

Playwriting in Three Major Nigerian Languages

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Abstract: In his article, "Playwriting in Three Major Nigerian Languages" Isaiah Ilo analyzes the frequency of playwriting in Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, the three major Nigerian languages, which together hold about a half of the country's estimated population of 140 million. Ilo uses a case study to contrast the importance of the languages, their evolution as literary languages, and their official status with a role in education. Ilo locates the significance of these factors next to an inventory of the plays and a listing of the writers to demonstrate the neglect of the mother tongue by experienced Nigerian dramatists. The study establishes that indigenous-language drama is well-received among the Yoruba and that literature in Hausa has enthusiastic readership while the languages, including Igbo, that is lagging behind in literary growth, fail to attract the interest of experienced dramatists. Ilo concludes that the creation of dramatic masterpieces in the Nigerian languages will probably help in the languages' continued existence, growth, and fortification.

Isaiah ILO

Playwriting in Three Major Nigerian Languages

The purpose of my study is to determine the occurrence of playwriting in Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba taking into account their privileged position in terms of number of speakers, extent of literary development, and official status as Nigeria's major indigenous languages. I juxtapose the importance and influence of the languages and the extent to which they are utilized in playwriting. Some Nigerian dramatists have earned literary distinction in English for their application of folk elements in their works. Despite critical acclaim, these plays perhaps lack some practicality for presenting home-grown materials in an outsourced language. Therefore, the question arises about the neglect on the part of established Nigerian playwrights to leverage their mother tongue equally with their writing. As evident from the works of talented writers across several cultures, skilful literary creation is based on a given cultural tradition that provides the materials of the work in form of modes of expression, folklore, worldview, etc. The more a work is informed by the cultural code, the more it advances and develops the literary language of that culture.

Literary plays by Nigerians began to appear from the late 1950s. From the onset, English dominated as the language of play writing. The fact that most African creative writing was conducted in foreign languages sparked off a perennial controversy since the early 1960s. While the disagreement persisted on whether the mother tongue or the colonial language should be the medium of writing, African creative writing and literary criticism in English went on to flourish, and most African writers and literary critics merely paid lip service to the desirability of African-language literature. African aesthetic orientations for literary arts, like those inspired by Negritude and anti-colonialism, while upholding the canon of modern African literary arts as the presentation of traditional themes, imagery, expressions, and folklore in the colonial languages, gave no place whatsoever to the creation and study of African language works. Today a major context for the study of African drama is postcolonialism, a concept designating a set of theoretical approaches that focus on the direct effects and aftermaths of colonization. The concept emerged in the mid-twentieth century in the context of decolonization and is today employed in contemporary scholarship and criticism in several disciplines. As a literary theory or critical approach, postcolonialism examines the literature by or about colonized people. On the one hand, it studies how the colonizer's literature justifies colonialism through images of the colonized as inferior people, society, and culture. On the other hand, it examines how colonized people articulate and celebrate their cultural identity by writing back in the colonizer's language to redress negative labels. While emphasizing outcomes of literary hybridity and trans-culturalization in the encounter between Africa and the West, postcolonialism as a dominant framework of discourse for modern African literature has found no place for the study of literature in the indigenous languages of the colonized.

The exclusion of African-language literature from mainstream scholarship means that a gap exists, but at the same time, the forty-years-old discourse about the issue of language in African literature has garnered a sufficient corpus of literature to fill the gap as a recognized theoretical field of language aesthetics. Language is so pivotal in African writing, constituting the main aesthetic and critical benchmark. And despite the growth of both conceptual and critical literature on the subject, what has naturally evolved as a field of study continued to be labelled merely as "the language question," "the language problem," "the language factor," or "the language debate in which to take an "either/or" stand (Ilo <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss4/1/>>). The proper attitude is perhaps to acknowledge the major conceptualizations on the issue as represented by Chinua Achebe's hybridism and wa Thiong'o Ngugi's essentialism as different language aesthetic approaches that have influenced present practices of creative writing in Africa, and from that perspective to study concurrently the writings in both European and African languages. Fortunately, there are now efforts directed to the study African language literature. For instance, the Centre for Research on African Literatures, Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University (Germany), in November 2004 hosted a four-day international symposium on Creative Writing in African Languages, convened by Anja Oed and Uta Reuster-Jahn. In the announcements of the conference, its theme was described as dealing with "the production, mediation, and reception of creative writing in African languages to move beyond merely pondering and confirming the existence and vitality of written literary

expression in these languages" and the conveners remarked that they "believe that it is time to recognise that creative writing in African languages forms an integral, vital, innovative and exciting part of African literatures and, accordingly, deserves as much informed critical attention as African creative writing in English, French, or Portuguese" (conference announcement). The notion follows in some ways what Albert S. Gerard suggested already in 1971, namely that the need in African literary scholarship is for Africans to undertake detailed monograph studies of individual local language literatures, to take up the task of assessing critically the value of such writings, of translating the best of them so as to make them available to a global audience, of studying the influence of traditional art on the new literary forms, and to identify and delineate the extent of the impact of external influences in contributing to the shaping of the new art (177).

In my present article, I consider a minute aspect of the issue of indigenous language literature: the frequency of the use of the languages in playwriting, the Nigerian major languages serving as examples. The purpose is to use an inventory of the plays and a roll call of the writers to demonstrate the neglect of the mother tongue by experienced Nigerian dramatists. I believe that before interest in the critical study of dramatic literature in Nigerian language may develop, the growth of meaningful literary dramatic creativity in the languages may first take place. Hausa is mother tongue of 22 million people and a second language of an additional 17 million. It is a *lingua franca* in northern Nigeria and Niger, and is also spoken extensively in northern Ghana and northern Cameroon. There are numbers of speakers in Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, and in major West African cities such as Lagos, Accra, Kumasi, and Cotonou. Hausa is today rated as a fast growing literary language in Africa and is used in international radio broadcasting by the British Broadcasting Corporation, Voice of America, Radio Deutsche Welle, Radio Moscow, and Radio Beijing. The literary use of Hausa began in the fifteenth century with the arrival of Islam in Hausaland. Hausa oral literature came under the influence of the religion and the accompanying Arabic language. Hausa literature first began to be written in a modified Arabic script known as *Ajami* a long while before the British colonial government introduced the Roman script. Hausas utilized *Ajami* to record their language and to compile several written histories, the most popular of which is the Kano Chronicles. Shehu Usman Dan Fodio, a teacher of Islam who wrote between 1714-1717, used the Arabic script for his poems. Like other indigenous communities, the Hausas have a rich tradition of arts. There existed performances of tales, praise songs and poetry, sometimes involving gesture or music. Hausa arts include the following: Tales (*Tatsuniyoyi*), traditions (*Labaru*), praise songs (*Kirarai*), plays (*Wasanni*), proverbs (*Karin Magana*), songs (*Wakoki*), fiction (*Littattfan hira*), other prose (*Zube*), riddles (*Tatsuniya*), epithets (*Kirari*), and tongue twisters (*Karin mangana*). Traditional Hausa plays were associated with youth organizations and Bori worship ceremonies. Drama too was associated with "Yan kama," the popular comedians. To a certain extent, these traditional oral plays inspired the modern Hausa plays that actually have their origins in the colonial educational system and were first performed in schools (see Skinner 1-5).

By 1980, there were only six or seven published Hausa plays. The first published Hausa play is *Wasan Marafa* (written 1954) by Alhaji Abubakar Tanua. It is the story of a village visited by a health inspector who preaches hygiene. The village accepts the inspector's recommendation to clean up the environment and attains health and prosperity. Another Hausa play *Uwar Gulma*, by Alhaji Mohammed Sada, as Neil Skinner notes, was commended in a letter to *West Africa* (9 March 1968) as being concerned with family relationship and having harsh humor with characters typical of any northern Nigerian town. With its theme of the relationship between a husband and wife, the play has a strong social concern. Other Hausa plays include *Wasan Yara* by Umaru Dembo, *Shaibu Umar* by Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa with Umaru L'adan and Dexter Lyndersay, *Tabarma Kunya* by G.D. Adamu, and K.D. Malam, *Zamanin Nan Namu* by Alhaji Shuabu Markarfi, and *Zaman Duniya Iyawa Ne*, a collection of three Hausa radio plays by Alhaji Yusuf Ladan. Haruna Birniwa, however, contends that by 1978 there were up to fifteen drama texts in Hausa. Included in his list is *Six Hausa Plays* written in English in 1930 by R.M. East (East's collection was later rendered in Hausa). The plays were adaptations of Hausa folktales. Birniwa's list includes plays translated to Hausa from other languages. *Daren*

Sha Biya (Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*) was translated into Hausa by I.Y. Yahaya, while *Mutanen Kogo*, was Tawfik al Hakin's *Ahlul-kahf*, a translation from Arabic by Ahmed Sabir. Birniwa notes that playwriting received the least attention in Hausa compared to other genres of literature. He writes that the reason for this was that the people in the North who were then writing in Arabic script paid more attention to writing religious books and that even after Western education was introduced, more emphasis was laid on poetry and prose rather than drama (Birniwa 117).

To lay the foundations for literacy and indigenous literature in Hausa, the British colonial government made vital contributions. The Department of Education of Northern Nigeria began a literature Bureau in 1930 whose main function was to produce Hausa textbooks for use in schools. Because of primary education and adult classes given in Hausa, the number of people who were literate in the language grew rapidly, but they had no literature to read. Therefore, a scheme was inaugurated in 1933 "to produce Hausa books of non educational type, which would provide reading matter for those who could read, at a price which they could afford, and distribute them over the Northern provinces in such a way that they might be brought to the notice of the native public, in fact, to lay the foundations of vernacular literature" (East 170). East who was the director of the Bureau visited the chief towns of Hausaland to explain the scheme to the elites and to invite them to try their hand at writing fiction. This appeal resulted in a number of story manuscripts, among them *Gandoki* by Malam Bello Kagara, an Arabic scholar, and *Ruwan Bugaja* by Malam Bello's younger brother, Abubakar Imam, a school teacher. In 1939 East started a monthly Hausa paper, *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo* which rose from a circulation of 5,000 to 15,000 copies in a few months. In all these efforts the stated objective of the colonial administrators was "to show the ordinary Hausa man that local language literature is essentially a thing of his own country, written by his own people in his own language, a commodity to be bought and used, just like anything else which is sold in the market" (East 174).

Shu'aibu Makarfi (1918-2008) has been called the grandfather of Hausa drama. His two plays, *Jatau Na K'yallau* and *Zamanin Nan Namu*, published by Gaskiya Corporation in 1970 are classic texts in Hausa and are studied in secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. Makarfi's responsibility as a staff in a radio house was to write scripts of radio plays. The publishing organization approached him to submit his scripts for publication. His plays targeted an audience of city dwellers with a critique of what he considered an erosion of the Hausa culture among the youth. In an interview granted to A.K. Babajo in 1996, he said he chose the medium of drama owing to his love to dramatise and expose ills: "By using characters I was able to convey and project these ills through role-playing. Besides, plays are more exciting in their imitations and make-belief" (Makarfi qtd. in Haushi <<http://ibrahim-sheme.blogspot.com/2008/01/shuaibu-makarfi-grandfather-of-hausa.html>>). On his choice to write in his mother tongue, he said he detested the imposition of the English language over Hausa language and did not have any reason to write in English: "I wrote in Hausa because it is my root and language and I am more conversant with it than any other language. In any case, the radio programme was targeted at a Hausa audience" (Makarfi qtd. in Haushi <<http://ibrahim-sheme.blogspot.com/2008/01/shuaibu-makarfi-grandfather-of-hausa.html>>). Makarfi said he used common expressions of the day in his plays, with the resources of folklore and oral traditions such as proverbs, riddles, and jokes. He remarked that he did not have "any degree of extensive exposure in playwriting," having trained as a teacher before taking up employment as a journalist. He, nevertheless, underscored the importance of his pioneering role in Hausa language drama, saying, "I am the first and only person to write and publish Hausa plays in northern Nigeria and the nation at large" (Makarfi qtd. in Haushi <<http://ibrahim-sheme.blogspot.com/2008/01/shuaibu-makarfi-grandfather-of-hausa.html>>). This claim arose probably from the fact that other writers had written mostly single plays, whereas he wrote many radio play scripts from which a few were published.

A recent trend in Hausa literature is what critics call *Soyaya* writers or market literature. The movement began in the mid-1980s witnessing a growth of writing and reading culture among Hausa youth. Critics describe the writers as immature and not well educated whose mission is to corrupt the

mind of the youth with love stories adapted from Indian movies, novelettes that are self-published and of low quality (see, e.g., Adamu <http://www.kanoonline.com/publications/pr_articles_hausa_literary_movement.html>). The criticism may be adverse but the literary movement may hold positive implications for Hausa language and literature. Nevertheless, despite the widespread literacy in Hausa, the fast growing literary culture, and the vast number of speakers, playwriting activity in the language is both marginal and in decline. The *Soyaya* movement does not include playwriting, as Hausa drama has been limited to only TV and home video. Moreover, no one can tell how long Makarfi's claim of being the only writer of plays in Hausa may stand. An estimated 20-25 million people speak Igbo in southeastern Nigeria, parts of Equatorial Guinea and some parts of the Rivers and Delta states in south-south Nigeria. There are numerous dialects of the language, some of which are not mutually intelligible. The wide variety of dialects has made the adoption of a standard written form essential for literary purposes, but the acceptance of benchmark orthography has been very difficult for the same reason. The controversy that followed in the wake of each attempt to adopt orthography for Igbo may have had the adverse effect of stalling the literary development of the language.

Igbo orthography has witnessed four phases in its evolution. The first — Isuama Igbo — was an attempt at a synthesis of selected representative dialects among freed Igbo slaves settled in Sierra Leone and Fernando Po. The second — Union Igbo — was an initiative of European missionaries led by T.J. Dennis that had the Bible, hymn books, and prayer books translated into Igbo. The third — Central Igbo — was a standard backed by the colonial administration and that combined a core of dialects. The fourth — Standard Igbo — was led by the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture to make Central Igbo more inclusive with words from outside the core dialects and with loan words. English language playwrights of Igbo origin seem unable to write plays in their language. From university training in dramaturgy they may rely on materials provided by the Igbo culture in their plays, but never let the mother tongue deliver the indigenous materials. For instance, Esiaba Irobi, an accomplished playwright who is Igbo, makes the dramaturgy of Igbo ritual performance the basis of his theatre. In repossessing Igbo myths and extending ritual to communicate his contemporary meaning, he aims at a recognizably Igbo theatre rendered in English (Diala 87). Similarly, the late Sonny Oti, a foremost playwright of Igbo origin, told me in a discussion before his passing that although his plays, *The Old Masters* and *Evangelist Jeremiah* were in English, he actually wrote Igbo-in-English, because in the works he translated Igbo into English. Oti said that writing Igbo-in-English was a step to writing in Igbo. That may be so, but any play to be classified as Igbo drama must be one that not only uses Igbo materials or expressions but also is rendered in Igbo.

There are so far about two dozen published Igbo play texts for the study of the language in schools. They include *Umu Ejima* by S.O. Mezu, *Udo ka Mma* and *Aku Fecha* by A.B. Chukwuezi, *Nwa Ngwii Puo Eze* by B.I.N. Osuagwu, *Two Igbo Plays* edited by B.I.N. Osuagwu, *Obidiya* by S. Akoma, *Ojaadili* by Odunke, *Obi Nwanne* by Kalu Okpi, *Oguamalam* by Chika Gbuje, *Ugomma* by Godson Echebima, *Nka Di Na Nti* by B.C. Okoro, *Erimma* by T. Nzeako and *Nwata Rie Awo*, *Abu Na Egwuregwe Odinala Igbo* by N. Ugonna is a collection of traditional Igbo plays. Goddy Onyekaonwu has also contributed *Uwa Ntoo*, *Oku Ghere Ite*, and *Erii Mara Ngwugwu*. Innocent Nwadike has issued four plays, including *Okwe Agbaala*, *Onye Kpa Nku Ahuhu* and *Nwata Bulie Nna Ya Elu*. These Igbo plays were not composed primarily for performance; nor did people with interest, training or experience in theatrical practice write them. Teachers of Igbo language wrote the drama texts for Igbo literature students and teachers at the secondary and tertiary levels of education who must study them.

A playwright and lecturer in Igbo, Innocent Nwadike, remarked that apart from the school system, Igbo people would not be reading their books since they prefer reading English to Igbo. He noted that the reading culture is very poor in Igbo language. For instance, Igbo newspapers usually go into extinction once they begin, due to lack of readership. Igbo speakers normally do not read texts published in the language (Nwadike qtd. in Obioha

<<http://www.sunnewsonline.com/webpages/features/how/2005/feb/22/how-22-02-2005-001.htm>>). Right from the beginning of the missionary work in Igboland, the missionaries attempted to offer the people basic literacy in their native language as they also did among the Hausas and Yoruba. The missionaries developed the orthography for Igbo language and translated the Bible, a prayer book, and the hymn book into Igbo, as well used the language for instruction in the schools. It took about seventy years after the study of Igbo began in schools in Igboland through missionary and colonial efforts before the first creative writing in the language was published. *Omenuko*, by Pita Nwana, appeared in 1933 as the first published Igbo story. Despite the efforts of missionaries and the colonial government to lay the foundation for literacy in Igbo language, the Igbo were very slow in paying attention to the literary development of the language (on government involvement and literature and culture in Nigeria, see, e.g., Ochiagha <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol9/iss3/2>>).

The missionary work was not as successful in Igboland as it was among the Yoruba. Missionary work started among the Igbo as late as the 1870s and the work made little impact on the people prior to the Igbo areas becoming part of the protectorate of Southern Nigeria (Isichie 145). By 1890s the work of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the pioneering mission, was confined to Asaba, Onitsha, and nearby Obosi. The Catholic Mission too was confined to this area when it arrived and it was said in 1899 that "Onitsha and Asaba have been overworked while the rest of the Igbo country has been almost totally neglected except for spasmodic or ill-sustained efforts" (Isichie 145). But even in Asaba the congregation was only a tiny minority and in Obosi, a disillusioned missionary gave a summary which may stand for the whole history of the CMS and the Catholic Missions in Igbo land in the nineteenth century: "In a small district we perhaps touch one percent of the people, the reminder are indifferent or hostile to our work ... At first they receive us gladly, but as soon as there are any converts and the inevitable collision between heathen customs and Christian principles take place, this cordiality is replaced by coldness and suspicion" (qtd. in Isichie 145). However, the spread of colonial rule led eventually to missionary penetration of the whole Igbo interior in the coming years. Nevertheless, the main change in missionary situation resulted from the real incentive to seek Western type education that the Igbo people had under colonial rule. In her book *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, Elizabeth Isichie remarks that the incentive which colonialism brought to the Igbo people was two-fold. On the one hand, people needed to communicate with their new masters, especially since the channels of communication tended to fall into the hands of corrupt intermediaries. On the other hand, the government needed Africans who were educated albeit to a low level to fill the posts in its lower echelons. Isichie notes: "For the first time education was seen as the gateway to economic opportunity by the Igbo people themselves. They realised, as they never did before, that knowledge is power, and that it can command a good salary" (145). Thus the government had to fall back on the missionaries for personnel and expertise in running the schools, and provided subsidies accordingly. This development offered a solution to the financial handicap of the missions, who now had the opportunity they had sought in vain for so long to exercise real influence on Igboland. However, once the Igbo saw the incentives which colonialism brought, namely the privileges that followed education in English, they seemed to go all out to grab them, and in doing so seemed to have left perpetually the literary development of their language behind. Notable Nigerian dramatists of Igbo extraction include Sonny Oti, Zulu Sofola, Asiaba Irobi, Emeka Nwabueze, and Tess Onwueme. All these and more, who have emerged recently, practiced or practice their theatre and playwriting skills exclusively in English, abandoning literary plays in Igbo to linguists and educationists in the language.

An estimated 28 million people in Nigeria, Benin, and Togo speak Yoruba, and traces of the language are found among communities in Brazil, Cuba, Sierra Leone, and northern Ghana. The language consists of various dialects, but Standard Yoruba, the written form taught in schools and used in the media has probably contributed in building a common identity among the Yoruba. Standard Yoruba, which has undergone several changes since its introduction by the Anglican Church, is based on the Oyo and Ibadan dialects and incorporates several features from other dialects, besides having some

characteristics peculiar to it only. Its beginning is traced to the 1850s when Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a freed slave of Yoruba origin who rose to be the first African Anglican Bishop and an accomplished missionary-linguist, published a Yoruba Grammar and translated the Bible to the language. Similarly, Samuel Johnson, another Yoruba ex-slave, compiled the first history of the Yoruba people in 1897. Thus, Yoruba people themselves, despite the use of the Roman script, facilitated the development of literary Yoruba. Moreover, the study of the language began very early with the establishment of mission schools where instruction was given in Yoruba and English. Because of this foundation of bilingual literacy, the Yoruba today can boast of two literatures, one written in the mother tongue and another in English, both of them equally interesting and impressive and exhibiting similar stylistic and thematic features.

The best-known Yoruba language playwright, Akinwumi Isola, is an actor and dramatist, as well as a retired professor of Yoruba literature. His award winning play *Efunsetan Aniwura* written between 1961 and 1962 attracted an audience of about 40,000 people during a performance at the Liberty Stadium Ibadan in 1981. Isola had also written a Yoruba language novel, *O Leku*, but the stage success of the play was a revelation from which he learnt the advantage of drama over the novel as a vehicle for reaching the people. He then went on to write other plays such as *Kosegbe*, *Aye Ye Won Tan*, and *Olumo Iyalode Egba*. Isola once observed: "The Yoruba people are great theatre goers. That is why about a hundred professional theatre groups can thrive among them ... Artists that have valuable message for the people can count on a ready audience" (407). He began later a partnership with a video film production company to write video film scripts. This followed a decline in the patronage of stage performances when nightlife suffered severe setback in most parts of Nigeria due to security concerns. Isola's goal is to promote Yoruba culture by rendering most of his plays in the language: "In view of the intention to reach the people directly through my works, I thought about another medium and this lured me into writing scripts for home video ... Language is the nerve centre of the people's culture ... I write to promote Yoruba culture and bring up the younger generations in the use of the language" (Isola qtd. in Ajayi <<http://www.sunnewsonline.com/webpages/features/how/2005/may/24/how-24-05-2005-001.htm>>).

Among the Nigerian major languages, drama is far more developed in Yoruba. In addition, more playwrights have emerged in Yoruba than have emerged in any of the other local languages. Certain factors may be responsible for this. One of them is that the study of the Yoruba language received early attention. Under the directives and personal involvement of Bishop Ajayi Crowther, the language began to be studied from 1825 onwards. The use of the Oyo dialect in the translation of the Bible gave the dialect the boost and prestige to be accepted as the literary standard dialect for Yoruba. In addition to this, the Yoruba had a fairly full-blown indigenous theatre tradition. Before the era of Western education, ritual drama and the Alarinjo (traveling masquerades) existed as the forms of drama among the Yoruba. Various religious and secular festivals provided the communities with occasions for merry-making and for spectacular shows, including dances and songs. Apart from this, the Alarinjo masquerades went about performing from place to place, using the village square as stage.

Modern Yoruba theatre first began in the church as a kind of opera in which the songs are rehearsed, while the dialogue is improvised. Using this form, church societies performed Bible stories and moralities. Later professional companies added secular plays and social and political satires. Hubert Ogunde was a pioneer in this genre. Following his example, many travelling theatre companies arose. Most of the plays of the travelling theatre group were not scripted until Duro Ladkipo emerged as the first of the Yoruba dramatists to print his plays. The plays published in 1964 include *Moremi*, *Oba Koso*, *Oba Waja*, and *Oba Moro*. Obotunde Ijimere who, as a member of Ladipo's company, was inspired by his plays, began to write for the company. He wrote *Eda*, an adaptation of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Everyman*, *Woyenji*, which is based on an Ijaw tale and the *Imprisonment of Obatala*, based on a Yoruba myth. Apart from the plays originating from the travelling theatre companies, the

plays classified as "Modern Yoruba Plays" include those that had their first existence as written scripts and might not have been staged. They are published plays in the Yoruba language from which examination set books are selected, whose texts are available for critical studies and for performance by theatre groups: "Modern Yoruba plays have something in common with Yoruba written literature: they borrow a lot from oral literature, especially from oral poetry ... In many contemporary modern Yoruba plays one comes across references to ritual drama either in the form of deities being worshiped or in the form of traditional ceremonies being performed. The inclusion of these features lends colour and movement to the action in some of the plays. There is also a generous use of social songs, drumming and dancing, largely borrowed from the practice of the travelling theatre groups" (Isola 400). Thus, By 1980 there were about thirty published Yoruba plays. Presently there may be about fifty. The playwrights include Adebayoh Babalola, J.F. Odunjo, Adebayo Faleti, Olanipekun Esan, Duro Ladipo, Afolabi Olabimtan, Olu Daramola, Dosu Alamu, Babatunde Olatunji, Akinwumi Isola, Adegoke Durojaiye, Oladejo Okediji, Olarenwaju Adepojie, Lawuyi Oguniran, Wale Ogunyemi, Olusesan Ajewole, Olu Owolabi, T.A. Ladele, Aderinkomi, Olatinwo Fatoki, and Awoyele Opadotun (the names of the more prominent playwrights of Yoruba origin are missing from this list pending further research). Notwithstanding the potentials and opportunities of play writing in Yoruba, the likes of Wole Soyinka, the first African Nobel laureate in literature, and Femi Osofisan who achieved international fame as outstanding dramatists failed to write in their mother tongue despite the zeal for Yoruba culture apparent in their plays.

In conclusion, my study is an attempt to determine the quantity of playwriting in Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, the three major indigenous Nigerian languages. These languages have the largest number of speakers among the Nigerian languages and the extent of their use in literary drama, given their potentials, seems to indicate the degree of the relationship of established Nigerian playwrights to their indigenous languages. The usual claim is that the indigenous languages are unattractive for creative writing because of their negligible audience. This claim is probably not true with respect to Nigeria's said major local languages which share about half of the estimated 140 million population of the country between them and are studied at the secondary and tertiary levels of education. The Yoruba public crave for indigenous language drama and Hausa has a waiting reading public. What has worked for these languages may also work for Igbo and the other indigenous Nigerian languages. Besides the need to reach the Nigerian local populace with drama in their mother tongue, the creation of dramatic masterpieces in the languages by proven masters of the art will probably help in the languages' continued existence, growth, and fortification.

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