

FROM VILLAGE SQUARE TO VIRTUAL SPACE: YORUBA LANGUAGE AND INDIGENOUS IDENTITY ON X

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Abstract

The increasing presence of indigenous Nigerian languages on social media has created spaces for linguistic practice, cultural transmission and identity construction. While previous studies have examined the visibility of Yoruba online, less attention has been paid to the identity work performed through indigenous-language discourse on X. This study examines how Yoruba linguistic and cultural resources are deployed to construct and negotiate indigenous identity. Adopting a qualitative digital discourse approach, the study analyses seven purposively selected and verifiable X posts published between April 2023 and March 2026. Guided by Bucholtz and Hall's Sociocultural Linguistic Theory of Identity, the analysis identifies four patterns: X functions as an informal digital classroom and cultural archive; Yoruba identity is constructed relationally; and indigenesness is performed through language advocacy and cultural positioning. The study argues that digital indigenesness involves using Yoruba linguistic and cultural resources to teach, preserve, negotiate and revalue identity in contemporary Nigeria.

Keywords: *Yoruba, indigenous language, indigenesness, identity, digital discourse*

“It is well known in language that the more it is used in several domains, the greater its development and expansion.”

— Ayo Bamgbose, *Yorùbá: A Language in Transition* (1986, p. 29)

Introduction

Language is central to how individuals and communities represent themselves, establish belonging and transmit cultural knowledge. For indigenous communities, it carries histories, values, beliefs and culturally specific ways of understanding the world. The continued relevance of indigenous language therefore depends partly on how its speakers reproduce and reinterpret these resources across changing social environments. The expansion of digital communication has created new spaces for such linguistic and cultural practices. Social-media platforms enable speakers to use indigenous languages, circulate cultural knowledge, explain linguistic forms and negotiate belonging. This is particularly significant in Nigeria, where English dominates formal education, public administration and many domains of digital communication, while indigenous languages continue to negotiate space within a highly multilingual society.

Yoruba offers a productive case. Its substantial speaker population, literary tradition and presence in popular culture have sustained its visibility in digital communication. Anóba (2023), for instance, shows that digital platforms facilitate the circulation and negotiation of Yoruba oral traditions, historical memory and belonging. Balogun (2023) likewise demonstrates Yoruba's growing visibility in Nigerian social-media practices and its role in identity negotiation through Yoruba and Yoruba-English/Nigerian Pidgin combinations in Instagram comments. Similarly, Onadipe-Shalom (2024) identifies social media as a space for Yoruba-language preservation and revitalisation through language teaching, proverbs, traditional values and music. These studies establish that Yoruba is not merely present online; it is actively reproduced and culturally mobilised. Yet *visibility does not in itself explain the identity work performed through language*. A post explaining a Yoruba name, for example, may simultaneously teach linguistic knowledge and position naming practices as markers of cultural belonging. Likewise, a comparison of Yoruba and Igbo expressions may affirm linguistic difference while recognising cultural similarity.

This study therefore shifts attention from the presence and preservation of Yoruba online to the *identity work performed through Yoruba-related*

discourse on X. It asks how linguistic and cultural resources are used to teach, archive, compare, advocate and negotiate indigenous identity.

Research Questions

The study addresses two questions:

1. How are Yoruba linguistic and cultural resources deployed on X to construct and negotiate indigenous identity?
2. What functions does Yoruba-related discourse on X perform in the transmission of linguistic and cultural knowledge?

The study argues that X functions as more than a communication platform. Within the limited but information-rich corpus examined here, it operates as an informal digital classroom and participatory cultural archive through which Yoruba linguistic and cultural identity is continually negotiated.

Literature Review

Indigenous Language, Culture and Identity

Language is closely connected to identity because linguistic choices can index affiliation, difference, values and social positioning. Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) Sociocultural Linguistic Theory is particularly useful here, conceptualising identity as emerging through linguistic and semiotic practices and emphasising indexicality and relationality. From this perspective, Yoruba expressions may index not only linguistic competence but also cultural affiliation, while comparisons with other Nigerian languages may construct identity through similarity and difference. Indigenesness is therefore understood in this study as the socially expressed belonging to, valuing and participating in an indigenous linguistic and cultural tradition.

Yoruba on Social Media

Recent scholarship establishes the growing significance of social media for Yoruba language and culture. Balogun (2023) demonstrates Yoruba's increasing visibility in Nigerian social-media communication and its role in identity expression. Anóba (2023) shows that digital platforms facilitate the circulation and negotiation of Yoruba oral traditions, historical memory and cultural belonging. Onadipe-Shalom (2024) similarly identifies social media as a space for Yoruba-language revitalisation through language

teaching, proverbs, traditional values, music and contemporary issues. Collectively, these studies establish social media as an important site of Yoruba linguistic visibility, cultural preservation and identity work. However, less attention has been given to the specific discursive practices through which Yoruba identity is performed in individual interactions on X. This study addresses that gap.

Education, Cultural Transmission and the Digital Space

Language is also a major medium of cultural transmission. Mansaray and Amosun (2002), in their discussion of curriculum innovation and globalisation, emphasise the importance of cultural transmission in education and the reproduction of cultural knowledge across generations. Although their work predates social media, this perspective is relevant to contemporary digital spaces, where users increasingly function as producers, teachers and disseminators of linguistic and cultural knowledge. The present study extends this concern to X by examining posts that explain Yoruba names, correct linguistic forms and circulate cultural concepts. It therefore considers X not as a substitute for formal education but as an informal site of linguistic and cultural learning.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) Sociocultural Linguistic Theory of Identity, which conceptualises identity as produced through linguistic and semiotic practices rather than as something that simply precedes them. The framework particularly foregrounds the indexical and relational construction of identity and the emergence of identities through interaction and negotiation. Three principles are particularly relevant to the analysis.

- a. Indexicality: Yoruba names, proverbs and culturally specific expressions can index linguistic knowledge, affiliation and cultural belonging.
- b. Relationality: Identity is constructed through similarity and difference, making the principle useful for analysing Yoruba–Igbo comparisons in D4 and D7.
- c. Emergence: Identity is understood as emerging through interaction rather than as a fixed possession; the study therefore examines how Yoruba belonging and indigenosity are performed and negotiated in the selected X posts.

The framework is appropriate because the study examines how identity is produced through digital linguistic and cultural practices, rather than assuming a predetermined Yoruba identity among users.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative digital discourse approach to examine how Yoruba linguistic and cultural resources are used to construct and negotiate identity on X. The approach is appropriate because the study focuses on the meanings and functions of linguistic and cultural practices in context rather than their statistical frequency. It examines how Yoruba is used to teach, explain, preserve, correct, compare and advocate linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Data Source and Corpus

The data comprise publicly accessible Yoruba-related posts on X. The platform was selected because its participatory structure enables users to produce, circulate and discuss linguistic and cultural content beyond formal educational settings.

The final corpus consists of seven publicly verifiable data units (D1–D7) published between April 2023 and March 2026. The corpus was deliberately restricted to seven items to allow each datum to be situated within its public context and subjected to close qualitative analysis. The study therefore prioritises contextual richness and analytical depth over corpus size.

Sampling Procedure

The study employs purposive sampling, selecting information-rich data units that illuminate Yoruba linguistic and cultural practices in digital discourse. Selection was guided by four criteria: the post must (1) contain identifiable Yoruba linguistic or cultural material; (2) relate to language, culture or identity; (3) provide sufficient material for qualitative interpretation; and (4) address at least one of the study's concerns: digital language learning, cultural transmission, identity construction, intercultural negotiation or indigenous-language advocacy.

The study does not claim statistical representativeness of Yoruba users on X. Rather, the seven data units are treated as information-rich instances of digital linguistic and identity work.

Digital Data Presentation

The seven data units are presented with the poster, date, time, thematic focus and relevant textual content to preserve their contextual integrity. Designated D1–D7, they are subsequently analysed according to their linguistic, cultural and identity functions.

D1: Yoruba Names as Linguistic and Cultural Knowledge (Poster: Alámòjá Yorùbá (@AlamojaYoruba); Platform: X; Date: 25 April 2023; Time: 7:06 p.m.; Focus: Yoruba names and their meanings; Post: “*The #YorubaName ‘Ọmómúrewá’ means: ‘The child brings goodness’ What’s the meaning of your Yorùbá name?’*”)

The post also uses the hashtags #learnyoruba, #YorubaNames and #yorubatraddition, explicitly positioning the content as an invitation to learn and share Yoruba linguistic and cultural knowledge.

D2: Ọmọ́lúàbí and Yoruba Cultural Values (Poster: olúwo jògbòdó Ọ̀rúnmilà (@animolenikun); Platform: X; Date: 2 September 2023; Time: 8:29 a.m.; Focus: Ọmọ́lúàbí and Yoruba philosophy; Post: “*On this Ose Ifa, let us look at Omoluabi: Who or What is Omoluabi?’*”)

The post subsequently explains Ọmọ́lúàbí as a Yoruba philosophical and cultural concept associated with qualities including goodness, courage, hard work, humility, respect, honour and integrity.

D3: Àgbẹ̀ and Yoruba Cultural Vocabulary (Poster: Alámòjá Yorùbá (@AlámòjáYoruba); Platform: X; Date: 30 November 2023; Time: 7:35 a.m.; Focus: Farming and Yoruba vocabulary; Post: “*Farming ‘Ìṣẹ̀ àgbẹ̀’ is the most prominent of all the professions...*”)

The post identifies àgbẹ̀ as the Yoruba term for farmer and situates the word within broader reflections on farming and its cultural significance.

D4: Yoruba–Igbo Cultural Similarity (Poster: Àròjinlè (@aroinle1); Platform: X; Date: 9 February 2024; Time: 7:00 a.m.; Focus: Yoruba and Igbo cultural-linguistic similarities; Post: “*Isn’t it amazing that Yorùbá and Igbo people hold the same myth about the civet cat?*”)

The post introduces the Yoruba expression “Ikú kii pètà lójúran” and explains its meaning. An Igbo respondent subsequently identifies the corresponding animal as Edi in Igbo and contributes an account of the associated belief.

D5: Yoruba Proverb and Linguistic Correction (Poster: Nojeem ‘Nudge’ Yusuf (@NudgeTM); Platform: X; Date: 25 March 2024; Time: 10:41 p.m.; Focus: Yoruba proverb, lexical distinction and linguistic correction; Post: “*The correct version of this Yoruba proverb is: Ògò tà, ògò ò tà, owó aláàárù á pé.*”)

The poster contrasts this form with the commonly used “Ògá tà, ògá ò tà.”, explaining the distinction between ògò and ògá and thereby drawing attention to Yoruba lexical accuracy.

D6: Indigenous Languages and African Identity (Poster: Reno Omokri (@renoomokri); Platform: X; Date: 15 August 2024; Time: 6:20 a.m.; Focus: Indigenous-language advocacy and African cultural identity; Relevant extracts from post: “*You cannot sing in English better than the English, but you can sing in your own language better than anyone.*” The poster further states: “*Do not worry about being understood. This is music. It is not a movie.*” and encourages African artists: “*I encourage Black African artists to learn from the Yorubas. Sing in Swahili, Zulu, Hausa, Wolof, etc.*”)

The post uses Yoruba musical traditions and Yoruba-language artists as examples in a wider argument for African indigenous-language expression and cultural authenticity.

Note: Because D6 is substantially longer than the other data units, only the extracts directly relevant to the present analysis are reproduced here.

D7: Ọlójòjò ọmọ and the Naming of Cultural Practice (Poster: Ayòwándé Adálémọ (@wandyvirus); Platform: X; Date: 12 March 2026; Time: 11:56 p.m.; Focus: Yoruba terminology, cultural identity and Yoruba–Igbo distinction; Post: “You don’t need to create a word. Are you Yorùbá? You should know it is called Ọlójòjò ọmọ.”)

The post distinguishes Ọlójòjò ọmọ from omugwo, identifying the latter as an Igbo term while discussing the related cultural practice of caring for a mother and newborn.

Analytical Procedure

The data were analysed through *qualitative thematic and discourse-oriented analysis*. Each post was examined for its principal linguistic or cultural practice, the meanings attached to its linguistic and cultural resources, and their implications for identity construction. The analysis focused on *language teaching and explanation, naming and linguistic knowledge, cultural transmission, linguistic correction, cultural comparison, identity performance, indigenous-language advocacy, and lexical and cultural negotiation*. These practices were subsequently grouped into broader themes.

Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) concepts of *indexicality, relationality and emergence* guided interpretation. The analytical process therefore moved from *linguistic/cultural practice → contextual meaning → identity function → broader cultural implication*. Posts explaining vocabulary, meanings or linguistic forms were examined for their informal pedagogical functions, while those circulating cultural values, concepts or practices were considered in relation to X as a *participatory cultural archive*.

Ethical Considerations

The study uses publicly accessible X posts. The analysis focuses on publicly available linguistic and cultural content rather than private information. Posts are identified through corpus codes in the analytical sections, while account names are retained where necessary for source identification.

Results and Analysis

X as an Informal Digital Classroom: D1—Yoruba Names as Linguistic Knowledge (Poster: Alámòjá Yorùbá; Date: 25 April 2023; Time: 7:06 p.m.)

The post states: “*The #YorubaName ‘Ọmómúrewá’ means: ‘The child brings goodness’ What’s the meaning of your Yorùbá name?’*” It also uses the hashtags #learnyoruba, #YorubaNames and #yorubatradiation, explicitly framing the post as a site of language learning. By pairing a Yoruba name with its English meaning, the post turns a culturally embedded linguistic form into an object of shared knowledge.

The question inviting users to share their own names makes the learning participatory rather than one-directional. D1 therefore demonstrates how X can function as an informal space for *language teaching and cultural learning*, while knowledge of Yoruba names becomes a means of publicly performing cultural affiliation and competence.

D5: Correction as Digital Language Teaching (Poster: Nojeem ‘Nudge’ Yusuf; Date: 25 March 2024; Time: 10:41 p.m.)

The post begins: “*The correct version of this Yoruba proverb is: Ọgọ tà, ọgọ ò tà, owó aláàárù á pé.*” It contrasts this with the form “**Ọgá tà, ọgá ò tà**” and explains the distinction between **ọgọ** (salt) and **ọgá** (boss). D5 represents a more explicit form of digital language teaching than D1: the poster identifies, corrects and explains a Yoruba linguistic form, making Yoruba itself the object of discussion.

Together, D1 and D5 demonstrate how X can function as an *informal digital classroom*, where users present linguistic information, explain meanings, correct forms and invite participation without a formal teacher–student structure or prescribed curriculum. This extends the educational concern with cultural transmission and knowledge acquisition identified by *Mansaray and Amosun (2002)* into the digital environment, where such transmission can occur through everyday interaction.

X as a Participatory Cultural Archive: D2—*Ọmọ́lúàbí* and Yoruba Values (Poster: olúwo jògbòdó Ọ́rúnmílà; Date: 2 September 2023; Time: 8:29 a.m.)

The post introduces *Ọmọ́lúàbí* as “a Yorùbá philosophical and cultural concept to describe a person of absolute goodness—An epitome of humanity”, associating it with courage, hard work, humility, respect, honour and integrity. D2 demonstrates that Yoruba digital discourse transmits more than vocabulary; *Ọmọ́lúàbí* serves as an entry point into a wider system of Yoruba ethical values.

The post therefore functions as a **participatory cultural archive**, circulating knowledge about character, integrity, respect, work and social responsibility while recontextualising inherited cultural values for a contemporary digital audience.

D3: Àgbẹ̀ and Cultural Vocabulary (Poster: Alámòjá Yorùbá; Date: 30 November 2023; Time: 7:35 a.m.)

The post describes farming as “*Ìṣẹ̀ àgbẹ̀*,” refers to “*Àgbẹ̀ l’ọ̀ba*,” and identifies **àgbẹ̀** as the Yoruba word for farmer. D3 shows that lexical instruction can also function as cultural instruction: **àgbẹ̀** is presented within a broader representation of farming and its significance in Yoruba society.

D2 and D3 therefore demonstrate how X can function as a *participatory cultural archive*, circulating values, occupations, concepts and expressions while making cultural knowledge accessible to contemporary users. This complements Onadipe-Shalom’s (2024) finding that social media facilitates the circulation of Yoruba language, proverbs, traditional values and cultural knowledge, and resonates with Anọ̀ba’s (2023) observation that digital platforms support the circulation and negotiation of Yoruba cultural and historical knowledge.

Identity through Relationality: D4—Yoruba and Igbo Cultural Similarity (Poster: Àròjìnlẹ̀; Date: 9 February 2024; Time: 7:00 a.m.)

The post asks: “*Isn’t it amazing that Yorùbá and Igbo people hold the same myth about the civet cat?*” It presents the Yoruba expression “*Ìkú kǐi pẹ̀tà*

lójúran” and explains its meaning, while an Igbo respondent identifies the animal as **Edi** and relates the associated belief.

D4 illustrates the *relational construction of identity*. Yoruba cultural knowledge is positioned alongside Igbo knowledge, with shared belief providing a basis for interaction while distinct linguistic forms are maintained. This supports *Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005)* principle of relationality: identity emerges through relationships of similarity and difference. D4 therefore shows that digital indigenous identity can involve *both cultural distinction and recognition of shared heritage*.

D7: Ọlójòjò ọmọ and Omugwo (Poster: Ayòwándé Adálémọ; Date: 12 March 2026; Time: 11:56 p.m.)

The post begins: “*You don’t need to create a word. Are you Yorùbá? You should know it is called Ọlójòjò ọmọ.*” It distinguishes the expression from **omugwo**, identifies the latter as an Igbo term, and acknowledges the value of caring for mothers and newborns.

D7 simultaneously performs *linguistic correction, cultural differentiation and intercultural accommodation*. The question “*Are you Yorùbá?*” explicitly links linguistic knowledge with Yoruba identity, making knowledge of the expression an index of belonging. Yet the post does not reject the related Igbo term or practice; it acknowledges its cultural origin and value. Yoruba identity is therefore constructed through *distinction without cultural separation*, supporting *Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005)* relational conception of identity.

Indigenouness, Language Advocacy and Cultural Positioning: D6—Reno Omokri and Indigenous-Language Advocacy (Poster: Reno Omokri; Date: 15 August 2024; Time: 12:20 a.m.)

D6 presents the clearest example of explicit language advocacy in the corpus. The post urges African artists to embrace indigenous languages rather than abandon them in pursuit of international recognition, declaring: “*Stop trying to be European or American. Be yourself.*” It further encourages artists to “*Sing in Swahili, Zulu, Hausa, Wolof, etc.*” and cites Yoruba musicians including Fela, Ebenezer Obey, King Sunny Adé, Shina

Peters and K1 De Ultimate as examples of artists whose Yoruba-language music reached audiences beyond the Yoruba speech community.

D6 therefore positions indigenous language as an *ideological resource for authenticity and global cultural expression*. The contrast between imitation and “being yourself” makes language choice a form of cultural positioning, challenging the assumption that international visibility requires abandoning local linguistic resources.

The finding also extends the study’s understanding of indigenesness as an *active practice of valuing, promoting and defending indigenous linguistic resources*, rather than merely an inherited condition. This connects with *Falayi (2026)*, whose study of cultural identity in transnational musical collaborations demonstrates how linguistic choices contribute to the negotiation of cultural identity across wider cultural spaces. The present study extends this concern to digital discourse by showing how indigenous-language advocacy itself becomes a form of identity positioning.

Discussion of Findings

X as an Informal Digital Classroom

D1 and D5 show that X functions as an informal language classroom, where users explain Yoruba names, proverbs and lexical forms. Learning is participatory and decentralised, with users acting as teachers, learners and contributors. This extends Mansaray and Amosun’s (2002) account of cultural transmission by demonstrating how users facilitate Yoruba linguistic and cultural knowledge online.

X as a Participatory Cultural Archive

D2 and D3 show that X circulates cultural knowledge beyond vocabulary: *omólúàbí* conveys values of character and responsibility, while *àgbè* connects language with farming and cultural memory. X thus operates as a participatory cultural archive, supporting Onadipe-Shalom’s (2024) and Anóba’s (2023) observations on digital preservation while showing how cultural knowledge contributes to contemporary Yoruba belonging.

Identity as Relational and Negotiated

D4 and D7 demonstrate the relational construction of Yoruba identity. D4 places Yoruba and Igbo cultural knowledge in relation through a shared belief, while D7 distinguishes *Ọlójùdò ọmọ* from Igbo *omugwo* while recognising their relatedness. This supports Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) view of identity as constructed through similarity and difference.

Indigenusness as Active Linguistic Positioning

D6 foregrounds the ideological significance of indigenous language by encouraging African artists to embrace indigenous languages and presenting Yoruba-language music as cultural expression. Language choice therefore becomes a means of identity positioning, framing indigenous language as a resource for authenticity and global expression rather than as subordinate to dominant languages.

The Emerging Digital Ecology of Yoruba Identity

Taken together, the seven data units reveal an interconnected digital ecology: a name becomes a language lesson (D1), a proverb a site of learning (D5), a cultural concept conveys values (D2), an occupation preserves cultural memory (D3), comparison produces relational identity (D4), language advocacy foregrounds indigenusness (D6), and lexical distinction reinforces cultural recognition (D7). X consequently emerges as a space where Yoruba identity is continually interpreted, negotiated and reproduced.

This does not suggest that X has “saved” Yoruba or that Yoruba users engage with the platform uniformly. Rather, the findings show that particular users are actively creating spaces for linguistic learning, cultural transmission and identity work. The significance lies in shifting attention from whether indigenous languages merely survive online to how speakers actively reconfigure indigenusness through digital practice.

Conclusion and Implications

This study has examined the relationship between Yoruba language, indigenusness and identity on X through a qualitative analysis of seven verified posts. The findings demonstrate that Yoruba-related discourse on the platform extends beyond ordinary communication. Users employ Yoruba linguistic and cultural resources to teach language, circulate

cultural knowledge, negotiate relationships with other Nigerian linguistic communities and advocate the continued relevance of indigenous languages.

The study identifies X as an informal digital classroom and participatory cultural archive. The data further show that Yoruba identity is relationally constructed through linguistic and cultural comparison, while indigenesness is actively performed through language advocacy and cultural positioning. These findings support Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) conception of identity as emergent and relational.

The study therefore argues that indigenesness is not simply an inherited identity but one that can be performed, affirmed, negotiated and reimagined through digital linguistic practices. Yoruba on X is not merely surviving in a new technological environment; it is being taught, explained, archived, compared, defended and reimagined, *From the village square to virtual space, the site of indigenous identity has expanded.*

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. Digital platforms be used as complementary spaces for indigenous-language learning, *particularly for teaching Yoruba vocabulary, expressions, proverbs and cultural knowledge.*
2. Content creators and educators develop structured Yoruba-language content *that supports linguistic learning and cultural transmission beyond formal classroom settings.*
3. Educational institutions incorporate relevant digital materials into indigenous-language instruction, *connecting formal learning with naturally occurring online discourse.*
4. Indigenous-language digital content be systematically documented and archived *as a resource for cultural preservation and future research.*
5. Further studies examine larger and more diverse digital corpora, *including other platforms, indigenous Nigerian languages and cultural communities.*

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