Language as the Core of Cross-Cultural Understanding

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Outline

- What is culture?
- Relationship between language and culture
- Some essential aspect of Yoruba Culture
  - Greetings
    - Greetings Based on Times, Seasons, and Circumstances
    - Greetings Based on Traditional Occupation or Religion
    - Situational Greetings
      - Greetings for a pregnant woman
      - Greetings for the new mother and the new baby
      - Greetings for the children of an older person that dies
- Names: What is a name?
- Use of Honorific Pronouns
- Kinship terms
- Incorporating Cultural Information into Language Instruction
- Conclusion

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What is culture?

- “Everything in human life and the best in human life”
- Culture as a way of life
- “Culture is seen to include everything people learn to do”
Relationship between language and culture

- Language expresses values and itself a value
- “Language is seen as social practice”
- The vocabulary of a language usually correlates with the cultural need and focus of the speakers of that language
## Yoruba culture: Greetings

### Times, Seasons, and Circumstances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greeting</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ß kú àárö</td>
<td>greetings for the morning (good morning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ß kú ösán</td>
<td>greetings for the afternoon (good afternoon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ß kú ìrölê</td>
<td>greetings for the evening (good evening)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ß kú alê</td>
<td>greetings for late evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ß kú ilé</td>
<td>greetings for being in the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ß kú àbö</td>
<td>greetings for coming back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ß kú ìrin</td>
<td>greetings for walking or for the trip</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Yoruba culture: Greetings

### Times, Seasons, and Circumstances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yoruba Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿ kú òòrùn</td>
<td>greetings for the sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿ kú fàájì</td>
<td>greetings for the enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿ kú ìjokòó</td>
<td>greetings for sitting down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿ kú ìyànjú</td>
<td>greetings for trying your best (in an endeavor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿ kú làákàyè</td>
<td>greetings for your intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿ kú ìpàdé</td>
<td>greetings for working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿ kú ìpàdé</td>
<td>greetings for the meeting/conference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yoruba culture: Greetings

Times, Seasons, and Circumstances

- ¿ kú ìdúró greetings for standing up
- ¿ kú àmójúbà greetings for seeing (a relative or friend that you have not seen in a long time)
- ¿ kú etí-ìgbô greetings from hearing from your friend or relative in a far away land
- ¿ kú ìdèlé greetings for staying at home while your loved one traveled or left home
- ¿ kú ààwë greetings for fasting (usually for Moslems during the month of Ramadan)
- ¿ kú rògbòdiyàn greetings for the problems going on in the country or around
Every traditional occupation among the Yoruba has a specific greeting and a specific response. Consider the following examples. (In all the examples in this subsection [A] denotes the person greeting the professional and [B] denotes the response of the professional):

**Babaláwo (A traditional healer)**

- **A:** Àbááyú-bayè o you sacrifice and you [will] survive the sacrifice
- **B:** Àbááyú-bayè - bærìíìe Ifä á gbè ô we sacrifice, we survive and the sacrifice [will] work Ifa Divinity will support you
Yoruba culture: Greetings

Traditional Occupation or Religion

**Aláró (A tie-dye person)**
- **A:** Àr÷ dú o you will dye it black
  - Àr÷yè o you will dye it safely
  - Àmugb÷e it will dry
- **B:** Olókun á gbè ô Olokun will support you

**Alágbëd† (a blacksmith)**
- **A:** Àræ yè o safe smithing
  - Owú á ræo the smith's hammer will smith [well]
- **B:** Ògún á gbè ô Ògún, the god of war, will defend you
Yoruba culture: Greetings

Situational (greetings for a pregnant woman)

When an older person meets a pregnant woman, the pregnant woman will be greeted as follows.

- **¿ kú idura**
  - Greetings for the struggle your body goes through

- **Àsökalé àõfààní**
  - May you bring forth the baby peacefully

- **Àfön á gbó k'ó tó wö**
  - The fruit, àfön, will ripe before it falls

- **A óò gbô ohùn iyá,- a óò gbô ohùn t'ænnæ**
  - We will hear the mother's voice and that of the baby

- **Tibi tire l'÷ ó bí o**
  - Both the good and the bad will be delivered

- **Àbíwêrê o**
  - Peaceful delivery

- **Eku kò ní í gbô,- ÷y÷ kò ní í mö o**
  - The mice will not hear [about the delivery] and the birds will not know
After the baby is born, the people in the house and in the neighborhood come to greet the new mother and the new baby. Usually, the greetings will be as follows:

- **Báríkà,-** Congratulations, greetings
- **÷ kú ewu àṣànlẹ** for the danger of childbirth
- **Àmọ̀ẹ̀ntuntun,-** Newborn, welcome from heaven
- **Mo yö fún ÷,- mo yö fúnra mi** I rejoice with you and I rejoice with myself
- **Oluwa yóò dá - àṣànlẹ̀si** *Oluwa* (the Yoruba supreme Lord) will preserve the child
- **ọ́ kú àṣàvô l'òmi** Greetings for dipping your hand in the water frequently
Yoruba culture: Greetings

Situational (new mother and the new baby)

- *Yóò l'òwöô rere lêhin*
  He or she will have good siblings

- *Yóò «e ìyààkále*
  He or she will be your child till your old age

- *Olúwa á «e ìyàànì "Bántálê"*
  *Olúwa* will make him *Bántálê*. (*Bántálê* is a Yoruba name that means [stay with me till my old age])

- *Orí ìyààá gbó, ð­së rë á ranlë*
  His or her head will be ripe and his or her feet will be established

- *¿ kú ìwô lósùn o*
  Greetings for dipping hands in red dye
Yoruba culture: Greetings

Situational (children of an older person that dies)

When an older person dies the children of the deceased will be greeted as shown below:

- Ọ kú à«ëyìndè  Greetings for replacing your parents
- Ọ kú ìnáwó   Greetings for the spending (for the funeral)
- Ọ kú ìdèlé   Greetings for watching over the household
- Èhìn bàbá/ìyá - á dára  His or her death will bring goodwill
Yoruba culture: Greetings

Situational (children of an older person that dies)

- Bàbá/Ìyá á á yà  Father/mother will come back
- Òôrun á á bà«írí o  Òôrun will not put you to shame
- Bàbá/ìyá á fohun rere pàræko  Father/mother will replace himself or herself with good things
- Bàbá/ìyá á á moore  Father/mother will be grateful
Yoruba culture: Names

Yoruba names indicate their values and beliefs, for example:

- **Yětúndé** “Mother comes back” (belief in incarnation)
- **Rótímí** “stay with me” (a name given to a baby after one has lost several babies funeral)
- **Ògúnwálé** “god of iron came home”
- **Ifábíyìí** “*Ifa* divinity delivered this child”
Yoruba culture: Names

Circumstances surrounding the birth of a child

- **Àbáyömí** “people would have ridiculed me”
- **Olúrèmílèkún** “stay with me” (a name given to a baby after one has lost several babies funeral)
- **Ìgè** “A breached baby”
- **Táíwò** “The first of the twins”
- **Kéhìndé** “The second of the twins”
- **Bôsëdè** “Born on Sunday”
Kinship Terms

- Uncle
- Aunt
- Cousin
Use of Honorific Pronouns

- Age
- Respect
Incorporation of Culture into Language Instruction

- A Language Class is NOT a Socio-Studies Class
- The Culture is Part of the Language
  The Language is the bearer of the culture
  • Greetings
  • Names
  • Respect
  • Kinship Terms
- Role Plays
Conclusion

Language is a critical aspect of any culture and true and deep cross-cultural understanding cannot take place without the knowledge of the language. Just as knowing about a language is not the same thing as knowing a language, in a similar fashion, knowing about the culture is not necessarily the same thing as knowing the culture in a way that will promote cross-cultural understanding.