

Publishing in Yoruba Language: Considerations from Demand and Supply Economic Theory

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Abstract

This descriptive survey of the ex post type was carried out to find a statistical explanation to the leanness of Nigerian publishers' interest in producing Yoruba-medium books in comparison with the English-medium ones. Publishers do not write books and they cannot adequately patronize themselves but authors and readers do so respectively. Since authors and publishers are out to make financial gains from their endeavours, it is presumable that they would not hesitate to exploit any area of publishing that will provide sumptuous economic benefits. The reasons for the reluctance or failure to publish as many books in Yoruba as those in English were thus sought from the angles of authors and readers. Hence this study is premised on the economic theory of demand and supply. Two instruments were used for data collection. The first was a self-constructed thirteen-item questionnaire titled "Yoruba-English Bilinguals' Reading Language Preferences Questionnaire" (YEBRLPQ) validated at 89.3 Cronbach alpha and administered to 200 bilinguals in Ibadan. The other one was a self-constructed eleven-item questionnaire titled "Yoruba-English Bilingual Authors' Language Preference Determinants Questionnaire" (YEBALPDQ) that yielded 87.4 Cronbach Alpha administered to 25 published authors that were Yoruba-English bilingual. The statistical tools of frequency counts, percentage and t-test were employed in analysing the data collected to answer two research questions and test one null hypothesis. The findings reveal the inadequate interest in reading Yoruba-medium books by Yoruba-English bilinguals and authors' general preference for English-medium writing as a result of its comparative economic advantage. This portends a bad omen for sustainable development of the language.

The language known as Yoruba

Yoruba is the language of the people of the south-western part of Nigeria. Its speakers within Nigeria are estimated to be about 25 million. It is one of the three most prominent languages in Nigeria (Adegbija, 2004; FGN, 2004). According to Akinwale, Adetunmbi, Obe and Adesuyi (2015), the speakers of Yoruba in southwestern Nigeria and parts of the republic of Benin are up to 40 million. Yoruba has a standard orthography, and is to be the medium of instruction from the pre-primary stage to the end of the third class in the primary schools situated in the region of its nativity. Its role as medium of school instruction is to diminish gradually from the end of the third year of basic school as English is progressively takes over as medium of instruction. Then, Yoruba is to be taught as a school subject (FGN, 1978, revised 1998, 2004). Yoruba is described by Abiodun (2014) as one of the most prominent civilisation of sub-Saharan Africa.

With the afore-mentioned roles and status of the language within such a large population, Yoruba language could be reasonably expected to be a haven for publishers. The market for educational as well as general interest publishing in Yoruba language is supposed to be so vast and the profit so robust that publishers would always scramble for manuscript in the language. But the situation seems to be in the opposite. It is to be noted, however, that contrary to the policy stipulation that Yoruba should be the language of instruction up to the end of the third year of primary school in Yoruba land, there is gross and flagrant disregard of the policy in favour of the English language in Nigerian primary schools, especially the profit-oriented private schools (Olatunji, 2013). This thus significantly diminishes the importance of the language at that level of education, consequently affecting the viability producing Yoruba-medium books for the primary level of education.

The state of publishing in Yoruba language

Obinyan (2010) has observed that publishing is obviously most predominantly done in English in Nigeria. This means publishing in Yoruba is done much less than English. Also, since books seem to be sold at almost prohibitive prices (Oyewusi, 2009) as a result of high production costs, publishers would take on only book projects that have sure markets. If people's reading interest and readiness to buy books is exclusively for English-medium ones, then publishing in Yoruba or any other indigenous Nigerian language may not be a very exciting idea.

The current study agrees that the problems bedeviling publishing in African, and indeed Nigerian, indigenous languages are legion (Limb, 200). All the numerous factors, however, both individually and collectively have socio-economic undertones.

Theoretical framework: the nexus between the economic theory of demand and supply and publishing in Yoruba language

Bonanno's (2012) exposition on the dynamics of demand and supply, though specifically written with focus on the narrow field of food deserts and nutritious food, contains nuggets that hold true for demand and supply consideration in book publishing in the Nigerian indigenous languages or English. Some of the demand and supply principles identified by Bonanno (2012) as strong determinants of decisions regarding production and supply of a particular brand within a population or a section of it are:

Market size:

For publishing in a particular language to be a profitable venture, the market for such books must be large enough to assure the publisher that the prospective revenue from the sales will not cover barely the production costs but a worthwhile profit margin is certain. This means the number of people interested in patronizing the books must be a very strong determining factor. Kalejaiye (2008) acknowledges the fact that publishing gulps a lot of resources, the dispense of which must be done with cost-benefit principle in mind. One could superficially conclude that publishing in a language with about 40 million speakers like Yoruba, but it is advisable to give adequate consideration to the percentage of such a population that is interested in reading in the mother tongue because that is what constitutes the actual market base for such publications.

Population and income growth:

The decision to go into publishing implies readiness to invest heavily in fixed costs which may not be sanely expected to be recouped in a year or a single book season. The publisher as a shrewd business expert would thus be interested in determining if the audience population for a type of book is declining or on the increase. This is crucial to the probability of a long-term viability and returns on investment.

Poverty rate and rate of adoption of income support programs:

Where a significant proportion of the target population falls into the low income group with very weak purchasing power and there is little or no income support programmes from the government, the publisher will be deterred from considering investing in book products for such a population. The observation by Iwu-James and Ifijeh (2016) that price is a crucial factor in publishing and marketing of books is, therefore, truism. They thus recommend that publishers of indigenous language-medium books exploit the benefits of information and communication technologies for easier and cheaper distributions of their products.

Consumers' preferences (taste heterogeneity):

The small communities of people that may be interested in things published in a particular indigenous language have varied preferences according to their education level, ethnic and religious affiliation, and others. To cater for the different parochial tastes within such a small sub-culture may not be considered economically wise by a publisher.

The implications of this theory for the current study include the fact that a publisher's decision whether to invest in publishing in indigenous languages, Yoruba in this case, depends on the economic viability of such an adventure. The economic prospect of a publishing decision is a reflection of the rate of demand for the planned product which is also dependent on a number of variables. If Yoruba-literate people cherish reading in the language and thus buy such books in large quantities, publishers would be encouraged to invest extensively on publishing in the language. But if they prefer to publish in any other language, it is because the audience base for books in such a language attracts much more robust economic rewards than Yoruba.

Educated bilingual Yoruba people have been observed to be guilty of "social violence against their language" by their excessive and exclusive interest in the English language and its products (Ani, 2012:12). This unwholesome attitude of Yoruba elites reflects in their extremely low patronage of Yoruba-medium newspapers (Salawu, 2004) and indeed other publications in the indigenous language. Sesan (2013) too agrees that writers using the medium of English outnumber those of the Yoruba medium for social and economic reasons, citing the dominant status of the English language as the Language of Higher Domain (LHD) above the Yoruba that is subjected to the status of Language of Lower Domain (LLD) by the unhelpful attitude of its users (speakers, writers and readers).

The need to step up publishing in Yoruba language

Yoruba Language is vibrant and buoyant as indicated by the yardstick of its speakers' population, its standard orthography, its pride of place in the Nigerian constitution and the National Policy on Education and other advantageous factors, but it is still endangered by the forces of globalisation and the negative attitude of its speakers that are bilingual in English and Yoruba (Owolabi, 2006; Fakoya, 2008). As self-contradictory as it may appear to paint such a vibrant picture of a language and then immediately claim it is endangered, an objective consideration of the future of Yoruba would reveal that it is a truly endangered language as extinction does not jump on any language overnight. The seed of extinction is sown and watered gradually through progressive neglect by its supposed native speakers, just as the attitude and practice of present-day Yoruba people portray.

The distinguishing features of the Yoruba race will go extinct if the language is not saved from avoidable death and eventual extinction. UNESCO's prediction that Yoruba language will die by 2025 (Ani, 2012) cannot be disregarded without grave consequences. The logic of referring to a people as Yorubas when their distinguishing language and culture have disappeared and have been replaced with other ones will be difficult, if not absolutely impossible to prove.

Publishing in the indigenous language is *sine qua non* to the documentation, frequent utilisation, and consistent transmission of bodies of cultural, scientific and technological knowledge to coming generations (McCarty, 2003). The nations known for exploits in technology, like Japan, China and India, are those that cherish and use their indigenous languages in all domains (Okediran and Olatunji, 2010). They update their indigenous technology as they transmit same from generation to generation. As people write in their indigenous languages, whether such writings are purely in the domain of science and technology or fiction writings, a great deal of bodies of local science and technology knowledge is preserved for further improvement.

Identification of medicinal leaves, roots and animals is an integral part of Yoruba cultural heritage preserved through the use of the indigenous language (Fakoya, 2008; Ashaver, 2013). Much of that body of knowledge is being lost to inadequate documentation. Because of the organic nature of herbs and roots, they are much safer when taken in appropriate quantities than the chemical substances presented as modern medicines. This problematic tide of the loss of the invaluable knowledge of indigenous medical practices can be stemmed by publishing extensively on indigenous medical knowledge. But if publishing in Yoruba language is anathema, there will not be any iota of such body of knowledge left in the nearest future.

Book publishing is one of the major means of identifying budding talents and promoting them as well as in raising a country's status in the comity of nations (Uche, 2015). Encouraging publishing in

Yoruba language will help discover prospective but hidden writing geniuses who are literate only in Yoruba language. If publishers concentrate on publishing in English alone, the potential contributions of such monolinguals to socio-economic, physical and political development of the nation will remain perpetually unrealized. The prominence that William Shakespeare's writings have contributed to the English language and its literature universally is instructive here. Shakespeare adamantly wrote in English at a time the language was second fiddle to Latin and Greek, and thus one of the least economically viable. But the magnitude of opportunity that English literature would have lost without William Shakespeare's works cannot be adequately imagined.

Men, materials and method

The descriptive survey design of the ex-post facto type was employed to arrive at a statistically valid presentation of the language of reading preferences of Yoruba-English bilinguals and determine the roles played by such preferences on the choices of the language of publication by fellow Yoruba-English bilinguals who are authors. No manipulation of variables occurred.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for the study. By purposive sampling technique, people that are proficient in both Yoruba and English were considered eligible to participate. Through accidental sampling, 200 willing participants were got from various locations like offices, worship places, schools, and other public places.

Twenty-five published authors were used as respondents by convenient sampling to get data on languages preferred for authoring and publishing.

Two instruments were used for data collection. The first was a self-constructed thirteen-item questionnaire titled "Yoruba-English Bilinguals' Reading Language Preferences Questionnaire" (YEBRLPQ) validated at 89.3 Cronbach alpha. The other one was a self-constructed eleven-item questionnaire titled "Yoruba-English Bilingual Authors' Language Preference Determinants Questionnaire" (YEBALPDQ) that yielded 87.4 Cronbach Alpha.

The researcher and a research assistant administered 200 copies of (YEBRLPQ) to the bilinguals in Ibadan city. The completed copies were retrieved immediately to avoid loss. On about three occasions that copies were found likely to be invalid through one error or the other, another copy was given to each erring participant and a replacement printed. Therefore, two hundred valid copies were still available for analysis.

Copies of YEBALPDQ were personally administered by the researcher to twenty-five authors that are Yoruba-English bilingual during a gathering of the Oyo State Chapter of the Association of Nigerian Authors.

Findings and discussion

Tables 1a, b, c, and d: Demographic Description of the Respondents

Table 1a: Distribution of the public respondents by sex and age

Sex	15 – 25yrs	26 – 35yrs	36 – 45yrs	46 – 55yrs	56yrs up	Total
Male	13	26	24	11	14	86
Female	17	38	21	16	12	114
Grand Total						200

Table 1a shows that 30 (13 male and 17 female) respondents all within the age brackets of 15 and 25 years, 64 (26 male and 38) are from age 26 to 35 years, 45 (24 male and 21 female) are from 36 to 45 years of age, 27 (11 male and 16 female) fall within 46 to 55 years of age while the remaining 26 (14

male and 12 female) are from 56 upwards. This implies that all the respondents have reached the chronological age in which their responses can be trusted to have emanated from matured minds.

Table 1b: By educational qualification

Educational Qualification	Frequency
O'Level	19 (9.5%)
Undergraduates	37 (18.5%)
ND/NCE and Equivalents	49 (24.5%)
1st Degree	67 (33.5%)
Postgraduate	28 (14%)
Total	200 (100%)

Table 1b shows that there was no one with a certificate lower than O' Level among the respondents. Those with postgraduate degrees were 28 (14%), 67 (33.5%) with the 1st degree, 37 (18.5%) were undergraduates. The remaining 19 (9.5%) had O' Level certificate. All the respondents were evidently bilingual since the least certificate possessed was O' Level because English was the language with which they wrote examinations that earned them their various certificates.

Table 1c: Authors by Sex and Age

Sex	Age					Total
	15 – 25yrs	26 – 35yrs	36 – 45yrs	46 – 55yrs	56yrs -	
Male	-	6	10	4	2	22
Female	-	1	1	1	-	3
Grand Total						25

A total of 22 of the sampled authors were male while 3 were female. The youngest category (26 to 35 years of age) were 8 in number while 2 belonged to the oldest category (56 years and above). This has implications: all the authors are old enough as free moral agents to make well informed decisions on what language is most viable to write for public consumption based on their carefully crafted objectives, they have been around long enough to have published in at least two languages if they deem that necessary, and so on.

Table 1d: Distribution of the authors by educational qualification

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Ph.D.	1	4%
Masters Degrees	5	20%
First Degrees	17	68%
Lower than 1st Degree	2	8%
Total	25	100%

Table 1d shows that 1 (4%) of the authors sampled had a Ph.D., 5 (20%) had Masters Degrees, 17 (68%) had First Degrees while only 2 (8%) had other post-secondary certificates lower than the first degree. This implies that one can rightly and reasonably expect well informed opinions about the motivating factors for the choice of whichever of the indigenous or other languages preferred by authors.

Research Question 1: In what language do most Yoruba-English bilinguals prefer to read?

Table 2a: Respondents' self-reports of reading language preferences

Language of Reading	Frequency Count	Percentage
English	188	94%
Yoruba	12	6%
Total	200	100%

Table 2a shows that 188 (94%) of the respondents prefer English-medium books to Yoruba-medium ones. Only 12 (6%) of them expressed preference for Yoruba-medium publications. The answer to Research Question 1 is thus clear: Yoruba-English bilinguals majorly prefer to read English-medium publications. This being the case, it becomes obvious that the market base for Yoruba-medium books is much narrower than could be reasonably expected in comparison with English-medium ones. It is noteworthy that while English cuts across all geo-political zones of the country, Yoruba's major catchment area is the western part of the country. Even in the major domain of the Yoruba language, those that do not cherish reading in the language are in the great majority. What hope is in publishing in that language, then?

Table 2b: Quantity of books read in the first half of 2015 according to language

Language of Reading	Frequencies and Percentages				Totals
	None	2 - 3 Books	4 – 10 Books	11 – 15 Books	
English Language	-	179 (89.5%)	19 (9.5%)	2 (1.0%)	200 (100%)
Yoruba Language	66 (33%)	131 (65.5%)	3 (1.5%)	-	200 (100%)

Tables 2a & b show that the answer to Research Question 1 is that the Yoruba-English bilinguals prefer to read in English language. There was none of them that had not read at least an English-medium book while 66 (33.0%) had not read any Yoruba-medium book in the first six months of the year. In the same vein, while 2 (1.0%) had read between 11 and 15 English-medium books, none had done a similar volume of reading in Yoruba language. It is noteworthy that the categories within the continuum also obviously favour English-medium books. This should not come as a surprise because most of the respondents were from parents that preferred them to be educated in the English language (Limb, 2000).

Research Question 2: Does the Yoruba-English bilinguals' reading preference affect publishing Yoruba language?

Table 3a: Authors' Responses Showing the Role of Readership Preference on Publishing in Yoruba Language

Identified Factors	Response Types		Total
	Agreed	Disagreed	
Narrow Audience Base	25 (100%)	-	25 (100%)
Publishers' Low Acceptance Rate	25 (100%)	-	25 (100%)

All of the participating authors (25 or 100%) reported that both of the identified inhibiting factors (narrow audience base and publishers' low acceptance rate) discourage them from writing Yoruba-medium books though they all expressed confidence in their abilities to write well in the language. They confessed that they do not give the idea of writing in Yoruba a second thought because they are sure such written materials would remain manuscripts forever. They, therefore, get themselves contented with writing English-medium materials.

This thus confirms the aptness of application of the economic theory of demand supply to the discouragement of both authors and publishers from investing resources (time, talent, money, and others) into production of Yoruba-medium books. Though Nigeria's language in education policy stipulates the teaching and learning of the major Nigerian languages beyond the geographical locations of their original

users, gross non-compliance with the stipulation has rendered the languages restricted to their original geographic domains. Government is the guiltiest of this breach through non-provision of both human and material requirements for implementation of the policy in public schools and lack of enforcement on private schools. Schools in Igbo land, Hausa land and other ethnic locations in Nigeria are, contrary to the spirit and letters of the language policy, not offering Yoruba. So, patronage for Yoruba-medium books is majorly limited to schools in Yoruba land. Even in Yoruba land, the language is an elective subject at the senior secondary level while it is not offered at all in most private schools. Unfortunately, Nigerians of the present day are not known to have penchant for buying books to read for pleasure.

This means a book published in Yoruba language will take much longer time to yield returns on investment than its English-medium counterpart published at the same time. Consequently, the rate at which publishers accept and publish Yoruba-medium manuscripts is much lower than those in English. One of the chain effects is that authors also write much less in Yoruba.

Table 3b: The Authors' Publishing Rates in Yoruba

Number of Yoruba-Medium Books Authored	Frequency	Percentage
None	21	84%
1 Publication	2	8%
2 Publications	1	4%
3 Publications	1	4%
Total	25	100%

Table 3b shows that twenty-one of them do not have any Yoruba publication though they all speak Yoruba fluently. Even those that may have low proficiency in Yoruba orthography could have got needed little editorial help. The 4 that have Yoruba publications (2 have only 1 Yoruba publication each while 1 has only 2 and the last 1 has only 3 Yoruba-medium books respectively) have published more extensively in English. It is interesting to note that 4 of the total of 7 Yoruba-medium publications are not complete books but either a chapter in a book or a poem in an anthology or the other. This presents a gloomy future for this one of the three most vibrant indigenous languages in Nigeria.

It is obvious that Yoruba-English bilinguals are not motivated to write in Yoruba as a result of extremely low prospects in such a venture. It is disheartening to note that writers in African languages are rarely recipients of Afrocentric Noma prizes, irrespective of large populations of speakers of such indigenous languages (Limb, 2000). So, there is appallingly little economic as well as prestige prospect in publishing in an indigenous Nigerian language.

Ho1: There is no significant difference between male and female Yoruba-English bilinguals' attitude to reading in Yoruba language.

Table 4: The t-test for Independent Measures of the Respondents' Genders and their Attitude to Yoruba-Medium Books

Sex	N	Mean	St. D	St. error Mean	Df	T	P
Male	115	1.07	.256	0.24	198	.660	>.05
Female	85	1.05	.213	0.23			

Since $t(.660) > .05$, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that there is no significant difference between male and female Yoruba-English bilinguals' attitude to reading in Yoruba language. Though there is no significant difference, it should be noted that the females have a lower mean score (1.05) than the males (1.07) in their attitude to Yoruba-medium books.

This proves that there is a gender differential in interest in language choice and linguistic behaviour (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Ifegbesan, 2010; Olatunji, 2015). This notwithstanding, the result shows that negative attitude to reading of Yoruba-medium books among Yoruba-English bilinguals is widespread, regardless of gender difference.

Conclusion

Findings from the study have shown that that patronage for English-medium books greatly outweighs that of Yoruba-medium ones. Consequently, authors that are English-Yoruba bilingual prefer to write through the medium of English rather than Yoruba language because of the comparative advantage in the former over the latter. The sad implication of this is that conservation and dissemination of linguistic and cultural heritage of the Yoruba people is hampered. Efforts to preserve such knowledge through the medium of another language cannot produce results with the exactitude that the original language would. Also, if the situation is allowed to continue to degenerate, death and consequent extinction may not be very far from Yoruba language.

Recommendations

- Serious public enlightenment on the need to preserve our languages should be pursued aggressively.
- Reading competitions in Nigerian indigenous languages are to be handsomely rewarded
- Special incentives for authors of Nigerian indigenous language-medium books should be provided by the government through a vibrant national book policy.
- Special incentives for publishers of Yoruba-medium books should be carefully thought out through wide consultations and faithfully implemented.
- Government should enforce the use of Nigerian indigenous languages for school instruction up to the end of the third year in the primary school as stipulated in the National Policy on Education.

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