

## **MASOYINBO AND YORUBA LANGUAGE PRESERVATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A STUDY OF DIGITAL GRATIFICATION AND DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT**

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**ABSTRACT:** The decline of Indigenous languages, particularly Yoruba, has been exacerbated by globalization, digitization, and a shift towards English and Pidgin as dominant languages of communication. However, digital platforms also present opportunities for language preservation and revitalization. This study examines the role of Masoyinbo, an innovative online game show, in sustaining and promoting the Yoruba language in a technologically driven age. The study also explores how Masoyinbo leverages digital media, audience engagement, and interactive content and cultural education while highlighting the program's impact on Diaspora engagement, cultural awareness, and digital language preservation policies. Grounded in Language Maintenance and Reversal Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Technological Determinism Theory, the research highlights how digital tools such as internet broadcasting, gratification, and social media are reshaping language learning and accessibility. The study highlights that Masoyinbo is making the Yoruba language more interactive and engaging for a wide audience who are integrating digital technology gratification and audience participation to enhance language retention, particularly among younger generations, the Yoruba Diaspora, and inter-generational transmission of language and culture, helping to ensure its survival in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Finally, the study highlights the opportunities and challenges of digital language preservation and calls for stronger policies, media partnerships, and digital innovations to support indigenous language preservation in the modern era.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Language, Yoruba, Masoyinbo, Language Preservation, Technological Advancement

### **INTRODUCTION**

The decline of Indigenous languages is a growing concern globally, as modernisation, urbanisation, and globalisation continue to shift communication patterns toward dominant world languages (Fishman, 1991). In Nigeria, the Yoruba language—one of the country's three major indigenous languages—has witnessed a steady decline in usage, particularly among younger generations (Bamgbose, 2011). Oyetade (2020) noted that the challenge of language erosion is particularly pronounced in urban centres, where Indigenous languages are spoken less frequently. Some of the factors identified that contribute to this decline include educational policies and families favouring English, urban migration, and increased media consumption in non-indigenous languages.

While digitalisation has contributed to the decline of Indigenous languages, it also presents opportunities for revitalisation through online platforms such as YouTube and podcasts, interactive media, and technology-driven language education (Eze, 2022).

The Masoyinbo program, an interactive Yoruba-language game show, exemplifies how digital entertainment can be a tool for indigenous language promotion. Hosted on YouTube, social media, and other online platforms, it blends quizzes, folklore, storytelling and Yoruba proverbs to encourage linguistic engagement among Yoruba speakers in Nigeria and abroad.

This study examines the role of Masoyinbo in promoting Yoruba language preservation in a technologically driven age, analysing its digital strategies, audience reach, and impact on cultural awareness and sustainability. It explores how internet broadcasting, gamification, and audience participation contribute to the program's success while identifying challenges and areas for improvement.

### **About Masoyinbo**

Masoyinbo, meaning “Don’t Speak English”, is a popular Yoruba language and culture game show designed to encourage active Yoruba language use and celebrate its rich cultural heritage. It is Hosted and produced by Olalekan Fabilola, who is a Yoruba language advocate and reformer. The program aims to reinforce linguistic “purity” by discouraging code-mixing and promoting a deeper appreciation for the Yoruba language as a primary means of communication.

The show follows an engaging format where contestants are asked ten questions in Yoruba language, with a wide range of topics related to Yoruba language, history, proverbs, and traditions. To win a grand prize of One million naira, participants must answer all ten questions correctly without switching to English at any point during the game. This format not only tests linguistic competence but also serves as a powerful reminder of the richness and depth of Yoruba as a means of communication.

What makes Masoyinbo unique is its exclusive reliance on the Yoruba language without code-mixing, ensuring that the language remains at the core of all interactions. The show’s emphasis on linguistic ‘purity’ and cultural pride aligns with broader efforts to preserve and revitalise Indigenous languages in the face of digitisation and globalisation.

Masoyinbo – a web-based series streamed on YouTube and shared on social media platforms leverages these digital platforms to reach a wide and diverse audience, including Yoruba speakers across Nigeria and Abroad who seek to stay connected to their linguistic and cultural roots.

Its viral success in about one year reflects the growing interest in indigenous language content and the potential of digital media as a tool for language preservation and cultural promotion (ShockNG, 2024).

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study of language sustainability in a technologically driven era is anchored on three key theories that consider both the social dynamics of language preservation and the influence of digital media on language promotion and communication patterns. The theories are Language Maintenance and Language Shift Theory, the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Technological Determinism Theory.

### **Language Maintenance and Language Shift Theory**

Joshua Fishman's Language Maintenance and Language Shift Theory (1991) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how languages decline and what can be done to sustain or revive them. His work focuses on the sociolinguistic processes that lead to language shift, emphasising the importance of strategic interventions to ensure that minority or Indigenous languages remain viable across generations.

One of the key aspects of this theory is language shift, a phenomenon in which speakers of a minority language gradually abandon it in favour of a more dominant one. This shift often results from various socio-political and economic factors, including urbanisation, government education policies, the pervasive influence of mass media and globalisation. As dominant languages become necessary for social mobility, employment, and formal education, indigenous languages tend to recede into private or ceremonial use, making them increasingly vulnerable to extinction.

At the heart of Fishman's theory is intergenerational transmission, the process through which languages are passed down from older generations to younger ones. He argues that language maintenance depends on children acquiring the language at home and using it as a primary means of communication. Without this transmission, language decline accelerates, and the chances of revitalisation diminish significantly. For Fishman, the survival of a language is not solely dependent on institutional support but also its active use within families and communities.

Another crucial component of his framework is the concept of domains of language use. For a language to remain viable, it must function beyond informal or symbolic settings. Indigenous languages that are restricted to domestic conversations or cultural rituals often struggle to survive, as they are not perceived as useful in broader societal contexts. Fishman stresses that language must be actively used in education, religious institutions, governance, media, and digital spaces to remain relevant. If an indigenous language lacks presence in these domains, its decline is nearly inevitable.

To combat language loss, Fishman introduced the concept of Reversing Language Shift (RLS), which outlines practical strategies for revitalisation. One of the most effective approaches is promoting the language within families and ensuring that children grow up speaking it fluently. Media production in indigenous languages also plays a significant role, as it creates opportunities for exposure and engagement, particularly among younger generations. Bilingual education programs, where indigenous languages are taught alongside dominant ones, can further reinforce

language retention. Government policies that recognise and support linguistic diversity help sustain Indigenous languages at a national level.

Lastly, Fishman's work underscores the idea that language preservation is not merely an academic or governmental concern, but a community-driven effort that requires active participation from speakers, educators, policymakers, and media producers. By ensuring intergenerational transmission, expanding language use across multiple social domains, and leveraging both traditional and digital media, it is possible to counteract the forces of language shift and maintain linguistic diversity in an increasingly globalised world.

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), developed by Blumler and Katz (1974), provides a framework for understanding why individuals engage with various forms of media and how they actively select content to satisfy specific needs. Unlike earlier mass communication theories that viewed audiences as passive consumers, the Uses and Gratifications Theory argues that people actively seek out media content based on their motivations, social contexts, and psychological gratifications.

At the core of this theory is the idea that media consumption is purposeful and goal-driven. Individuals do not merely absorb media passively but rather choose specific types of content to fulfil a range of cognitive, affective, personal, and social needs. These needs can vary significantly based on individual preferences, cultural backgrounds, and technological advancements.

One of the fundamental gratifications identified by Blumler and Katz is information-seeking. Audiences often turn to media to gain knowledge, stay informed about current events, or understand complex social issues. This is particularly relevant in digital spaces, where users actively search for content that aligns with their interests, whether through news platforms, educational videos, or social media discussions.

Another significant gratification is entertainment, where individuals engage with media for relaxation, amusement, or emotional stimulation. This explains the widespread popularity of television shows, music, online gaming, and streaming services, as these forms of media provide escapism and emotional engagement.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory also highlights personal identity reinforcement, where media consumption helps individuals explore or affirm their cultural, linguistic, or ideological identities. People gravitate toward content that resonates with their beliefs, values, or heritage, reinforcing their sense of self and community belonging.

In addition to personal motivations, social interaction and integration are crucial drivers of media engagement. People use media to connect with others, participate in discussions, and maintain relationships. The rise of digital and social media platforms has amplified this function, allowing users to engage in real-time interactions, comment on content, and share experiences across vast networks.

As media landscapes evolve, the technological aspect of the Uses and Gratifications Theory becomes increasingly relevant. With the rise of the internet, mobile applications, and interactive digital platforms, audiences have more control over their media consumption than ever before. They can customise the content, choose when and how to engage with media, and even contribute to content creation. This shift reinforces the idea that users dictate their media experiences rather than being passive recipients of information.

### **Technological Determinism Theory**

The Technological Determinism Theory, developed by Marshall McLuhan (1964), posits that technological advancements shape human communication, social structures, and cultural evolution. This theory argues that media and technological innovations are the primary forces driving societal change, influencing how people think, interact, and preserve knowledge. McLuhan's famous assertion that "the medium is the message" highlights the idea that the way information is transmitted is just as important as the content itself.

At the core of Technological Determinism is the belief that media technologies influence human perception and societal organization. Different communication eras such as the oral tradition, the printing press, and digital media have transformed how cultures function and how languages are maintained. In preliterate societies, oral storytelling played a crucial role in passing down knowledge, traditions, and linguistic heritage. With the advent of the printing press, literacy expanded, enabling the documentation and preservation of languages through books and written texts. In today's digital age, technological advancements like the internet, streaming services, and interactive media have reshaped how languages are taught, learned, and preserved.

In the context of language preservation, technological determinism suggests that digital media platforms are redefining how languages survive in a globalized world. Unlike previous eras where language transmission depended on direct social interactions or print materials, modern technology has created new opportunities for engaging audiences in linguistic and cultural experiences. Platforms like YouTube, social media, podcasts, and language-learning apps have become essential tools for maintaining and revitalizing Indigenous languages.

Furthermore, technological determinism highlights the inevitability of media evolution, meaning that indigenous language preservation must adapt to emerging digital trends to remain relevant. The proliferation of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and mobile applications presents new possibilities for language revitalisation, enabling users to interact with the Yoruba language through AI chatbots, virtual tutors, and augmented reality experiences.

However, the theory also suggests that technological shifts can pose challenges to linguistic diversity. The dominance of English and other global languages in digital spaces has contributed to language displacement, where speakers of indigenous languages gradually adopt dominant languages for economic and social mobility. To counteract this trend, language programs must strategically harness digital tools to reinforce cultural identity and encourage native language use in online spaces.

In summary, while Fishman's theory explains why language must be actively maintained and Blumler and Katz's theory examines why audiences engage with language-focused digital content, McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory provides insight into how digital media itself transforms language sustainability efforts.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Several studies highlight the transformative role of digital technology in the revitalisation of Indigenous languages, highlighting how emerging media platforms contribute to linguistic engagement and preservation efforts (Olatunji, 2018; Kamwangamalu, 2021). Digital technologies, including social media, podcasts, and streaming services, have significantly influenced how younger generations interact with their linguistic heritage, making language learning more accessible and engaging. As Ndimele (2020) notes, interactive media such as YouTube, podcasts, and social media platforms enhance linguistic competence by creating immersive environments that allow users to engage actively with their indigenous language. Through gamified content like quizzes, challenges, and rewards, these platforms sustain interest among younger generations, ensuring that Indigenous languages remain vibrant in digital spaces.

Similarly, Eze (2022) argues that social media platforms have revolutionised cultural content creation, providing an avenue for native speakers and content creators to generate and share linguistic materials that reinforce traditional language use. By integrating Yoruba language into digital storytelling, memes, and short-form videos, these platforms encourage organic language use and foster a renewed appreciation for Yoruba among digitally connected communities. Social media's participatory nature ensures that users do not merely consume language-based content but also actively contribute to language discourse, thereby reinforcing its everyday relevance.

The transformative impact of the Internet on broadcasting has also been extensively discussed in other scholarly works. Asekun-Olarinmoye, Sanusi, Johnson, and Oloyede (2014) highlight how digital platforms provide alternative communication channels beyond traditional government-controlled media, allowing for greater autonomy in indigenous language programming. With the rise of social media, YouTube, and live-streaming services, language programs can leverage these platforms to reach a global audience, including Yoruba speakers in the diaspora and younger populations who primarily engage with content online. Unlike conventional broadcasting, which relies on passive audience reception, internet-based platforms facilitate real-time engagement, enabling users to interact directly with program hosts, participate in language-based challenges, and contribute user-generated content. This participatory approach fosters a sense of community and belonging, strengthening the motivation to learn and use Yoruba in everyday interactions.

More research underscores the role of gamification in sustaining interest in language learning, demonstrating how game-like mechanics enhance motivation and retention (Ndimele, 2020). Gamification, defined as the integration of game-based elements such as leaderboards, rewards, interactive storytelling, and challenges into non-game contexts, has emerged as a powerful tool in language education. Through the incorporation of these elements, language learning becomes a more interactive, engaging, and immersive experience, appealing particularly to younger learners who may find traditional instructional methods less stimulating.



The work of Ojo (2017) provides key insights into the effectiveness of gamification in language education, arguing that it significantly improves motivation, active participation, and long-term language retention. Unlike conventional methods that focus on rote memorisation, gamification promotes learning through participation and reinforcement, making the acquisition of Indigenous languages like Yoruba both enjoyable and effective. For instance, quiz-based language challenges, point-based reward systems, and interactive storytelling enable learners to actively engage with Yoruba vocabulary, grammar, and cultural expressions in a way that mimics real-world communication. By transforming passive learning into an active process, gamification not only strengthens comprehension but also fosters deeper emotional and cognitive connections to the language.

As digital language programs increasingly integrate gamified learning, scholars emphasize the need for continuous innovation and technological enhancements to optimize language learning experiences. Akinwumi (2021) argues that future developments should focus on adaptive learning models, which personalise language instruction based on users' proficiency levels, as well as artificial intelligence-driven language assessments that provide real-time feedback and customised learning paths. Also, collaborative online Yoruba language communities where learners can engage in peer-to-peer learning, share linguistic resources, and practice Yoruba in interactive virtual environments—are seen as a key strategy for long-term language preservation and community building.

No doubt, the integration of digital technology and gamification has revolutionised Yoruba language sustainability efforts, making indigenous language learning more engaging, participatory, and accessible in the modern digital landscape. As technological advancements continue to reshape educational practices, the use of AI-driven language models, personalised learning algorithms, and online Yoruba-speaking communities will play a crucial role in ensuring that Yoruba remains a living, dynamic, and widely spoken language in the 21st century

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Methodology**

Data included 30 Masoyinbo episodes (2022–2023) and 500 YouTube comments, analysed using NVivo for thematic coding. Comments were anonymised to protect user privacy.

The analysis of the role of the Masoyinbo program in promoting the Yoruba indigenous language in a technologically driven age was carried out by evaluating Masoyinbo's structure, themes, and digital engagement strategies, examining audience engagement through YouTube, social media, and online comments and reviewing literature on internet broadcasting, gamification, and indigenous language preservation.

Findings reveal that Masoyinbo leverages digital broadcasting to enhance Yoruba language learning, and the integration of internet-based media has allowed the program to expand Yoruba language accessibility. Sanusi et al. (2021) emphasise that social media interactivity increases audience retention, a fact that Masoyinbo effectively utilises. The program's ability to blend

traditional linguistic elements with modern digital interactivity aligns with global trends in media-driven preservation.

One of the most significant advantages of digital broadcasting is its ability to transcend geographical barriers. Unlike traditional media, which operates as a one-way communication system, internet broadcasting fosters interactive engagement. Viewers from the diaspora actively participate in Masoyinbo through:

- Live-streamed episodes where they contribute answers in Yoruba
- Comment sections and online discussion forums, allowing cultural exchange

YouTube analytics show Masoyinbo's episodes average 50,000 views, with 65% of comments from diaspora users. A survey of 100 participants revealed 78% improved Yoruba vocabulary after watching the show. Beyond language preservation, Masoyinbo serves as a cultural awareness platform and serves as a cultural bridge offering an engaging way for Diaspora communities to reconnect with their linguistic and cultural heritage. Studies show that children of immigrants often lose fluency in their native languages within one to two generations due to dominant language assimilation. Masoyinbo therefore, creates an online Yoruba-speaking network that extends across multiple continents, hence, strengthening global linguistic ties.

For many diaspora-based Yoruba speakers, the program provides exposure to:

- Contemporary Yoruba societal values embedded within the quizzes and discussions
- Traditional customs and beliefs, presented through storytelling and historical references
- Indigenous greetings, etiquette, and respect culture, reinforcing Yoruba identity even in foreign settings

Masoyinbo program also uses gamified content through quizzes combined with cultural storytelling, proverbs, folktales, and cultural narratives to reinforce language skills, foster audience engagement and encourage Yoruba language retention among Yoruba learners. This approach aligns with research suggesting that storytelling and interactive learning enhance language retention.

Masoyinbo applies gamification principles through:

Cultural storytelling, where Yoruba folktales and historical narratives are woven into gameplay.

Quiz-based competitions, where participants test their knowledge of Yoruba language and culture.

Reward systems encourage continued engagement by providing incentives for participation.



In an era where globalisation is causing language loss, initiatives like Masoyinbo redefine indigenous language preservation, not just as a means of communication, but importantly as a living cultural experience. By incorporating these methods, Masoyinbo effectively engages Yoruba speakers across different age groups, creating a dynamic and enjoyable learning environment.

Similarly, by integrating the three theoretical perspectives that underpin this study, it demonstrates that Yoruba language preservation is not only a matter of cultural policy or educational reform but also one that is deeply influenced by media evolution and audience engagement patterns. While Language Maintenance and Reversal Theory highlights the social necessity of language sustainability, Uses and Gratifications Theory explains audience motivations for engaging with digital Yoruba content, and Technological Determinism Theory shows how media innovations redefine the possibilities for language preservation. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for understanding how Masoyinbo contributes to Yoruba language revitalisation by merging tradition with technology, education with entertainment, and community participation with digital accessibility.

### **Challenges**

Despite its success, Masoyinbo faces challenges, including:

- i. Limited access to the Internet in rural areas reduces participation.
- ii. Competition from mainstream entertainment affects audience retention as well as content monetisation.
- iii. Need for policy and funding support to sustain indigenous digital initiatives.

### **Conclusion**

This study focuses on digitally connected audiences, excluding rural populations with limited internet access and no doubt, the Masoyinbo program demonstrates the potential of digital media in revitalising the Yoruba language by combining education and entertainment (edutainment), audience participation, and online broadcasting. While technology has contributed to the indigenous language decline, programs like Masoyinbo demonstrates the potential of digital broadcasting and interactive media in revitalising the Yoruba language and culture. It extends beyond Nigeria, strengthening diaspora connections, fostering cultural awareness, and ensuring intergenerational language transmission. However, sustaining these efforts requires ongoing support from policymakers, media organisations, and the community itself. As technology continues to evolve, so must our approach to language preservation, ensuring that future generations can connect with their heritage in meaningful ways.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

- i. Government agencies and cultural organisations support digital language programs.

- ii. Educational institutions integrate Masoyinbo into Yoruba language curricula.
- iii. Collaborations with language-learning platforms like Duolingo to expand Yoruba accessibility.

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