

**Socio-Linguistic Comparison Between Yoruba And Igala Ethnic Groups In Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the socio-linguistic comparison between Yoruba (South-West, Nigeria) and Igala (North-Central, Nigeria) ethnic groups in Nigeria. Culture entails the customs, beliefs, language and norms of the people. The marriage procedures and linguistic similarities between the two ethnic groups were examined. Similarities were found in the area of language, about 124 (One hundred and twenty four) words were found to have similar pronunciation and linguistic meaning between the two ethnic groups. The marriage procedures between the two ethnic groups of Yoruba and Igala were also found to be similar in terms of steps like outlook, usage of mediator, barrowing, investigation into the family background and public wedding ceremony.

**Key: Socio-linguistic, Yoruba, Igala, Ethnic, Ethnic group.**

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is a country comprised of people of different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds. These cultural groups have similar historical artifacts, languages pattern, dressing, marriage, naming and funeral conventions. The ethnic groups in Nigeria include, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Igala, Efik, Fulani, Igbira, Biram, Tapa, Jukum, Nupe, Basa and so on. However, this study is interested in the marriage and linguistic similarities between the Yoruba and Igala ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Yoruba are mostly found in the South West Nigeria and while the igala are found in the North Central of Nigeria in the present Kogi state in Nigeria.

Culture is the historically developed and earned pattern of beliefs and customs of a people which forms the basis for the formulation of attitude from which peoples patterns of social behaviour emerged. Culture is a way of life of people which includes food, norms, languages, values, religion, dressing, belief, music, literature, attitudes, political and social organization such as naming and burial ceremonies (Akitunde, 2012). Oladiti and Ajiboye (2012) posited that culture is the complex whole human beings acquisitions of knowledge, moral, beliefs, arts, custom and technology that are learned and transmitted among generations. Culture is from the Latin word cultura from colere which means to cultivate. It's the patterns of human activity and the symbolic structure that give such activities significance and importance. A system of symbols and meaning that even their creator contest, which lack fixed boundaries, that are constantly influx and that are interact and compete with one another. Ways of life including arts, beliefs, institutions of a population that are passed down from generation to generation (Boston University, 2016). The cultural background and behaviour of the people shape the way they interpret the world around them (Kavakli, 2020). Culture through language influence people's thinking and impacted on peoples habitual thinking. Culture and language are closely related, language is verbal expression of culture which is used to express cultural ties such as relationship discussion in marriage (Khatib, Tabari & Muhammad, 2016, Said & Ezzatullah, 2021).

Language is a means of communication and conveying of ideas, emotions, thought and feelings among members of a society which reflects both the individual and characteristics of a person, as well as the beliefs and practices of the community (Sirbu, 2015; Amberg & Vause, nd). Language form an integral parts of who human being are at personal and societal levels;

helps to communicate personal thoughts and cultural beliefs and as well serves as tool that conveys indigenous values related to group identity. Language is influenced by the society it functions and it serves as the most determining factor distinguishing people as a separate community, nation and state (Sirbu, 2015). Language involves from base tools of communication into a system of understanding through the attribution of meaning from the word to the concept conveyed (Yakin & Totu, 2014., Heavey, et al., 2021). Language is not only a means of expressing ideas but also a means of forming consolidating ideas in the social consciousness (Sharofiddinov, 2020). Akinmusire and Olugbeko (2011) stated that language shapes thought and emotions, determine one's perception of reality. They stressed further that language is not only a vehicle for expression of thoughts, sentiments, perceptions and values characteristics of community; it also represents a fundamental expression of social identity. Okoroafor and Nnadi (2018) saw local language as a means of promoting acquisition of the skills and attitudes needed for success in formal education.

Language is an important and essential aspect of culture. It is central to culture and it is the means through which culture is learned and communicated. Language is a vehicle through which people interact, share ideas and communicate experiences with one another. Language of a set of people goes a long way in determining how they view the external world, thereby determine their cultural heritage. Language determines individual identity and perspectives; the degree of acceptability depends on the amount of language one can speak; shows cultural background of someone and social relationship is maintained through language (Akinmusire & Olugbeko, 2011). Human languages evolves by a process of descent with modification in which a generation language give rise to the successors languages over time (Pagel, 2017). Language at times may exist in form of group of languages which descended from a common ancestor and this is called family languages (Sharofiddinov, 2020). Nigeria is one of the most linguistic diverse nations in Africa with about 350 different ethnic groups; most of these languages are similar to each other on account of sharing common ancestor, being in contact for a long period of time and haven a common language root (Kumar, Aggawal, Sharma & Mamidi, 2021). Yoruba and igala languages are unique but have some common and related characteristics and also the steps in marriage procedure between the two ethnic groups shows similar futures, this may be attributed to closeness and interactions between the two ethnic groups over time. The most common languages in Nigeria include, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Igala, Ebira, Nupe, Egu and so on.

Yoruba is a popular indigenous language in Nigeria. The Yorubas are amongst the most populous ethnic group in Africa (Ayandele, 2004, Lange, 2014, Jock, 2021). It is the mother tongue of the inhabitants of Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Ekiti, Oyo and Osun states in South West Nigeria, as well as in Akoko Edo local government area of Edo state (South South, Nigeria) and the Okuns in Kogi states and Kwara states (North Central, Nigeria). Yoruba is also spoken in the neighbouring countries of the Republic of Benin and Togo. Also, Yoruba language retains its presence in the oral literatures of Yoruba descendants in Brazil, Cuba and parts of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago (Omogbe, Azeta, Adewumi, & Omotoso, 2014). Yoruba is a language spoken natively by about thirty million people in Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2006). Olaoye (2013) stated that Yoruba language has many dialects among which are Egba, Ijebu, Oyo, Ife, Ondo, Akure, Ijesa, Ekiti, Igbomina, Owo, Ikale, Ilaje, Ibadan, Ikare, Yagba Gbede and so on . In Nigeria, the homeland of Yorùbá lies between longitudes 20<sup>0</sup> 30<sup>0</sup>' and 60<sup>0</sup>. 30<sup>0</sup>' East of the Meridian and Latitudes 60<sup>0</sup> and 90<sup>0</sup> North of the Equator. The language of people reveals the richness of their heritage and tradition (Ogunkunle, 2013). Language is a distinctive and essential tool for socialization, it is use to reflects the culture and world view of its user while a particular people's world views also affect their culture (Atolagbe, 2012). The Yoruba have a rich cultural heritage. Yoruba language and vocabularies is still in used in the North American among the Afro-Americans for singing songs, although they didn't understand the indepth of the language. Yoruba is closely related to the language of Itsekiri and Igala, the three languages have their source from Yoruboid language group (Valdes, 2015, Nigeria Know, 2017). Yoruba origin as stated by Johnson(1921) is still not clear, while some scholars opined that Yorubas originated from Arabia area, others traced Yorubas origin to Egypt. However, what is clear is that the home of the Yorubas in Nigeria is ile-ife ( Agai, 2013, Jock, 2021).

Igala is a socio-cultural group among the settlers in Nigeria. Igala belongs to the Yoruboid groups of languages with enormous features of Yeah languages group of the West Benue-Congo (Omochonu, 2012). Igala is situated mostly in today's Kogi state in the North central region of Nigeria, and it is the largest ethnic group in Kogi state, Nigeria (Okpe, 2006). The 1991 population commission of Nigeria projected Igala to be approximately two million people, and it is about 8th largest ethnic group of the over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria (FRN, 2006). Igaala is the language of the igala ethnic group and the people refers to themselves as 'Abo Igala' (Igala people). Igala ethnic group is located within the east of the confluence of the River Niger and Benue. Igala land is 120 kilometres wide and 160 kilometres long. It is located

approximately between latitudes 6' 80° and 8' north and longitudes 6' 30° and 7' 40° east and covers an area of about 13, 665 square kilometres. The headquarter of Igala land is idah, other towns that makes up of igala land include Ankpa, Ejule, Anyigba, Egwume, Dekina, Okpo, Abejukolo and so on. The location of the Igala people has exposed them to other ethnic groups such as the Epira, Yoruba, Nupe, Basa, Hausa, Bini, Tiv, Igbo, and Idoma and this has exposed them to a wide variety of linguistic and cultural influences. The Igala people have three deep horizontal marks on their cheeks with one vertical mark right at the top of the horizontal marks for purpose of identification (Unubi & Yusuf, 2017).

### Language Similarities Between Igala and Yoruba

Igala and Yoruba are one of the African languages which belongs to the Yeah subgroup of the West Benue Congo language family. (Negedu, 2003, Omachonu, 2012). This study aims at further identifies the words that are similar between Igala and Yoruba language.

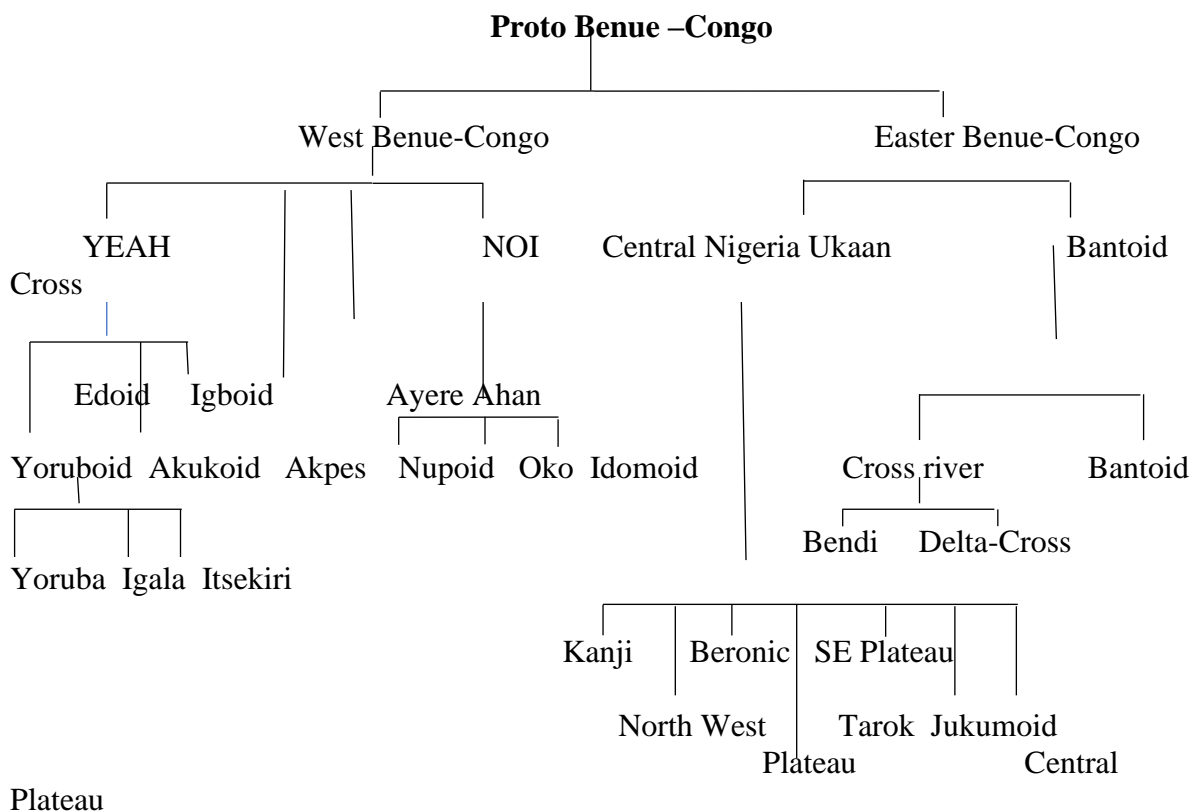


Fig 1: The place of Yoruba and Igala in the genetic Classification of Benue-congo (Adapted from Omachonu, 2012).

Using the above diagram, Igala is classified as a language of the Yoruboid branch of the Yeah family. According to Negedu (2003) as cited in Unubi (2015), the Defoid languages constitute a branch of the present Benue Congo language family. It comprises the Yoruba, the

Igala and the Itsekiri groups of south-western Nigeria. It is believed that these languages have a close linguistic affinity.

S/N	English	Yoruba	Igala	S/N	English	Yoruba	Igala
1	Snake	Ejo	Ejo	63	Leg	Ese	Ere
2	Die	Ku	Ku	64	Bone	Egun	Achiku/ogwugwu
3	Water	Omi	Omi	65	Ear	Eti	Eti
4	Black	Dudu	Edudu	66	Eyes	Oju	Eju
5	Hill	Oke	Uwo	67	Finger	Omo-Ika	Anyiga
6	Sell	Ta	Ta	68	Hand	Owo	Owo
7	Canoe	Oko Oju omi	Oko	69	Head	Ori	Oji
8	Cut	Bu	Bu	70	Mouth	Enu	Alu
9	Moon	Osu	Ochu	71	Nose	Imu	Imo
10	Evil	Ibi	Ebibi	72	Shoulder	Ejika	Ojika
11	Mother	Iya	Iye	73	Teeth	Eyin	Enyi
12	Fire/light	Ina	Una	74	Numbers	Onka	Aluka
13	Buy	Ra	La	75	One	Eni/onkan	Inye
14	Fish	Eja	Eja	76	Two	Eeji	Eji
15	Market	Oja	Aja	77	Three	Eeta	Eta
16	Palm Oil	Epo pupa	Epo	78	Four	Eerin	Ele
17	Husband	Oko	Oko	79	Five	Aarun	Elu
18	Cock	Akuko	Aiko	80	Six	Eefa	Efa
19	He-goat	Obuko	Obuko	81	Seven	Eeje	Ebie
20	Amen	Ase	Ache	82	Eight	Eejo	Ejo
21	Arrow	Ofa	Ofa	83	Count	Ka	Kaluka
22	Box	Apoti	Akpati	84	Feather	Iye	Iwe
23	Battle	Ogwu	Ogun	85	Human Flesh	Eran-ara	Oro-ela
24	Beans	Ewa	Egwa	86	Flute	Fere	Ufele
25	Bitterness	Ikoru	Rikoro	87	Food	Ounje	Ooje
26	Breast	Omun enyan	Omu Enya	88	Flower	Ododo	Ododo
27	Blood	Eje	Ebie	89	Fowl	Adiye	Ajuwe
28	Bird	Eye	Ewe	90	Freedom	Ominira	Ominolami
29	Build	Ko	Ko	91	Goat	Ewure	Ewo
30	Beans Cake	Akara	Akara	92	Bell	Agogo	Agogo
31	Clock	Aago	Agogo	93	Guinea Fowl	Awo	Awo
32	Cough	Iko	Uko	94	Hide	Farapamo	Folakpama
33	Court	Ile-ejo	Unyi ajo	95	Hoe	Oko	Ukoche
34	Crocodile	Ooni	Onye	96	Hunger	Ebi	Ebi
35	Dance	Ijo	Ido	97	Hunting	Ode	Ode
36	Day	Ojo	Ojo	98	Kill	Pa	Kpa
37	Dead	Oku	Ukwu	99	Go	Lo	Lo
38	Divide	Pin	Kpe	100	Knife	Obe	Obe

39	Dying Child	Abiku	Abikwu	101	Lamb	Aguntan	Alan
40	Dog	Aja	Abia	102	Load	Eru	Adu
41	Moon	Osu	Ochu	103	Luck	Oriire	Ojile
42	Name	Oruko	Odu	104	Masquarade	Egungun	Egwu
43	Musician	Akorin	Akeli	105	Meat	Eran	Ela
44	Ocean	Okun	Iteku	106	Pick	Ko	Ko
45	Palm tree	Ope	Ekpe	107	Police	Olopa	Anokpa
46	Palm tree leaves	Imo-ope	Ima ekpe	108	Prayer	Adura	Aduwa
47	Shadow	Ojiji	Ojiji	109	Pull	Fa	Fa
48	Shelter	Ibugbe	Ebu	110	Red	Pupa	Ekpikpa
49	Come and take	Wa gba	Le a gba	111	Road	Opopona/Ona	Ona-Okpakpa
50	My Child mother	Omo iyami	Ome iyemi	112	Rock	Apata	Apata
51	Five naira	Naira marun	Naira maalu	113	Rope	Okun	Ikwu
52	Where are you going	Ibo ni e nlo	Ugbo elo	114	Season	Igba	Egba
53	Lets go	Jeka lo	Liya kalo	115	I want to drink water	Mofe momi	Natene momi
54	Give me	Mu funmi	Komi/du mi	116	I want to eat	Mofe jeun	Natene jenwu
55	Give birth	Bi	Bi	117	Come	Wa	Liya
56	pound	Gun	Gwu	118	Give me	Fun mi	Dumi
57	Eat	Je	Je	119	Keep your mouth shut	Panu e mo	Falu wede
58	say	Ka	Ka	120	To receive	Gba	Gba
59	know	Mo	Ma	121	Climb	Gun	Gwu
60	grind	Lo	No	122	Burn	Jo	Jo
61	swallow	Mi	Mi	123	Divide	Pin	Kpe
62	sell	Ta	Ta	124	Swallow	Mi	Mi

### Marriage Procedure in Igala and Yoruba Ethnic Groups

In African socio-cultural settings, there are different rituals that are laid down to initiate members of the society into different stages of social, cultural, religious, physical and natural transformations (Babarinde-Hall, 2018). Marriage ceremony therefore, is a traditional rite that is used to initiate couples into the socio-cultural life that is meant to recognize them as responsible members of the society. Marriage as a ritual of the rite of passage cuts across all nations of the world and it differs from one ethnic group to another, this is due to the cultural diversities of its performers (Mahmud, 2021).

In traditional Africa society, marriage is seen as an integral part of societal life. Marriage in the present context does not lend itself to same meaning by different scholars. However, marriage for the purpose of this study will be defined from African/ Nigerian context. Marriage is a socially approved union between two adults who decide to live together as husband and wife. It is a rite of passage as both husband and wife will undergo social and physiological changes (Iyere & Okpe, 2017; Mahmud, 2021).

Marriage ceremony in Nigeria varies between ethnic groups due to diversify culture and religion of the people. Within the different ethnic groups in Nigeria, introduction and engagements processes are somehow similar. It is during the process of the engagement that the traditional practices are performed (Solanke & Ayodabo, 2017). The wedding ceremony is an elaborate ceremony with the involvement of the families of wife and husband to be. In Yoruba and Igala societies, it is usually held in the brides family house and it is here the bride wealth are paid (Jean-Baptise & Burrill, 2019),

The Marriage is an integral part of Igala custom that is greatly valued among the people of Igala land. Igala custom did not recognize bearing of children without legally marrying each other and Marriage is the only legitimate way by which child could be born into the Igala society. In Igala culture, divorce is not encouraged and women are expected to remain with their husbands throughout their lives. Traditional Marriage in Igala custom is a bond between a man and a woman and their families. The initial negotiations are mostly undertaken by the parents involved which may be embarked upon in the absence of the husband and wife to be. The most common traditional marriage practice in Igala custom is polygamy and like other African traditional society the number of wives and children a man has determine his social status and fame (Iyere & Okpe, 2017).

After the initial negotiations, the Igala traditional Marriage recognize period of courtship, this is done without sexual relationship between the intending couples. The period of courtship is for the couples to be to study themselves in terms of their compatibility and it is after they are satisfied with one another that other processes of marriage can follow. In Igala, marriage is only recognized on the premises that it follows the strict marriage procedures which involve the traditional marriage rituals. One important aspect of Igala traditional marriage is the investigation carried out by both families to inquire of any disease, crime history and scandals that may likely bring shame to them or spoil their family reputations. It is after they



are satisfied with their findings that the first step in marriage will commence. The first step of the igala traditional marriage is the parents of the husband to be casual visits to the wife to be family this is called “Uyon We Emugba”(Should you like me, accept my gift). The essence of the visit is for the parents of the husband to be to declare their intention to marry from the wife to be family and they present gifts of few kolanuts and other few items to the wife to be family. The acceptance of the Kolanut by wife to be is an indication of willingness and acceptance of the offer.

The second step of the Igala traditional marriage is the payment of dowry. Initially, there will be an agreement on what bride price will be and this is done by a negotiator appointed by the husband to be with the wife to be extended family. The gifts to be presented to the wife to be family will includes gift for her father, mother and siblings; It is after the agreement have been reached on the gifts to be presented by the husband to be family that a date will be picked for the marriage ceremony and this usually takes place in the home of the wife to be family. Before the date of the marriage ceremony, the husband to be is expected to send money and food stuffs for the occasion to the family of the wife to be family.

Before the marriage ceremony, the wife to be will be sent to the husband to be family to spend three market days or fourteen days (14) consecutively to familiarize her with the new family. On marriage ceremony day, the family of the husband and wife and the invited visitors are entertained elaborately. This is done after the bride prize have been paid with other items like Kolanut, clothing materials for the wife, palm wine and local gin. The Kolanut is the most important objects in the Igala traditional marriage and an elder from the wife house presides over the ceremony, break the kolanut and offer prayers for the couple. After the marriage ceremony, at the evening time, the wife friends, her age grade and women from the wife family lead her to the husband house carrying along with them her properties. The wife entourage will send emissaries to the husband house that they are having difficulties on their way. The husband will send money or gift to them to easy the difficulties mentioned. The first day in the husband house is the day the couples are expected to have their first sexual intercourse and a sign of blood stain which signifies that the wife was a virgin will be sent to the wife mother. Keeping virginity is a thing of pride among the Igala as the wife will be accorded with more respect by the community.

Among the Yoruba social cultural groups, marriage is regarded as a sacred institution, therefore, it's based on solid foundation, of which traditional ethics and values are attached to. According to Egbo, (2011) Yoruba marriage follows seven (7) steps:

**Step 1:** The first stage is called outlook (*Ifojusode*), this refers to the means of acquiring a suitable bride. This can be done in two ways. The parents of the male can look for a suitable bride for their child or The male who is ready for marriage might show interest in a female and secures a mediator (*Alarina*) to investigate the suitability of the young girl to be a good wife. A-go-between (*Alarina*) conveys the message of their intention to the lady or the parents of the lady.

**Step Two:** The second stage is the stage of investigation. This entails the parents of both the male and female conduct investigations into the families of each other. This focus on checking for the behaviour, good human relations, cases of inherited diseases and so on. It also involved the consultations of deities to check the spiritual compatibility of the spouse in-terms, of child bearing, longitivity of the couple together and wealth. It's when this has been done and positive results were found by the two parents that they can move to the next stage. The parents of the both young man and lady carry out investigations about both families to be sure there is no record or traces of some serious disease or crime in the intended family after this the service of ifa priest is also sought for the clarity of the spiritual journey of the couple to be (Ogoma, 2014).

**Step 3:** The next stage is consent giving (*Ijohen*). This can be also called offer and acceptance stage where the intension of the husband to be is made known to the young lady. The acceptance of the lady to the offer which might mostly be done through a go-between (*alarina*) is called *Ijohen*.

**Step 4:** The next stage to consent giving is the borrowing (*Ito*). This is the stage that the parents of the husband to be (Mostly the father) in company of the head of their family (*Mogaji or Baales*) go to the home of the wife to be to inform them of their intention to marry from the family and this discussion is done by the head of the young boy family stating that they have found a beautiful flower in the brides to be family that they want to pluck. They can go with small gift like kola and wine in this stage.

**Step 5:** The next stage is the engagement ceremony (*idana*). This is a stage that the family of the husband to be goes to the young woman's family bearing gifts and paying fees. This allows for family members that were not part of the visit during the borrowing to participate in the ceremony (Kyalo, 2013; Raji & Ajadi, 2013).

**Step 6:** The next stage is to fix date for the marriage and engaged in marriage preparation (Idajo/Ipalemo). This is the stage where the groom to be consults an herbalist to obtain a suitable date for the wedding and makes money available for the wedding expenses.

**Step 7:** The last steps of Yoruba marriage is the Wedding ceremony (Igbeyawo). It is stage where the wedding is announced to the public that A is officially married to B. This is a public ceremony and it's always a glamorous affair with lots of food and music.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria is a nation with about 250 ethnic groups with diverse socio –linguistic settings. The study exploits the similarities in the socio-linguistic settings of the Yorubas and Igala ethnic groups in Nigeria. Similarities were found in the marriage procedures between the two Nigerian ethnic groups. Marriage steps like outlook, usage of mediator, barrowing, investigation into the family background and public wedding ceremony were common to the two ethnic groups. Language similarities in some words pronunciation and meaning were also found among the two groups. One hundred and twenty four words were found to be similar among the two groups in this study. This study therefore concluded that there are lots of similarities between culture of the Yorubas and the Igalas despite the fact that they are leaving in different geographical zones of Nigeria.

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