Nigeria. Anybody using Yorùbá dialects where the Yorùbá language should be used is regarded as uneducated, uncultured and lacking in prestige. Observation today reveals that Yorùbá dialects are present in many Yorùbá novels that are purported to be written exclusively in the Yorùbá language. This work, therefore, using a reading method, examines the role of Yorùbá dialects in the work of three selected novelists: Olúmúyìwá (2012), Adágbádá (2014) and Awé (2015). The Sociology of Literature, from the perspective of the Mirror Image Approach, is adopted for this work. The theory sees literature as a product of society. Our findings show that the novelists promote the use of Yorùbá dialects, regardless of their relationship with the speech community. The sociology of literature employed suggests that the use of dialects in novels serves specific purposes, including: to demonstrate the authors' affection for the dialects, to preserve them from extinction, and to show that the novelists are proficient in both the Yorùbá language and the dialects depicted. The paper suggests that more novelists should incorporate dialects from various Yorùbá communities into their works of art to help preserve these dialects from extinction.

**Keywords:** Àkúrẹ̀, Dialects, Ìjẹ̀sà, Novelists, Yorùbá, Yorùbá Novels

## Introduction

According to Barber (2001), language differentiates humanity from animals. It makes human culture possible. People refer to it as the pillar and bulwark of human means of communication. Ògúnṣiyì and Adéoyè (2012) assert that language was mainly oral, such that needed information could only be stored in a person's head through recitation, cramming and so on. It is beneficial for the language of any ethnic group to be written down (Johnson, 1921). Today, the way people view the Yorùbá language has undergone tremendous changes from the early, realistic attempts made by missionaries, who were pioneers, to reduce it into a written form to facilitate evangelism. From the initial stage of human races and the Yorùbá mythology about creation, one could say that humanity has a universal language. In Biblical historical documentation about humanity and language, it is written in the Bible that: "Now, the whole earth had one language and one speech" (Gen. 11:1). The Bible explains further that the Lord observes that the people are of one language and that no one can stop them from doing whatever they plan to do. He, therefore, made them go in different directions. The biblical account depicts the creator himself confusing the one language being spoken by human beings because they had purposed in their minds to build a tower known as the "Tower of Babel" that could reach heaven to avoid being destroyed (Gen. 11).

Due to the existence of variants of a language, which emanated from a standard language, which are not mutually intelligible, humanity has been thrown into 'confusion' attributed to the metaphorical city of 'babel' in the Bible. Consequently, humanity, a matter of necessity, has to learn or study dialects of different languages on earth to facilitate means of communication or for academic research purposes. The main challenge, in the study of different variants of Yorùbá dialect, today, is how linguistics; dialectologists to be precise, could tackle the perennial problem of some Yorùbá dialects that are on the verge of extinction would be salvaged and documented. Barber (2000) asserts that languages sometimes die out because of competition from another language. The Yorùbá language like all other languages had been in spoken form before it was reduced to writing, which many linguists worldwide have researched deeply into either its standard form or its dialects (Johnson 1921). According to Finnegan (2004), dialect is a language variety in its totality- including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, pragmatics and any other aspect of the linguistic system. McGregor (2009) believes that dialect variation deals with language varieties with their peculiarities of grammar, phonetics or lexicon associated with different regions.

The written form has since been regarded as the standard form of the Yorùbá language otherwise known as the Yorùbá language (Adébòwálé & Olúmúyìwá, 2016). It is pertinent to note here that the Yorùbá language incorporates several features and lexis from other Yorùbá dialects. Yorùbá language is realised in its dialects. Yorùbá language has a place of honour among the various dialects because it is the only variant socially defined within the linguistic area. It is the mother tongue of most of the children of urban dwellers. It is also used in education, politics, religion, and broadcast/print as pointed out by Olúmúyìwá (1994). Observation shows that the oral form of the language is noticed in some of the Yorùbá novels.

There are many variants of Yorùbá dialects. These include, Ègbá, Òyó, Ìjẹ̀sà, Àkúrẹ̀, Mòbà, Èkó, Ìkálẹ̀, Òwò, Ìjẹ̀bú, Èkìtì and Oṅdó dialects. Observation shows that the variants of Yoruba dialects that are supposed to be in oral form only are depicted in Yoruba novels as shown in our explanation below. Some people acquire different nicknames or appellations through the different dialects

spoken by them such as Bàbá Ìjèbú (father of Ìjèbú), Bàbá Ègbá (father of Ègbá) and Bàbá Ìjèsà (father of Ìjèsà).

Each of the variants of the Yorùbá dialects is geographically and socially restricted. Less attention was paid to the study of these dialects. Awóbùlúyì (1998) called on Yorùbá scholars to give more attention to the study of the variants of the dialects of the Yorùbá language. He believes that the study of these dialects has the potential of helping to clarify certain morphological issues that are likely to remain obscure in the standard variety of the language. Today, many linguists have been working tremendously either on the standard form of the Yorùbá language or the dialects. Yorùbá scholars have risen to study aspects of the phonology, morphology and syntax of Yorùbá dialects. Such people include Adéwólé (1999), Fábùnmi (2001), Olúmúyìwá (2014) and Abódèrìn (2014). This work is a descriptive study. It focuses on how both Yorùbá language and Yorùbá dialects are spoken in the society as depicted in three selected Yorùbá novels where their use is apparent. It examines the role played by the use of the Yorùbá dialects in the different Yorùbá novels. This paper is not concerned with any linguistic classification of Yorùbá dialects, instead; it is concerned with the use of Yorùbá dialects in selected Yorùbá novels and what society can deduce from their use.

Although Yorùbá novelists are expected to write their novels in the standard Yorùbá language yet, it is noticed that the use of different variants of Yoruba dialects is apparent in their work. This paper therefore, examines the role of Yorùbá dialects among Yorùbá people as depicted in some selected Yorùbá novels to find out how and why the novelists use the dialects where they are to write standard Yorùbá or Yorùbá language. Three selected Yorùbá novels examined in this work are: Olúmúyìwá (2012) *Oko Aga*, Adágbádá (2014) *Šé Dandan Ni?* and Awé (2015). *Ìgbà Layé*. It is worth saying here that Tèmitópé Olúmúyìwá hails from Àkúré, Fadékèmi Adágbádá is from Abèòkúta in Ègbá land while Dèbò Awé is an Ìjèsà man. It is believed that the knowledge of this will help in our analysis of the novels.

### **Synopsis of the Novels**

Tèmitópé Olúmúyìwá (2012) *Oko Aga*

*Oko Aga* depicts different types of crime. Banks are broken into, and both old and young are kidnapped. Many lives are lost every day. Everybody is in a state of panic. Police officers seem incapable of solving the problem. The Commissioner of Police gets the mandate of the president to find a solution to the problem. Through the help of DIG Idowu and her team, many perpetrators of the crime are arrested, and most people abducted regain their freedom.

Fadékèmi Adágbádá (2014) *Šé Dandan Ni?*

Mopélólá, Adélaní's wife has five female children for her husband. The husband who wants a male child marries Mótáyò. To his dismay, Mótáyò's first issue for him is female. Mótáyò, with the help of a juju man, has a male child with only the genital showing him as a male child, all other characteristics are that of a female. At the end of the day, Mopélólá, the first wife has a male child in her old age. Mótáyò's only 'son' commits suicide while all Mopélólá's six children are successful in life and they take care of their parents including Mótáyò.

Dèbò Awé (2015) *Ìgbà Layé*

*Ìgbà Layé* is about Apùlárí's experience as an infant until he is out of primary school. He lives with many people in towns and hamlets and even goes outside Yorùbá land. At the initial stage, he speaks only his dialect, which is Ìjèsà dialect, but after a few years in primary school, he speaks Yorùbá language fluently.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The sociology of literature from the perspective of the mirror image approach is adopted for this work. The theory sees the relationship between a work of art and society as one of the constant inter-relationships and that each one affects and is affected by the other. The main preoccupation of the sociology of literature is the understanding of the relationship between literature and society (Adékèmi, 2013).

The novelist is part of the society; he has to draw his materials from his immediate society if he expects his art to have a direct social bearing. Louis de Bonald (1754-1840) popularized the sociology of literature from the perspective of the mirror image approach. he emphasizes that a literature critic must research deeply to know whether what the literature is talking about resembles what is happening in society. Bonald cited in Taiwo (2013) that through a careful reading of any nation's literature, one could tell what his people had been. He believes that a work of art does not exist in isolation; creative writers gather inspiration and materials for their literary works in the society that gave birth to them. This study employs the sociology of literature from the perspective of the mirror image approach to examine the use of the Yorùbá dialect in selected Yorùbá novels. It is believed that this theory will give us an insight into how and why Yorùbá novelists use Yorùbá dialects where they are expected to use the Yorùbá language.

### **The Role of Yorùbá Dialects in Selected Yorùbá Novels**

This section focuses on why the novelists use the Yorùbá dialects in their novels.

#### **The Novelists depict that Speakers of Yorùbá Dialects are Illiterates**

In Yorùbá society, any speaker of a dialect where he is expected to speak the standard form of the language is considered illiterate, uncultured and lacking in prestige. Adágbádá depicts this when Káfáyá's father, an Ègbá man notices that children of the same

parents come first in their different classes and says in Ègbá dialect:

‘Há haà. Òjóró ti wónú ihun ẹ́ n ẹ́ yí ó. Àrí? Àrí Sẹ́ àwọn ọmọ Adégoróyè nikan rẹ̀ wà líbí, àbí bó ẹ́ jí pé àwọn nikan rẹ̀ n múpò kìn-in-ní? Àríí, bá nẹ̀ re wón mowé tó àbẹ̀yin tíṣa nẹ̀ dẹ̀ ti n gba ribá? Bí kò bá jí báà, sọmọ mùrẹ̀n-ẹ̀n yí mowé kò dẹ̀ sí lÁyédé mó, àfọmọ Adélaní Adégoróyè?’ (*Sé Dandan Ni?* p. 27)

Hà. There is a cheat in what you are doing. Are the children of Adégoróyè the only children here? How come they are the only people that come first? Are they so brilliant or their teachers are taking bribes? If not so, are there no other brilliant children in Ayédé except the children of Adélaní Adégoróyè?

This man’s reaction shows that he is illiterate, and does not value Education. He takes his children out of school as he wishes according to the head teacher. He does not know that examinations do not require a bribe; it requires reading. He believes that Western education is not the sole vehicle that can make one succeed in life. He says:

‘Şebí Dèlaní Adégoróyè yí jẹ́ bàbá àwọn ọmọ nẹ̀ kò kàwé, ọkan pàtàkì i wà lẹ̀ẹ̀rín àwọn yí wà lÁyédé’. (*Sé Dandan Ni?*, p. 28)

‘After all, Dèlaní Adégoróyè who is the father of the children did not go to school, and he is one of the important personalities in Ayédé’.

Bàbá Ìjẹ̀sà, an illiterate, speaks the Ìjẹ̀sà dialect throughout the novel despite living among the people who speak the Yorùbá Language.

In a context, it amazed him that a woman drives a car. Baba Ìjẹ̀sà, as usual, speaks Ìjẹ̀sà dialect while asking for clarity from Adigun:

‘Jàre, ọ̀gá àgbà, obinrin kí a mí wò ó ló wa mọtò dé beé lẹ̀rínkàn?’

‘Bẹ̀ ni bàbá’

‘Obinrin mí wa ọ̀kò lílá bẹ̀ẹ̀? Ẹ́ ẹ́ sí ọ̀kùnrin nínú ìnyan ọ̀sìṣẹ́ rẹ̀ ní? Kòrò bá lọ yíó síkọ?’ (*Sé Dandan Ni?*, p. 39)

‘Please, head teacher, is this the woman that drove that vehicle?’

‘Yes, father’

‘A woman driving such a big vehicle?’ Is there no man among her workers? What if there is a problem?’

In the above extract, Bàbá Ìjẹ̀sà is illiterate. This is depicted by the type of question he asks. He is a novice at a new development in the modern society. He speaks only Ìjẹ̀sà dialect although; people respect him as an elderly man in the village. This confirms the fact that some of those who speak Yorùbá dialect can neither read nor write but they may not lack in prestige.

### **The Yorùbá Communities are Heterogeneous**

Another point worth noting here is that the novelists depict that Yorùbá communities are heterogeneous. The community portrayed in the novel; *Sé Dandan Ni?* speaks Yorùbá language, yet both Bàbá Ìjẹ̀sà, Káfáyá’s father, Ìyá Ègbá and the community dialogue freely. Bàbá Ìjẹ̀sà does not speak Yorùbá language yet he understands whatever is being spoken in the said language. For instance, Mopélólá who does not know what to tell her husband for giving birth to a fifth baby girl and not a baby boy tells Bàbá Ìjẹ̀sà her mind in Yorùbá language. Bàbá Ìjẹ̀sà answers Mopélólá in Ìjẹ̀sà dialect thus:

‘Àwé, jòò jẹ́ mi gbòrán jàre. Kín lọ a ẹ́? Ẹ́ sihun wàa ẹ́ jù kí ọ́ a dúpẹ́ lọ Elédùmarè. .... Àwé, nujú rẹ̀ nù bí mó ti mí wò ó bẹ̀ẹ̀, kọ jeun, kọ gbómọ rẹ̀ mọ́ra, kọ a yin bàbá lógo. (*Sé Dandan Ni?* p. 10).

My friend, please, keep quiet. What will you do? There is nothing you can do than to thank God Almighty ..... My friend, wipe away your tears as I am looking at you right now, eat, carry your baby, and begin to praise God.

The same thing happens during the end of the year party where results are being called as earlier said. Bàbá Káfáyá, an Ègbá man speaks in annoyance when he learns that the three children in the first position in different classes are from the same parents. The head teacher who understands what he says, explains to him in Yorùbá language giving reasons for his children’s failure.

The same thing comes up in *Ìgbà Layé* when there is a pandemic of smallpox in Dèkína, Bàbá Ìjẹ̀bú says:

‘Sànponná wẹ̀m wò rẹ̀èè! Sànpónná wẹ̀è!! Ilẹ̀gbóná rẹ̀ a mí pè é!!! Ó lẹ́ jàbiròn. E è gbòògùn bọ̀rọ̀bọ̀rọ̀ (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 54)

This is a sign of smallpox! It is smallpox!! We call it Ilẹ̀gbóná!!! It is a fatal disease. It does not respond to treatment easily ...

He also suggests what they can do to combat the sickness and the people understand him.

When Mótáyò told her mother who is an Ègbá woman about the case of Adékúnlé who was having a congenital error problem, Ìyá Ègbá said;

‘Şebí mó n bẹ̀bì lówó rẹ̀ látíjọ́ yí wá pé kí ì n ẹ́ Dèkúnlé kò i má ẹ́ wẹ̀nẹ̀wẹ̀nẹ̀ bó ti n ẹ́. N bí n ẹ́ o wíí mí pé pépẹ́sì ìyá bàbá rẹ̀ ròò jọ. Kò tán lẹ̀ẹ̀ṣẹ̀nyín? Njẹ́ ìwọ́ wíí mí kóí má la tojú bolé olíṣẹ̀gù kiri. Sẹ́ bàbá rẹ̀ sá ti mò?’ (*Sé Dandan Ni?* P. 94).

I have been asking you since all these days why Adékúnlé has been behaving the way he does. You kept telling me that he takes after his paternal grandmother. Can you see yourself now? Did you ever tell me before you started going from one herbalist to the other? Is the father aware?’

The above conversation depicts that there is relationship between Yorùbá language and Yorùbá dialects. Speakers of Ijesa and Egba Dialects understand the standard form of Yorùbá language despite the difference between the levels of Yorùbá language and Yorùbá dialect. It is observed that the speakers of Yorùbá dialects converse freely with the speakers of the standard variety of the language; the difference between the levels poses no barrier to any person in any Yorùbá community. It connotes that all speakers of Yorùbá dialects understand themselves. All Yorùbá dialect speakers converse with Yorùbá language speakers freely without any interpreter. This is what operates in our society today. Many people move from their hometowns where they speak the home dialect, in search of green pastures. This brings about many dialects in a given community.

**Speakers of Yorùbá Dialects also speak the Yorùbá Language fluently**

The novelists also depict that speakers of Yorùbá dialects also speak the Yorùbá language. Awé (2015) makes Láyí speak two variants of Yorùbá dialects and Yorùbá language one after the other. Brother Láyí who plays with Apùlàrí and others says in Ọyọ dialect that:

‘Ìwọ ọ gbòhun tópeèèrẹ́ n wí nì? Sọ ọ fẹ́ gbọ ọ?’ (Ọyọ dialect)

‘Mọ fẹ́ gbọ, bùdà. Jọ sọ fún mi. Mà a fún in-in lákàrà jẹ ...’ (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 68)

‘Ohun tó mọ-on n wí rẹ̀ tó ọ bá mọ (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 68)

Don’t you hear what Bulbul says? Do you want to hear?

‘I want to hear, brother. Please, tell me. I will give you bean cake for your consumption ....’

‘This is what it says if you don’t know’

Láyí tells Apùlàrí in Yorùbá language what bulbul says:

Mo kú o!

N ọ tún jaata mọ-on!!! (Yorùbá language) (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 69)

I am dead!

I will no longer taste pepper!!!

Láyí is the same person that speaks in Ìjẹ̀sà dialect what bulbul says after eating pepper:

Kí mẹ́ jata kí mọ́ tú a jẹ,

Òògìrì pata kú lèbèlèbèbè (Ìjẹ̀sà Dialect) (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 69)

If I did not eat pepper, what else would I eat?

Òògìrì (a flavouring made from melon seeds) subdues the effect of pepper to the barest minimum

When Baba Àgbà rebukes Apùlàrí for taking gààrí with sugar, he says in Ìjẹ̀sà dialect that:

“.... ùwọ ọfọ̀n-on abèrèkẹ́ kàngíríí, olè, ọlẹ́ abikàn-ó-kù ló...”

(*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 99)

... you, a mouse, with a big cheek, thief, lazy person taking to another crime in addition to the one you are already having before

Baba Kékeré intervenes in the Yorùbá language saying:

‘Ááá! kí ló wà nínú sùgà kòbò. Sẹ́ ó jí owó rẹ́ nì? Àbówó ara rẹ́ ló fí rà á? .... ẹ́ fọ́mọ́ yí sílẹ́ jàrẹ ...’ (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 99)

What is in ten kobo worth of sugar? Did he steal the money? Did he buy it with his own money? There is nothing special in this at all ... please, leave the child alone...

Baba Àgbà, who speaks the Ìjẹ̀sà dialect, replies in Yorùbá language that:

“Hòò! N gbọ́, máa rà á o, máa kólẹ́ jẹ́dìjẹ́dì ságò ara rẹ́ o ...” (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 99)

Hòò! Do you hear? Continue to buy it, to be infected with dysentery.

It is noticed that Baba Àgbà, who rebukes Apùlàrí in Ìjẹ̀sà dialect, switches to Yorùbá language when reacting to his brother’s comment.

The code-switching in the above conversation shows that the speakers of Yorùbá dialects are also versed in the Yorùbá language. They only choose where and when to use each of the two languages. Examples of this abound in the society.

**Novelists Depict that Yorùbá Dialect is the Language of the Rural People.**

It is depicted in the novels that speakers of Yorùbá dialects are primarily from rural areas. They acquire the language from birth, as Adébòwálé & Olúmúyíwá (2016) have rightly noted that the Yorùbá language is realised in its dialects. Therefore, the original Yoruba dialects are spoken in rural areas, as opposed to the adulterated versions spoken in urban areas. This is depicted in Òdígèè hamlet where the parents of the children playing in the moonlight use Àkúrẹ́ dialect to call their children home.

“Àjàrí yaa sùn o!”

“Àyànná, ọ rì tó o, a bọ́ lúlẹ́.” (*Okò Aga*, p. 24)

“Àjàyí, come and sleep!”

“Àiná, that is enough, come home”

Àjàrí (Àjàyí) and Àyànná (Àiná) are Yorùbá names pronounced locally. This connotes that Yorùbá names have their dialectal forms.

Awé (2015) depicts that each Yorùbá community has its dialect. For instance, Ìjẹ̀sà people’s dialect is Ìjẹ̀sà dialect; everybody in Ìjẹ̀sà land speaks Ìjẹ̀sà dialect. Woléwolé who is a government worker speaks Ìjẹ̀sà dialect with his wife. For instance, the wife trying to discourage her husband from giving more food to their child says in Ìjẹ̀sà dialect that:

‘Lómọ ọ ti jẹun yó gbégbé nì in tún mí gbàjẹkùú kò! Ìn mọ mọ bọmọdéeé jẹè!! Ìn mọ mọ fí àjẹwọrotò kọè!!!’ (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 6)

You are giving leftover food to a child that has got a bellyful of food! Do not spoil this child!! Do not make him a glutton!!!

The husband answers in the same dialect that ‘Omọdẹ mọ “mọ yó”. Sẹbí àjẹkù mi nì? Òkèlè kàn dèè nì erè’ . . . (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 6)

A child does not know ‘I am satisfied’. Is it, not my leftover food? And it is just a morsel of food...

All Ìjẹ̀sà people in Dekina, Benue State, Nigeria, speak their dialect, despite being far from their homeland. Awé (2015) stresses the importance of speaking one’s dialect. Apulari’s father speaks Ìjẹ̀sà dialect when giving instructions to Timo, thus:

‘Ọ jàrẹ ùa bá mí dá ọmọ padà sùlẹ́ lódò bàbà Òkè-Àtà. Ojú kàn ẹ̀pà, ojú kàn erèè nì erè. Kúwájú báá sẹ́ ọ, ọniyàn á padà sáyìn ... Ko dèè bá mí fùròyìn hun-ún şẹ́lẹ́ sí Déítù tó ọ̀n ará ulé létí. Ko wí àn ọ̀n wí mọ mí bọ́ lárípẹ ...’ (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 56).

Please, help me return this child to Baba Òkè-Àta. He is my only child. If one cannot move forward, he had better go back ... Help me explain to our people what happened to Deitu. Tell them that I will soon come home ...

The ‘Òṣómàáló’ (Ìjèṣà cloth traders) do speak their dialect when asking for their money regardless of their debtor’s tribe. The novelist gives the idea of what they usually say when they are asking for their money. For instance;

Àbí Ua mumi kú ni ? Ku ọ bàá dá mi lóhùn kíá, gbádogbádo á gboó àgbádo lẹ ọ, ..... Urú òkó wo lo í kí mi jó rán? Wò ó, òṣò ni maa ló tí ọ fí a wóó mi kò mí’ (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 25).

Do you want to drink water that will kill you? If you do not answer me on time, you will be in trouble .... How dare you ask me to have my seat? Look, I will be in a crouch position until you pay me.

The sociology of literature, from the perspective of the mirror image approach employed, confirms that all the examples show that Yorùbá dialects are highly rated in the locality. Everybody has to speak it. Yorùbá dialects are acquired why Yorùbá language is learnt. This gives a reason why children who are not of school age find it difficult to converse in Yorùbá language.

Awé (2015) indicates that children from infancy until they reach Primary 3 are not proficient in the Yorùbá language; they speak a variant form of the Yoruba dialect, which is their first language when conversing with others. Apùlàrí, who was unable to speak the Yorùbá language upon school admission, can speak it fluently by the time he reaches primary six (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 130).

### Learners of Yorùbá Language Code-mix it with their Dialects

The novelists depict that at their tender age, children code-mix the Yorùbá language with their dialects, as can be noticed in the dialogue between Dámilólá and Dayò below.

“Kí ló ẹ ọ lówó? Ibo lo ti ri *ojuju*?”

“Èyè mi mọ ni o. Ó n tóbè wò *lídí àrìrò ni mọ fọ* kí wón fún mi tówò. Ó ní òun gbọ, ó ti síbí bọ ọbè, ọ jé kó gboná dáadáa kí ó tó mu tẹ mí lówó. Bí mo ẹ n kígbe ni èyè mi n tẹ ẹ mọ mi lówó. Bì mo ẹ ni kì n *já ọ* mi gbà, pẹkí *lọ ọ* mi ẹ pẹlú àtupa ẹakabùlà tó wà nílẹ, ló bá jó mi ọ” (*Oko Aga*, p. 26-27)

The italicized words are Àkúrẹ dialect.

What is wrong with you? Where do you sustain an injury?

It was my mother. She was having a taste of the stew she was preparing beside the fireplace and I asked her to give me some. She agreed, she dipped the spoon into the stew allowing it to get hot, and she pressed it on my palm. The more I cried, the more she pressed it. As I was trying to force my hand out, I stumbled on a local lamp on the ground and I was burnt.

It is observed that these children cannot sustain the delivery of their speech in standard Yorùbá without code mixing it with their dialects. Dámilólá and Dayò who are involved in the above conversation are small children. They have not learnt enough Yorùbá language to be able to converse fully in it. While Dámilólá tries to speak the Yorùbá language, he combines it with the Àkúrẹ dialect; when he is about mentioning ‘sore’ in Yorùbá language he calls it *ojuju* in Àkúrẹ dialect instead of ‘egbò’ that is, its standard form. The same thing happens in the case of Dayò, who finds it difficult to express himself in Standard Yorùbá without code-mixing his speech with Àkúrẹ dialect. One can notice some words and phrases that are dialectal such as; ‘èyè’, ‘lídí’ ‘àrìrò’, and ‘mọ fọ’, in his speech instead of ‘iyá’, ‘nídí’, ‘ààrò’, ‘mo sọ pé’ which are their standard forms. The same phenomenon is observed in Oko Aga, where Oríyómí combines the Yorùbá language with the Àkúrẹ dialect, as shown below.

“Kò jìnà rárá. Àbùjá wà láti Àròlòyè dé ibè. Sẹ *in fẹ* lẹ síbè ni?” “Wón kì ita adiyẹ *libè*. Qjà egurè Qşó lẹ ti lè rí adiyẹ rà. Mà á mu *in débè bí in bá fẹ*”. (*Oko Aga*, p.106-107).

The italicized words are in Àkúrẹ dialect.

It is not far at all. There is a shortcut to get there. Do you want to go there? They do not sell hen there. You can get a hen to buy at Qşó hamlet market. I will take you there if you want to go.

Many children in our society today are fond of code-mixing their dialects with the Yorùbá language, especially those living in rural areas and hamlets. This is because they have not learnt the Yorùbá language.

### The Speakers of the different variants of the Yoruba Dialects Understand Yorùbá Language.

In *Ìgbà Layé*, Apùlàrí is seen code-mixing Ìjèṣà dialect with the Yorùbá language on his first day in school as depicted in the conversation below:

‘Qmọ ọdún méléó ni ọ?’

‘Qdún mēfà ni mēre’

‘Ta ló bí ọ?’

‘Bàami àti mọomi ló bí mi’ (*Ìgbà Layé*, p. 20)

The underlined words are Ìjèṣà dialect.

‘How old are you?’

‘I am six years’

‘Who are your parents?’

‘Bàami (my father) and mọomi (my mother) gave birth to me’

It is noticed that there is no interpreter employed. The conversation between Apùlàrí and the head teacher shows that Apùlàrí cannot speak Yorùbá language but understands it when it is spoken to him.

This is also depicted in *Oko Aga*, where Oriyomí, who lives in a hamlet, cannot speak the standard form of the Yorùbá language, despite being a pupil; however, she understands the language when it is spoken. For instance; when Bùnmi and Kẹmi ask for the meaning of the words used, she can tell them the meaning in the standard form of the language. This means that she understands Yorùbá language but cannot speak it.

“Kí ni wọn n pè ní egurè àbá mi?” Kẹmi béèrè.

“Abà àbá mi.” Ibè ni mọ ti á sóko àrọjẹ wa níbí. Mọ ya wo tàkúté tí bàbá mi ẹ síbẹ ...

“Tbo lònà Ìyàná Àrọlọjà

“Aká òsì”

“Aká? Kí ni wọn n pè bẹẹ”

“Apá òsì” Ó fi ọwọ júwe. (*Oko Aga* p. 104-105).

“What do they call *egurè àbá mi*?” Kẹmi asked.

“My father’s hamlet. I came from there to this place. I branched to look at my father’s snare.....

“Where is the way to ìyàná Àrọlọjà?”

“Aká òsì”

“Aká? What is the meaning of that?”

“Left-hand side’. She uses her hand to describe...

Words like *egurè*, *àbá*, and *aká* are words in Àkúrẹ dialect used by the novelist. The novelist draws our attention to the fact that those using dialect also understand Yorùbá very well; hence, Oriyomí can explain that *egurè* is ‘abà’ (hamlet), ‘àbá’ is bàbá (father), and *aká* is ‘apá’ (side). It is depicted that there is mutual understanding among those who dialogue without interpreters. It also shows that Oriyomi understands both the Yorùbá language and Yorùbá dialect as depicted in her description of their hamlet.

### **Reasons for using the variants of Yoruba dialect in Yoruba novels**

The following reasons are deduced from the work of the novelists for using the standard form and its dialects in Yoruba novels when they are expected to write only the standard form.

### **Novelists Promote the Use of Yorùbá Dialects**

Another point is that novelists include Yorùbá dialects in their work to promote its speaking. Hence, they make some of their characters speak the dialects despite not living within the speech community. This may be responsible for the use of appellations such as Bàbá Ìjẹ̀sà (father of Ìjẹ̀sà), Bàbá Ègbá (father of Ègbá), Bàbá Ìjẹ̀bú (father of Ìjẹ̀bú) and Ìyá Ègbá (mother of Ègbá).

In *Şe Dandan Ni?* It is observed that Bàbá Ìjẹ̀sà maintains the Ìjẹ̀sà dialect in all conversations throughout the novel, despite living among people who speak the Yorùbá language. He shows his competence in the dialect. He is fond of his dialect. The novelist is indirectly suggesting that no language is superior to another and that people should view them as such.

In *Oko Aga*, Olúmúyìwá (2012) intentionally portrays his speech community (Àkúrẹ) by making some of his characters speak the Àkúrẹ dialect. Such characters include people of Òdíḡẹ community, Dámilólá, Dayò and Oriyomí. All these people are adults and children that live in rural areas. He makes those living in urban areas speak the Yorùbá language. What the novelist wants to depict is that only children and those living in rural areas are left with Yorùbá dialects. The novelist is indirectly drawing the community's attention to the significance of the Yoruba dialect in our society. It is therefore left in the hands of individuals to sensitize the community on the need to speak the Yorùbá dialects.

Awẹ (2015) in his introduction depicts that *Ìgbà Layé* is a historical novel that portrays what the Ìjẹ̀sà community looked like some years ago. Life is a stage where everybody plays his part. Ìjẹ̀sà like any other Yorùbá Community acquires their dialect and learns the Yorùbá language in school. All young and old speak the dialect including those living outside Ìjẹ̀sà land. The novelist sees the dialect as Ìjẹ̀sà identity. He is indirectly suggesting that Yorùbá community should not lose their identity, which is their dialect.

It is observed that Adágbádá, although is from Ègbá, yet the Ìjẹ̀sà dialect is prevalent in her novel (*Şe Dandan Ni?*). Bàbá Ìjẹ̀sà speaks Ìjẹ̀sà dialect throughout the story. Bàbá Kàfáyá speaks Ègbá dialect at the end of the year party while Ìyá Ègbá speaks Ègbá dialect when her daughter comes to her for a piece of advice. What can be deduced from the novelist’s use of the Yorùbá dialect is that Adágbádá intentionally promotes Ìjẹ̀sà and other Yorùbá dialects regardless of her identity with any community speaking the dialects. This also depicts the Yorùbá community as a heterogeneous community.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examines the role of Yorùbá dialects in three selected Yorùbá novels. It is depicted in the novels that the use of Yorùbá dialects is for specific purposes. Our findings show that Yorùbá dialects are the languages every community acquires before learning Yorùbá language or standard Yorùbá. It is from these dialects that the Yorùbá language or the standard Yorùbá is realised. The sociology of literature employed depicts that the variants of Yorùbá dialects have become the language of children, illiterate adults and people from rural areas. It is also established that the speakers of Yorùbá dialects also speak the Yorùbá language. Children in their early years in primary school cannot converse in the Yorùbá language without code mixing it with their dialects. People using Yorùbá dialects understand the Yorùbá language. The three novelists try to promote Yorùbá dialects by including them in their work. The paper suggests that everybody should try to speak the Yorùbá dialect. It should not be left in the hands of children and

rural people only. Yorùbá dialects should not be allowed to go extinct; we will need them one day. For instance, a Yoruba etymologist can refer to the dialects before they understand the morphological processes of certain words. For instance, ‘dòtà’ (stool) emanates from ‘òtìtá’ (its dialectal name). If the dialects are no longer in use, many words will lose their originality.

Despite the importance of using the Yoruba dialects, it is observed that in Yorùbá society today, most children no longer acquire the Yorùbá dialect; instead, they acquire the English language, which is the country’s lingua franca, especially among children in urban areas and those with literate parents. In most homes, Yoruba dialects and their standard form are no longer in use. This means children no longer acquire dialects; instead, they speak the English language from the onset. This paper views the inclusion of Yorùbá Dialect in Yorùbá novels as a means of preserving the dialects. The paper, therefore, suggests that every Yorùbá novelist should make use of Yorùbá dialects in their works for their sustainability.

## References

1. Abóderin, O. (2014). Ìhùwàsí Òrò-Atókùn Nínú Gbólóhùn Ìbèèrè Oní-ni lédè Yorùbá, Àkùngbá Journal of Linguistics and Literatures, No. 5, 31-37.
2. Adágbadá, F. (2014). *Şé Dandan Ni? Àkúré*: Montem Paperbacks.
3. Adebòwálé, O. & Olumuyiwa, T. (2016). “On the Place of Dialects in Selected Yoruba Films. English Lingual Journal, DSPM Research Lab, Mostaganem University Press, 2(1) 37- 58
4. Adébòwálé, O. (2021). Ìlò Èdè nínú Ìwé Ìtàn-Àròsò Tèmitópè Olúmúyiwá. in Àkùngbá Journal of Linguistics and Literatures, No 12, (Special Edition).
5. Adéwólé, L.O. (1999). Negation in Ifè, a Yorùbá Dialect. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 58:397-403.
6. Awé, D. (2015). *Ìgbà Layé. Ilésà*: Elyon Publishers.
7. Awóbùlúyì, O. (1998). Àwọn Èka-Èdè Yorùbá. Paper read at Yorùbá Studies Association of Nigeria Conference, Pastoral Institute, Bódijà, Ìbàdàn.
8. Bámgbósé, A. (1986). Yorùbá: A Language in Transition, Lagos: J.F Odúnjò Memorial Lectures Organising Committee.
9. Barber, C. (2000). The English Language: A Historical Introduction, Canto Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
10. Fábùnmi, F.A. (2001). Tense/Aspect and Negation in Ìjèṣà: A Yorùbá Dialect”. in *Yorùbá: Journal of the Yorùbá Studies Association of Nigeria* 2(1): 44-54.
11. Finegan, E. (2004). *Language: Its Structure and Use*, Boston: Thomas Wadsworth.
12. Johnson, S. (1921). *The History of the Yorùbá People*. Lagos: CSS Bookshops.
13. McGregor, W.B. (2009). *Linguistics: An Introduction*, London: Continuum.
14. Ògúnṣíjì, A. & Adeoyè, Y. (2012). Language and Communication in the Traditional African Society: The Yorùbá Example in *African Culture & Civilization*, Ájàyí, S. A. (ed.) Ìbàdàn: Atlantis Books in Association with Ìbàdàn Cultural Studies Group: 332-344.
15. Olúmúyiwá, T. (1994). *Àwọn Èka –Èdè Yorùbá 1. Àkúré*: Montem Paperbacks.
16. Olúmúyiwá, T. (2012). *Oko Aga. Àkúré*: Montem Paperbacks.
17. Olúmúyiwá, T. (2014). An Examination of Humorous Communication in Selected Yorùbá Comedy Vidio Films, *AJOLL: Àgò-Ìwòyè Journal of Languages and Literary Studies*, Vol. 5:27-40.
18. Sheba, L. (2013). Yorùbá Dialects as literary Language in Written Literature. in F.A. Fábùnmi and A.S., Saláwù (Eds.) *Readings in African Dialectology and Applied Linguistics* (pp. 163-176). LINCOM: Studies in African Linguistics.
19. Táíwò, A. (2013). *KáRìn Ká Pò: A Novelist’s Perspective on Security*, in *Yorùbá: Journal of Yorùbá Studies Association of Nigeria*, 7(2).
20. The Holy Bible (2004). King James Version. Lagos: CSS Bookshops.