



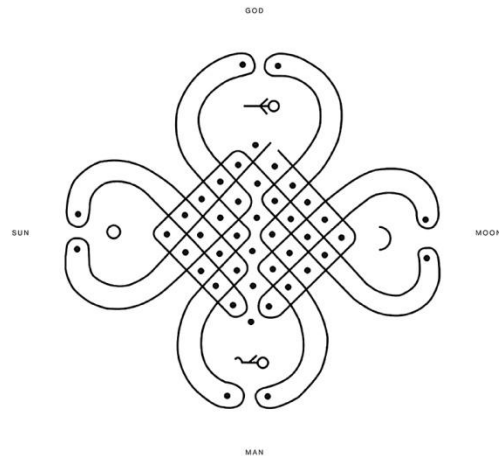
**Osmond Tshuma**

***Osmond Tshuma is the award-winning co-founder and creative director of Mam'gobozi Design Factory. Over the years, he has worked on numerous brands across Africa, from MTN, Telkom, RMB, SABC, Apartheid Museum, and McDonald's, just to name a few. Invited to speak at the Typographics NYC 2020, Dex Atmosphere 4.0 conference and ATYPI 2020 Pan Afrikan Dialogues, Osmond's unique designs have been featured on the Obama Foundation website and he has had projects published in both Singapore and the USA. He has worked on memorable campaigns, like the iKwekwezi FM rebranding and the launch of the limited-edition Soweto Gold '76 commemorative beer. His accolades include awards from the Pendoring show, Loeries, the New York One Show and Cannes Awards.***

## Afrika: love Letters

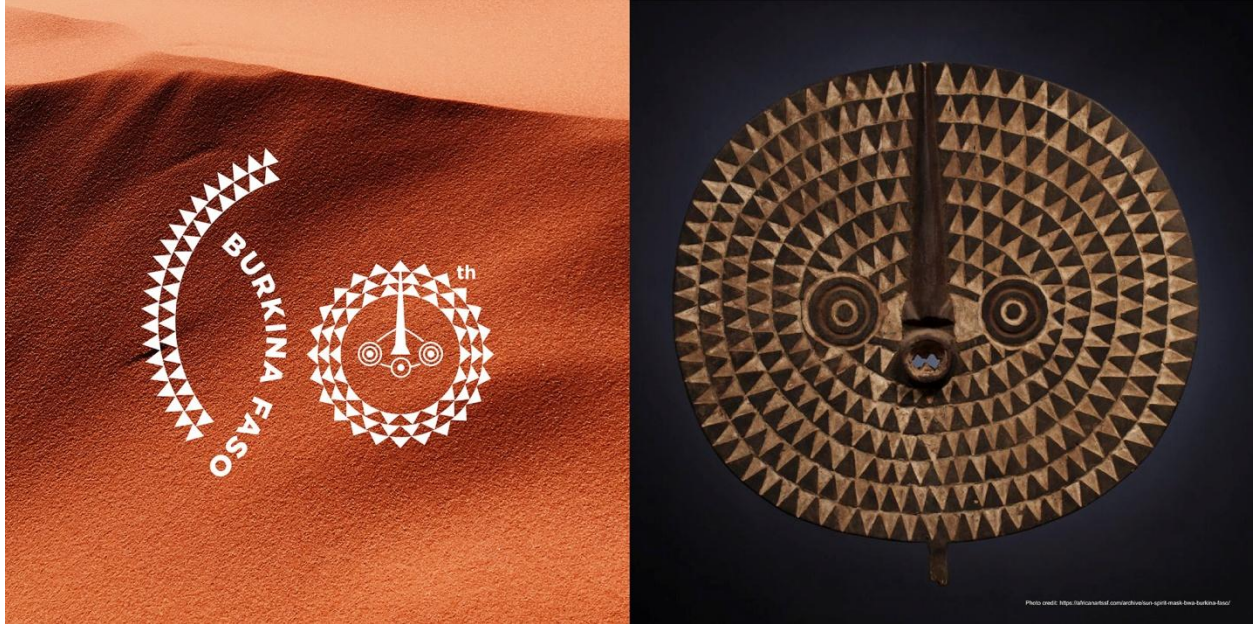
*Osmond Tshuma*

“This self-initiated project is based on celebrating Afrikan countries independence from colonial rule through an exploration of lettering and letter forms. This was initiated by the disturbance of the xenophobic attacks happening in South Africa towards other Afrikan nationals. In educating myself further about each country, I started critiquing the state in which it is in, by means of ancient cultural symbols, art, sculptures or patterns. I also attempt to explore the similarities we have with one another. By doing so I am able to realise that it’s more about learning from the past, and from other cultures so to preserve who we are and also celebrate one another.”



**Angola 45** - Inspired by the Lusona writing system native to the Chokwe people. Lusona is an ideogram that functioned as mnemonic

devices to record proverbs, fables, games, riddles and animals, and to transmit knowledge. The ideograph reference illustrates the oral story of the beginning of the world among Chokwe people. The top figure is God, the bottom is man, on the left is the Sun and on the right is the Moon. The path is the path that leads to God.” - (Bastin, 1961, page 39).



**Burkina Faso 60-** Inspired by the sun spirit mask of the Bwa people of Burkina Faso, which is used to celebrate the farming season.



**Chad 60-** Inspired by the ancient Wodaabe face tribal scar tattoos which symbolise beauty.



**Eritrea 29-** Inspired by beautiful hand-made patterns called Tibeb on a Habesha dress. A Habesha dress is a traditional attire worn by Habesha women. Throughout the history of Eritrea, women have played an active role.





**Gabon 60-** Inspired by the Bakota reliquary guardian figures (mbulu ngulu), traditionally the Bakota believe in the ancestors powers of the afterlife.



**Ghana 63-** inspired by the Dwennimmen Adinkra icon which symbolizes strength and humility.



**DWENNIMMEN**  
Symbolises strength and humility



**Morocco 64** – Inspired by colourful Moroccan mosaic patterns called Zellij, which is a craft that dates back to at least the 700s. This craft can be found in many architectural structures in Morocco; like mosques, gates and opulent palaces.



**Nigeria 60-** Inspired by the Queen Mother Pendant Mask while the ascender for the 6 is inspired an altar tusk. In the Kingdom of Benin, ivory was related to colour white a symbol of ritual purity that's why

it was used in many altars. The Queen Mother Pendant Mask is one of many masks and artefacts that were looted 123 years ago by the British.



**Zambia 56-** Inspired by the African fish eagle, the national bird of Zambia, the design on 6 is inspired by the waving patterns on the Makenge baskets.



***'SegunOlude runs a collaborative graphic design studio, teaches graphic design. His professional portfolio includes 11-year dossier of teaching graphic design at the University of Manitoba, while also producing various editorial and magazine design, corporate identities, web design, commemorative postage stamps for Canada Post, local and international event branding, including the event branding and publicity materials for TEDxWinnipeg.***

***'Segun is involved in various professional and community organisations in Canada. He participates annually in community development missions with his wife. 'Segun also teaches professional development courses each year in Canada and Nigeria. An engaging presenter, he is often called up to present or speak about topics ranging from human rights, immigration, integration, and multiculturalism, through Historica Canada and Passages Canada.***



## **Deeper Than Decolonisation**

### **How we retrace a path back in the age of technology**

*'Segun Olude, CGD*

#### **ABSTRACT**

**Yoruba language utilised oral traditions for communication and preservation of history before contact with the Northern, Arabic, and Islamic influences, and later, the arrival of Europeans. There is an opportunity to capture, archive, and share the stories and adages in electronic format to make them widely accessible for learning and storytelling. However, there are some challenges—there are not enough compliant typefaces and fonts and no cohesive educational or cultural policy to guide such endeavour. By consciously working to create the tools and define multiple outputs, it is conceivable to change Yoruba language's status from a likely death to a viable digital language of education, business, and industry.**

#### ***Keywords:***

**Yoruba; Yorùbá; language; history; oral traditions; typeface; multilingual font; latin extended font; language death; visual language; pattern;**

**Earlier in the history of Yorùbá people, stories were passed on by word of mouth through poetry and song. It was a simpler time. People used what they had to tell their stories—words. They had time to tell stories as they worked on the farm, did their chores, or went on hunting expeditions.**

**In traditional Yorùbá settings where families lived close to one another or within compounds, they shared everyday experiences. During their interactions, stories were told and retold. It had a curatorial and editorial effect on stories that were edited, embellished, and passed on.**

**Today, Yorùbá families are widely dispersed around the world. Opportunities to learn or retell the stories that once passed down from one generation to another are slowly disappearing. Everyone is busy. Time is limited, work and family life are demanding. Lack of geographic cohesion among family members is mostly absent. Family members have drifted off to urban centres, many have moved abroad. Each person has access to a plethora of electronic entertainment options on personal hand-held devices for those living closer together.**

**There is an opportunity to capture, archive, and share the stories and adages in electronic format, accessible to anyone interested in learning the language. However, there are some challenges—not enough compliant fonts and a lack of policy to collect and store stories. Keeping the language alive requires active use—tools are needed to teach Yorùbá as first-language to the young. The importance of language and culture must be the foundation of such education.**

**In our differences, we find our similarities. Let me explain. Everything discussed in my book, *Ìtàn ati Àṣà Ìbíle Yorùbá: The Yorùbá Narrative in Words and Images*, can be said about any other**

culture, language, tribe, or people. We all eat, drink, dress up, and believe in some higher power. In the case of the Yorùbá, we call God by His many names—*Baba wa, Ọlọrun, Olódùmarè, Oluwa, Ọba Ogo*, and such our narrative is extensive.

Stories are a form of packaged communication. Therefore, idioms, allegories, folktales, adages, and proverbs can be building blocks of narrative. Cultures around the world use or have used various forms of oral traditions to preserve knowledge and share their cultural histories.

The Aborigines of Australia use *songlines* to preserve and retell the story of creation and navigate vast geographical spaces. Cherokee legends contain the knowledge of rituals, magic and healing methods. *The Torah*, later *The Holy Bible*, are rich in the narrative of middle-eastern Jews. The Yorùbá have a highly developed culture and structured societies, and a complex, layered oral tradition system. They have a very expressive tonal language that contains direct, indirect, and hidden clues to religious beliefs, social and political structures, history and lineage, and other essential aspects of Yorùbá life. Words, phrases, idioms, and stories coalesce into the foundation of Yorùbá language. It is necessary to use proper accents and diacritical marks to show the language's full tonal range.

I chose to focus on Yorùbá narratives because many Yorùbá indigenes living outside their country of origin have lost or are losing their connection to the language and culture. If I thought this predicament was unique to my family, I soon found out it was a general problem. Like other migrant groups abroad, Yorùbá-born

**expatriates stop speaking their birth language, and their children often never learn it. In one generation, the language is lost or dead.**

**In my study of Yorùbá language and culture, I used transcribed interviews, observation, discussions, and various methods of investigation of real-life Yorùbá people from different walks of life, both in Nigeria and in the diaspora. The project's culmination is a collection of stories that reveal the true identity of the Yorùbá from historical influences present in the culture, expressed as a book, a series of educative poster panels, pronunciation keys, typographic explorations, and beautiful photography, and video [interviews] conversations.**

**The study also looked at the Yorùbá alphabet, words, phrases, idioms, and stories. That led to creating working typefaces, with complete accents and diacritical marks, a necessary step in the transition from an oral tradition to digital expressions. The refinements found in older Yorùbá books are mostly missing from digital communications, for self-evident reasons.**

**Apart from oral traditions, there is a rich visual language of patterns and designs on crafts, sculptures, and cloth derived from the history, stories, and cultural beliefs of the Yorùbá. I attempted to collect and arrange the various components of the narrative of the Yorùbá people and their culture, study their importance within the context of their tribal identity, and highlight the influences of storytelling on cultural identity. I utilised elements of qualitative and quantitative research, transcribed interviews, observations, discussions, and**



investigation of real-life Yorùbá people from various walks of life, both in Nigeria and the Yorùbá diaspora.

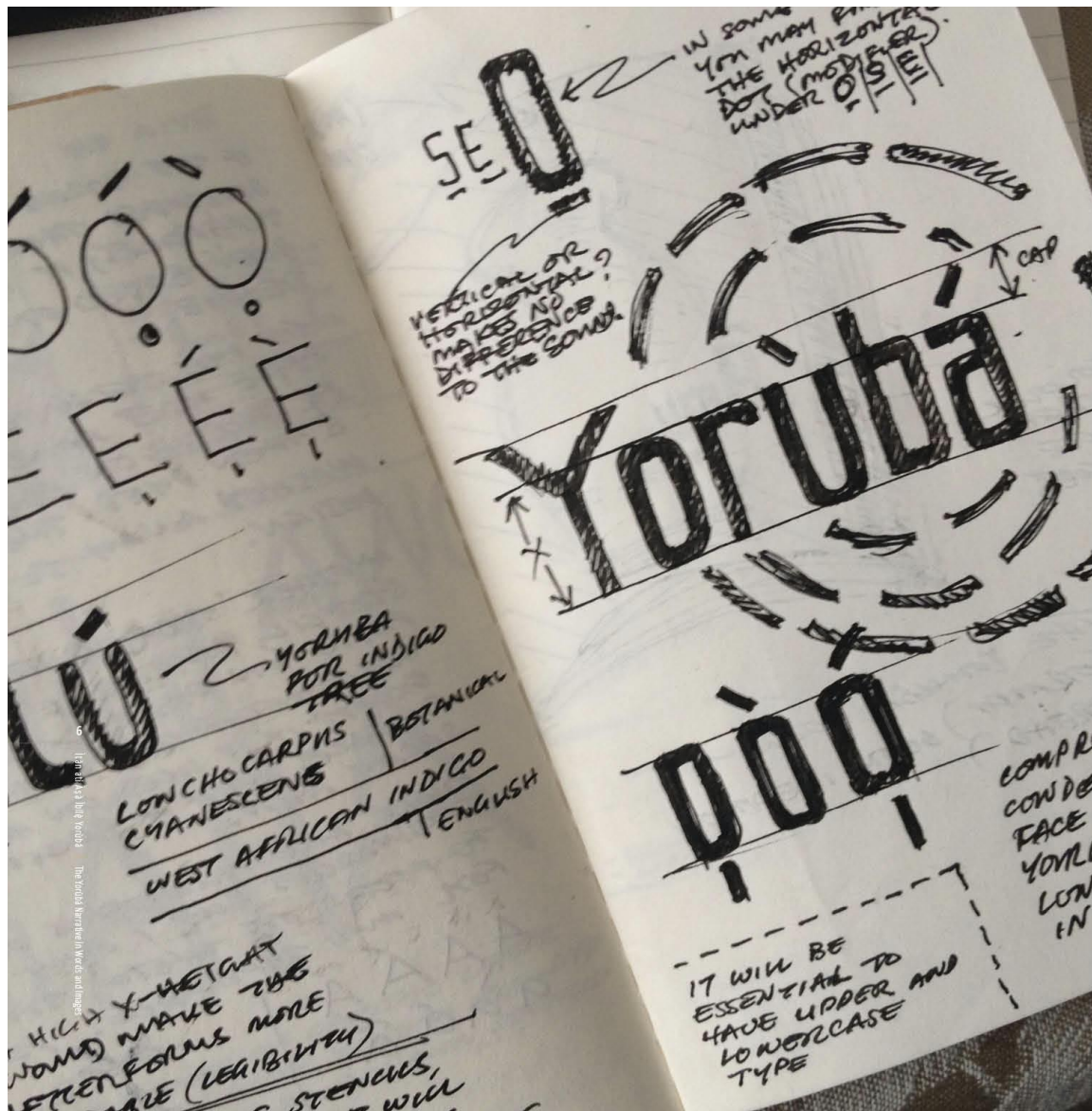


Figure 1. A page from a sketchbook, examining the form and structure of Latin extensions for Yoruba alphabet, trying to make logical decisions that would benefit the typical user.



**Figure 2& 3. Two page spreads to show the layout of the book, with images on the left, text on the right, backed by margin notes to give context. Some pages have relevant adages in both Yoruba and English.**

## **A Challenge to Oral Traditions Citation**

**It is worth stating that one of the greatest challenges of documenting oral traditions is the western educational institutions' view of citations. How do you cite oral traditions that have no written records but an aggregation of agreed meanings? I believe it is time to redefine a different trajectory for studying indigenous languages like Yoruba as we retrace a path back to our pre-colonial past, to reestablish place and meaning.**

## **A Taxonomy for Yoruba People**

**For the sake of clarity and ease of communication, I was pressed to developed a rudimentary taxonomy and classified Yoruba people into three main groups—Historical, Traditional, and Contemporary Yorùbá. This classification is only to understand the perceptions of the different groups. Some of the extremes I have encountered range from the Yorùbá traditionalist who does not think the language could ever die, to the contemporary Yorùbá who think the**

language should fade away already, for the sake of Nigerian unity, a national identity, or other personal reasons.

**Historic Yorùbá** are those who we only know through oral traditions and the writings of people like Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Samuel Johnson, and the first Yorùbá historians. They had access to “purer” oral history sources. It might be worth considering that the Yorùbá transported across the Atlantic to Brazil, Cuba, and The Caribbean, who kept the traditional religious practices, are, in essence, historical by their traditional practices. This is because they retained pre-colonial beliefs in the new lands.

**Traditional Yorùbá** are Yorùbá of the period before the pressures of modernisation and foreign education set in. They lived with little or no modern conveniences, used herbal medications all the time, and produced crops by tiling the earth with traditional hand-hewn implements. There still are traditional Yorùbá today who live close to the land in more remote villages or enclaves within larger urban centres. Also, a traditional Yorùbá might be someone who has decided to reconnect with their heritage and live close to the land. They are sometimes referred to as “Traditionalists” or “Revivalists,” whether they live at home or abroad. I wish to use the term “neo-traditional Yorùbá,” but have not found a perfect fit for it.

**Contemporary Yorùbá**, as the name implies, are those who live in a post-colonial Nigeria, have an education and are exposed to modern amenities values of microwave, automobiles. They may or may not speak the language with fluency and have less affiliation with the culture. I could break this group into two sub-groups, but it

might get messy. Some Yorùbá who cannot speak or write the language yet have a legitimate claim to being Yorùbá—legal, hereditary, choice, marriage, or genetic—fit into this group. Also, Yorùbá living abroad in various parts of the world as Yorùbá in Diaspora belong in this classification. I, the writer, belong to this group.

Not originally in the taxonomy matrix, but included among the contemporary Yorùbá classification are those that I loosely refer to as “**Digital Yorùbá.**” They were born in the last 20 years and live contemporary Yorùbá lives. They have educated parents, grew up with computers, own digital devices, access the internet, and identify more with the western world than their Yorùbáness. Some digital Yorùbá are curious about their heritage and fantasize about the past heroics they have heard in stories. This class is growing fast as more Yorùbá youth join this group. Some even anglicise the spelling of their names to look or sound more western. This challenging group is my primary audience.

**From Oral to Digital Stories: Keeping the language alive through use.**

To keep language or heritage alive, it must be used. It cannot be kept in museums. Yorùbá adages, idiom, and essential knowledge was committed to memory and transmitted with words and song. It depended on the ability of the storyteller to memorise stories and retell them accurately. Then, there’s the challenge of dialects and regional differences in pronunciation.



The written form of Yorùbá developed after contact, first with Arabs through trans-Saharan trade and *jihads*, and later with European traders who travelled over the Atlantic Ocean. The final choice of a Latin-based Yorùbá alphabet was made after deliberation over the complexity of the Arab script, as cited in Isaac Adejoju Ogunbiyi's paper: *The Search For A Yorùbá Orthography Since The 1840S: Obstacles To The Choice Of The Arabic Script*. Ogunbiyi noted that there were inconsistencies in the written form of the language and some pronunciation limitations that would have interfered with the spoken language's tonality.

The *Ajami Script* could not capture the vocal nuances of the Yoruba language and was dropped. With influence from early Christian missionaries in Yorùbá land, the Latin alphabet based Yorùbá supplanted the Arabic script to become the de facto form of written Yoruba.

*Comparative table of Arabic/Yoruba, 'ajamī and Romanized alphabets*

S/N	Arabic	Yoruba 'ajamī	Romanized Yoruba	S/N	Arabic	Yoruba 'ajamī	Romanized Yoruba
1	ب	ب	b	19	س	س	s
2	م	م	m	20	ر	ر	r
3	و	و	w	21	ش	ش	s/sh <sup>1</sup>
4	ف	ف	f	22	ي/ي	ي/ي	y
5	–	ب/پ	p/kp	23	ك/ك	ك/ك	k
6	–	ب/غ	gb	24	غ	غ	g <sup>2</sup>
7	ت	ت	t	25	ق	–	-
8	د	د	d	26	ع	–	-
9	ث	–	-	27	هـ	هـ	h
10	ذ	–	-	28	ء	–	-
11	ظ	–	-	29	fatha	َ	a
12	ط	–	-	30	kasra	ِ	i
13	ض	–	-	31	damma	ُ	u
14	ل	ل	l	32	–	آ/إ/ع	e
15	ن	ن	n	33	–	و/أ/عوا	o <sup>3</sup>
16	ج	ج	j	34	–	ي/ع	e <sup>3</sup>
17	ز	–	-	35	–	و/عوا	o <sup>3</sup>
18	ص	–	-				

1. 'Sh' used by many writers until recently instead of 's'.
2. The Yoruba 'g' is pronounced like the Cairo ج .
3. Recent innovation/modification.

**Figure 4. Yoruba Ajami Script, credit The Search for a Yorùbá Orthography Since the 1840s–Obstacles to the Choice of Arabic Script by Isaac Adedoku Ogunbiyi.**

**By the time Nigeria became an independent nation, The Yoruba Bible and a few other books had already been written and published in the Yoruba language. As we all know, the old technology used to print books is mostly gone. The old letterpress and hot type publishing are gone, replaced by computers and other digital devices. Today, Yoruba authors find it easier to access books, but many do not have proper accents and diacritic marks. To retain the authenticity of Yoruba stories, it is necessary, in my opinion, to retain the marks because they help differentiate words and sounds. One word could mean five different things in Yoruba language. For instance, *Owo* could mean money, trade, hands, respect, or a particular plant.**

**Could graphic design be a means of collecting, conserving, and regenerating interest in the Yorùbá narrative? Could graphic design help present Yoruba in visually engaging ways that are easily-accessible in analogue and digital forms? Those questions are answered on the following pages. These are my proposals for using design to facilitate learning Yorùbá, and keeping Yorùbá stories alive, especially among Nigerians living abroad.**

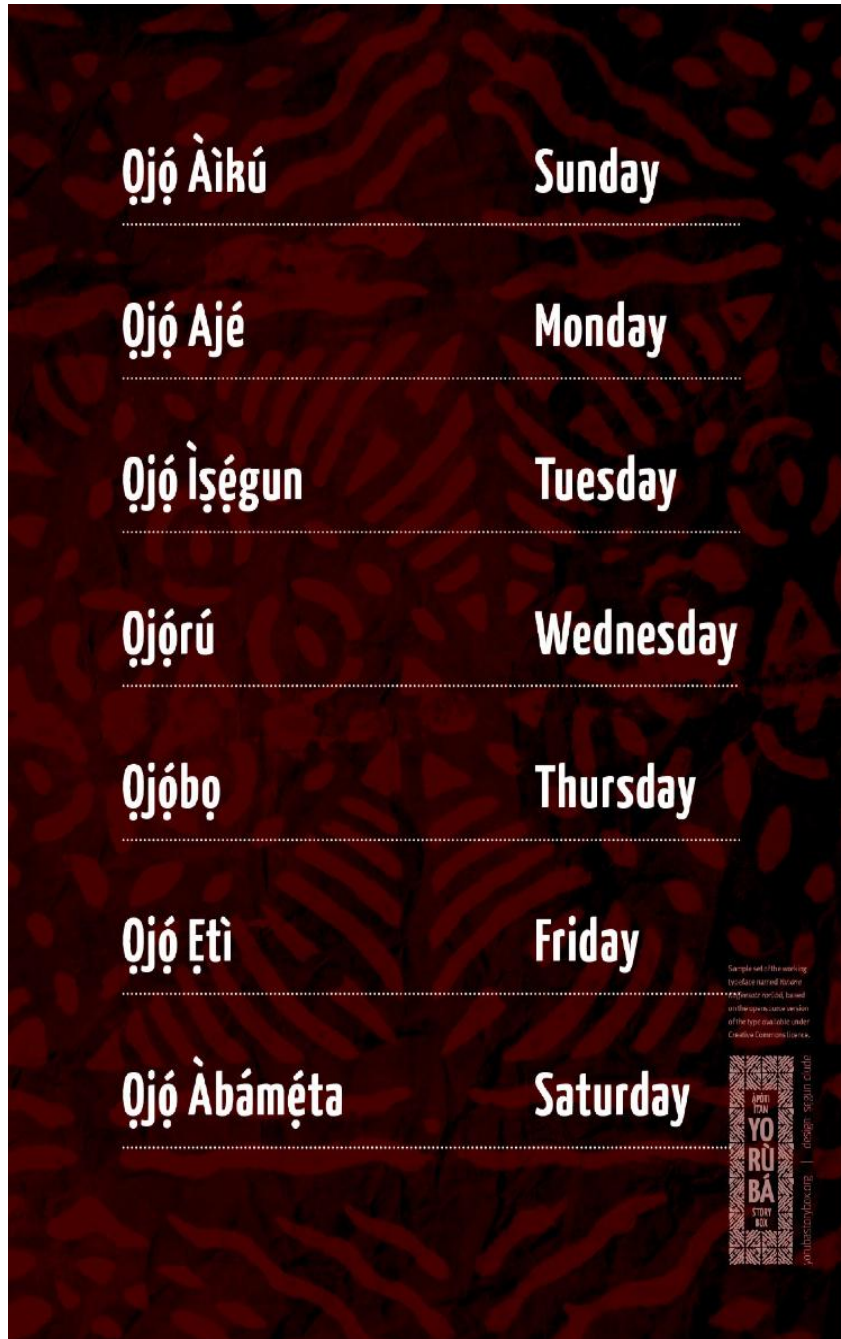
**The use of computers in everyday communications has made a difference in the world. Over the years, computer industry has been slow to include Yoruba at the system level or offer fonts that include the full suite of Yoruba Latin, Latin extensions, and modifier glyphs. It is good to see that Google has done much work in this direction. Apple has also included Yoruba as one of the alternate languages in settings, but more needs to be done. May I take this opportunity to**

invite typographers to join in creating or extending their type designs to include the full set of Yoruba glyphs and modifiers. Below are panels designed to show the Yoruba alphabets and accents.





**Figure 5. Pronunciation key for the basic set of characters of written Yoruba, designed as a first introduction to Yoruba for a beginner.**



**Figure 6. Days of the week in Yoruba. This is useful for schools and institutions to have on classroom walls. Community groups may also find this useful at events as conversation starter.**

Ṣẹ̀rẹ̀	January
Èrèlè	February
Ẹ̀rẹ̀nà	March
Ìgbé	April
Èbìbí	May
Òkúdu	June
Agẹmọ	July
Ògún	August
Owèrè (Owéwè)	September
Ọ̀wàrà (Ọ̀wàwà)	October
Bélú	November
Ọ̀pẹ	December

**Figure 7. Yoruba names of the month calendar. In a flat format, it is a poster. In an interactive format, it is a quiz (in development). Learners would test themselves as they try to recall the names of weeks and months.**



**Figure 8. Yoruba names for colours are sometimes subjective. Very often, they are comparisons or attribution to some existing phenomena, bird, animal, or plant. For example, the colour green, àwọ̀ ewéko simply means, the colour of vegetation.**

## Conclusion

**Five hundred seventy-three extinct languages are listed on the linguistlist.org database. A combination of factors lead to the loss of**

**a language—war, disease, famine, natural disasters, displacement, politics, and other causes. It happens quickly in some cases, while in other cases, it is a slow process until the language ceases to be written or spoken.**

**Some languages are only alive in their written form but have ceased to be spoken. That can happen again, especially because many emerging economies adopt English as their official or business language. Indigenous languages are under constant threat. New releases of software and apps inch many languages towards extinction, slowed only through an intentional effort to save rare and dying languages.**

**As designers, we need to be aware of our responsibility in saving dying languages. Saving a dying language saves not just stories but cures for diseases not yet known to the western world. Keeping a language alive may mean keeping indigenous knowledge systems alive before other less efficacious solutions supplant them.**

**Saving a language from dying is deeper than decolonisation. It is how we retrace a path back to our divine-human indigenous origins, even in the age of technology. Changing technology or economies do not have to lead to loss of language. We have work to do, to save our different languages by creating new digital tools and making old one more accessible for the digital indigenes.**