

yoruba words and phrases

Yoruba words and phrases hold a profound significance in understanding the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and linguistic beauty of the Yoruba people. As one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and West Africa, the Yoruba language is not only a means of communication but also a vital component of identity, history, and spirituality. Whether you are a language enthusiast, a traveler, or someone interested in African cultures, exploring Yoruba words and phrases offers a window into a vibrant world filled with wisdom, proverbs, and expressive expressions that reveal the depth of Yoruba civilization.

Understanding the Yoruba Language

The Origins and History of Yoruba

The Yoruba language belongs to the Niger-Congo language family and has been spoken for centuries among the Yoruba people. Historically, it is linked with the ancient kingdoms of Ife and Oyo, which served as cultural and political hubs. Over time, Yoruba has evolved into various dialects but remains mutually intelligible across regions.

The Significance of Language in Yoruba Culture

Language in Yoruba culture is more than communication; it is a vessel for preserving history, morality, and societal values. Proverbs, songs, and oral literature form an integral part of everyday life, conveying lessons and preserving ancestral wisdom.

Common Yoruba Words and Phrases

Basic Greetings

Mastering basic greetings is essential when engaging with Yoruba speakers. Here are some of the most common:

- **Bawo ni?** – How are you?
- **Ẹ káàárò** – Good morning
- **Ẹ káàsán** – Good afternoon
- **Ẹ kúròlé** – Good evening/night
- **Şé àlàáfíà ni?** – Are you well?

Courteous Phrases

Expressing politeness and respect is vital in Yoruba interactions:

- **Jọwọ** – Please
- **Ẹ jò ó** – Excuse me / Please (when asking for a favor)

- **Ẹ ẹ́** – Thank you
- **Ẹ má bínú** – Sorry / Please forgive me
- **Ó ẹ̀un** – Thank you (more formal)

Common Phrases for Daily Use

- **Ẹ́ o mò ?** – Do you understand?
- **Mo ní inú didùn lati mọ ẹ** – I am pleased to meet you.
- **Ìbàdò rẹ ni** – Welcome.
- **Ẹ má bínú** – Don't be upset.
- **Ó dàbò** – Goodbye.

Yoruba Proverbs and Their Meanings

Proverbs are the heart of Yoruba communication, encapsulating morals, wisdom, and societal values in concise expressions.

Popular Yoruba Proverbs

1. "Ìmọ́ lára ni ọba, àmọ́ ọba kì í mọ́ ohun tí ó ń lọ ló' ọ́ ."

(The wise person is like a king, but even the king does not know everything that is happening.)

Meaning: Wisdom comes with humility and acknowledgment of one's limitations.
2. "A kì í fi ẹ́ dá ẹ́ dá, a kì í fi ọmọ ẹ́ dá ẹ́ ọmọ ẹ́ dá."

(You don't use a child to do what only an adult can do.)

Meaning: Assign responsibilities appropriately according to age and capability.
3. "Bí a bá fi ọwọ́ kan àpá àgbà, a máa rú ẹ́ ."

(If you hold onto the elder's hand, you will not fall.)

Meaning: Respect elders and seek their guidance.
4. "Ọ́ rọ́ tó bá túmọ́ , kì í pé ní ìgbọ́ ."

(A word that is well explained will not be misunderstood.)

Meaning: Clarity in communication prevents misunderstandings.

The Role of Proverbs in Communication

Proverbs serve as a subtle yet powerful way to communicate complex ideas and moral lessons. They are often used in conversations, storytelling, and teaching to reinforce cultural values.

Yoruba Words for Family and Relationships

Understanding family-related terms helps in grasping the societal structure of the Yoruba people.

- **Ìdílẹ́** – Family
- **Ìyá** – Mother
- **Bàbá** – Father
- **Àbúrò** – Younger sibling

- **Ìyàwó** – Wife
- **Ọmọ** – Child
- **Ọkùnrin** – Man
- **Obìnrin** – Woman

Phrases to Describe Family Relationships

- "Ọmọ tí a bí ni kì í bàjẹ " – A child born of a good family will not be ruined.
- "Baba ni í dá ọmọ lójú" – The father is the one who guides the child.
- "Ìyá ni ilé ọmọ" – The mother is the foundation of the home.

Yoruba Words in Cultural and Religious Contexts

Spiritual and Religious Phrases

Yoruba culture is deeply spiritual, with many words and phrases associated with religion and spirituality:

- **Orisa** – Deity
- **Şé o mò è sìn mi?** – Do you know my religion?
- **Ojú Ọlọ́ run** – The sight of God / God's will
- **Ẹ şà** – Traditional religion / deities worshipped in Yoruba culture
- **Ẹ sìn** – Religion

Common Religious Phrases

- "Ọlọ́ run ni ọba wa" – God is our king.
- "A ní ìbàẹ̀ rẹ " – We have faith.
- "Kí Ọlọ́ run fi ayọ̀ bù kún ọ" – May God fill you with happiness.

Learning Yoruba for Travel and Communication

Useful Phrases for Travelers

- "Níbo ni àjàkọ̀ tàbí ilé ìtajà wa?" – Where is the marketplace?
- "Ẹ jò ọ , şe o lè ràn mí lọ wọ ?" – Please, can you help me?
- "Mo fẹ̀ lọ sí..." – I want to go to...
- "Báwo ni mo şe lè dé..." – How can I get to...

Tips for Pronunciation and Usage

- Yoruba is a tonal language, meaning pitch can change the meaning of words.
- Practice the tonal marks: the rising (´), falling (`), or level tones are crucial for correct pronunciation.
- Listening to native speakers and practicing regularly enhance fluency.

Conclusion

Yoruba words and phrases encompass a linguistic treasure trove that reflects the cultural identity, history, spirituality, and social values of the Yoruba people. From simple greetings to profound proverbs, the language offers a unique insight into a civilization that values wisdom, respect, and community. Whether you aim to learn basic conversational Yoruba or delve into its rich oral literature, understanding these words and phrases can deepen your appreciation of Yoruba culture and foster meaningful connections with its people. Embracing the beauty of Yoruba language not only enriches your linguistic repertoire but also grants you a glimpse into the soul of one of West Africa's most vibrant cultures.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the meaning of the Yoruba greeting 'Bawo ni'?

'Bawo ni' means 'How are you?' in Yoruba and is commonly used to greet someone.

How do you say 'Thank you' in Yoruba?

You say 'E se' or 'Ose' to express gratitude in Yoruba.

What does the Yoruba phrase 'A kí í fi ẹsẹ mọ ile' mean?

It means 'We do not step into someone's house without permission,' emphasizing respect and courtesy.

What is the Yoruba word for 'family'?

The Yoruba word for 'family' is 'Ẹbi'.

How do you say 'Good morning' in Yoruba?

You say 'Ẹ kaaro' to greet someone in the morning in Yoruba.

Additional Resources

Yoruba Words and Phrases: A Deep Dive into Language, Culture, and Identity

Language is a vital vessel of culture, history, and identity. Among the world's rich tapestry of languages, Yoruba stands out as a vibrant and historically significant linguistic tradition rooted in West Africa. Known for its melodious tone, complex tonal system, and expressive vocabulary, Yoruba words and phrases serve as a gateway to understanding the cultural nuances, societal values, and spiritual beliefs of the Yoruba people. This article offers an in-depth exploration of Yoruba words and phrases, their meanings, usage, and cultural significance, providing both linguistic insights and contextual understanding.

Understanding Yoruba Language: An Overview

Yoruba is a Niger-Congo language spoken predominantly in southwestern Nigeria, parts of Benin, Togo, and by diaspora communities worldwide. With an estimated 20-30 million speakers, it is one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa. The language features a rich tonal system—primarily three tones (high, mid, low)—which play a crucial role in distinguishing meaning between words that otherwise appear identical in spelling.

Yoruba is a language deeply intertwined with religion, culture, and social structure. It is the language of proverbs, poetry, and oral storytelling, essential for passing down wisdom and societal values from generation to generation.

Core Yoruba Words and Their Meanings

Understanding basic Yoruba vocabulary provides a foundation for engaging with the language and appreciating its cultural depth. Here are some core words and their meanings:

Greetings and Common Phrases

- Báwo ni? - How are you?

A standard greeting used in casual and formal contexts, often inquiring about someone's well-being.

- Ẹ káàárò - Good morning

Used in the early hours of the day to greet someone.

- Ẹ káadọ́ - Good afternoon

A greeting used in the midday hours.

- Ẹ káalẹ́ - Good evening

Used as a polite evening greeting.

- Odàbò - Goodbye

A farewell phrase, expressing wishes for safe departure.

Basic Nouns and Pronouns

- Ọmọ - Child or offspring

Used in various contexts to refer to children or descendants.

- Ìyàwó - Wife

Denotes a married woman.

- Ọkùnrin - Man

Refers to an adult male.

- Ọmọde - Child

A more informal or diminutive term for a young person.

- Èmi - I or me

First-person singular pronoun.

- Ìwọ - You

Second-person singular pronoun.

- Àwa - We

First-person plural pronoun.

Common Verbs

- Jẹ - To eat
- Sùnn - To sleep
- Rìn - To walk or travel
- Gbọ - To hear or listen
- Wà - To be or exist

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Yoruba Phrases and Their Cultural Significance

Beyond basic vocabulary, Yoruba phrases encapsulate cultural values, social etiquette, and spiritual beliefs. They often reflect respect, community, and reverence for ancestors and deities.

Respectful Expressions

- Ẹ jò ó , ẹ máa rántí wa - Please, remember us
A polite way to ask for remembrance or favor.
- Ẹ jẹ́ kí a ní ibáṣepọ̀ pẹ̀ lú ibáṣepọ̀ - Let us maintain good relationships
Emphasizes the importance of community and harmony.
- Ọ rẹ́ mi, èmi ń bó - My friend, I am coming
Used when informing someone of one's arrival or departure.

Greetings Reflecting Social Hierarchy and Respect

- Bàtà mi ni, sùgbọ̀n mo fẹ́ kí o mò pé - I am just a shoe, but I want you to know that (humble acknowledgment)
Demonstrates humility and respect.
- Ọ gá, ẹ sẹ o - Sir, thank you
A respectful way to address authority figures or elders.
- Ìyàwó mi, kí ló dé? - My wife, what is happening?
An affectionate phrase indicating concern or interest.

Spiritual and Philosophical Phrases

- Àṣẹ - Authority or command; also a spiritual assertion of authority
Often used in rituals or to affirm a statement.
- Ọlọ́ run ni ọba wa - God is our king
Reflects religious belief in divine sovereignty.
- Ìbàrẹ̀ ni kì í bàjẹ̀ - A thief's curse does not spoil (meaning: evil cannot truly harm good people)
A proverb emphasizing resilience and faith.

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Yoruba Proverbs: Wisdom Embedded in Language

Yoruba proverbs are an integral part of communication, encapsulating moral lessons, societal norms, and cultural wisdom in concise and poetic forms.

They are frequently used in conversation, storytelling, and formal oratory.

Some notable examples include:

- "A kii fi ẹ rù ẹlẹ dàá jẹ àdánidá" - One does not use a stranger's curse as a shield.

Meaning: Do not rely on others' misfortune to protect yourself.

- "Ọmọ tó bá mò ẹ kọ , ẹ kọ ni yóò fi hàn" - A child who learns will show their education.

Emphasizes the importance of education and learning.

- "Bí a bá mò àkúnya, a ní kó má bàjẹ " - If we know the thief, we prevent theft.

Highlights the importance of awareness and vigilance.

These proverbs serve as moral compasses and reflect societal values such as respect, humility, wisdom, and community cohesion.

Yoruba Phrases in Rituals, Festivals, and Daily Life

Yoruba language is vibrant in rituals, festivals, and daily interactions, often infused with spiritual significance.

In Rituals and Religious Practices

- Ẹ mí ni ẹ mí, kò sí ibi tí kò ní ìbáṣepọ̀ pẹ̀ lú Ọlọ́ run - Spirit is spirit; every place has a connection with God.

Reflects the spiritual worldview.

- A kí Oluwa, a kí àṣẹ - We greet the Lord, we greet authority (or spiritual power).

Used in ceremonies to show reverence.

- Ọ rúnmilà ni ọlọ gbọn - Orunmila is the wise one

Recognizes the deity of wisdom and divination.

In Festivals and Cultural Celebrations

- Eyo Festival - A festival of masquerades celebrating heritage and tradition, often accompanied by phrases like "Ẹ kú oríire" - Congratulations or well-done.

- New Yam Festival - Marked with expressions like "Ètùtù ni" - Giving thanks for harvest.

In Daily Life

- Šé o dà? - Did you sleep well?

A common daily inquiry.

- Mo nífẹ ẹ rẹ - I love you

An expression of affection in personal relationships.

- Ẹ jẹ kí a máa bá a lọ - Let us proceed together

An invitation to collaborate or move forward.

The Role of Tone and Context in Yoruba

Yoruba is a tonal language where pitch determines meaning. For example:

- Ìyá (high tone on the first syllable) - Mother
- Ìyà (mid tone) - Wife or marriage
- ìyá (low tone) - Cry or weep

Misplacing tones can lead to misunderstandings, making tone mastery crucial for learners. Context also plays a significant role; the same word can have different meanings based on intonation, accompanying gestures, and situational cues.

Conclusion: The Cultural Richness of Yoruba Words and Phrases

Yoruba words and phrases are more than mere communicative tools—they are the living expressions of a rich cultural heritage. From daily greetings to proverbs that encapsulate moral lessons, the Yoruba language offers a window into the values, spirituality, and social fabric of its people. Appreciating these linguistic nuances enhances cross-cultural understanding and preserves the legacy of one of Africa's most expressive languages. Whether through its poetic proverbs, respectful phrases, or spiritual expressions, Yoruba continues to thrive as a vital, dynamic language that embodies resilience, wisdom, and community.

Yoruba Words And Phrases

yoruba words and phrases: Advanced Yoruba Words & Phrases Neo Ancestories, Biola Emiloluwa, 2024-12-18 Are there people in your life who want to learn the Yoruba language? This is the perfect dictionary! Included are pages filled with bright and colorful pictures and bilingual labels to help teach Yoruba words to English speaking children. Parents, teachers, and gift givers will find: More 1000+ of familiar objects with illustrations and phrases Pictures labeled with the English word followed by its Yoruba equivalent Phonetic spellings the words Words grouped by themes This dictionary is a fun way for young English-speaking children to build a basic vocabulary in Yoruba. It's never too soon to start teaching boys and girls a second language! Perfect for children of all ages, these references employ stunning illustrations and photographs to bring to life the meanings of hundreds of essential terms. Filled with beautiful spreads, each pictorially defines many objects, people, concepts, and actions common to the everyday world of It makes gentle introductions, it is a great way to introduce the language. The book features, A fun and easy way for young language students to expand their vocabulary and broaden their knowledge. Elevate and master your language Ideal for learners of all ages at school or at home, as well as teachers who can use it as a tool in the classrooms

yoruba words and phrases: *The Syntax and Semantics of Yoruba Nominal Expressions* Ajiboye, Oladiipo, 2016-12-14 The Landmarks Series is a research and publications outfit funded by the Landmarks Research Foundation to publish recent outstanding doctoral dissertations on any aspect of Nigerian linguistics, languages, literatures and cultures. This study is a departer from most

previous work on Yorùbá Grammar in the sense that rather than being purely a descriptive grammar; it attempts to provide a theoretical analysis of the internal and external syntax of Yorùbá nominal expressions using the Chomskyan Principles and Parameters approach to syntax. This Generative theory attempts to characterize the grammar of all natural languages in terms of a set of universal principles that all languages share, and a set of parameters along which languages may vary. The book emphasizes the empirical motivation behind major theoretical proposals in that framework, and shows how views on the nature of universal grammar and cross-linguistic variation have developed over the years as a consequence of a massive increase in cross-linguistic syntactic research.

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yoruba words and phrases: Learn Yoruba Bailey Barney, 2025-05-13 Whether you're planning a trip to Nigeria, reconnecting with your roots, or just love learning new languages, this book is your ultimate Yoruba guide. INSIDE YOU'LL DISCOVER: 1,001 PRACTICAL PHRASES for real world situations - from Báwo ni? (How are you?) to Şe iwọ fẹ omi? (Do you want water?) CLEAR PRONUNCIATION GUIDES that help you speak naturally and confidently EVERYDAY VOCABULARY LISTS covering shopping, dining, emergencies, travel, social life, and more CULTURAL TIPS & ETIQUETTE so you don't just speak the language - you connect deeply with the culture Say goodbye to stiff textbook phrases. This book gives you authentic, modern Yoruba that locals actually use - so you can navigate Lagos streets, order food, chat with new friends, and fully experience Yoruba life. WHY THIS BOOK WORKS: Beginner Friendly Format: Each phrase is presented in English and Yoruba, with easy to follow pronunciation Real Conversations: Learn expressions that matter and use them right away Engaging & Practical: Built for travelers, language learners, and heritage speakers alike An incredible book for anyone serious about speaking real Yoruba. I never knew learning could be this smooth! Bring the rhythm, richness, and beauty of Yoruba to your daily life. Start speaking from page one

yoruba words and phrases: Encyclopedia of Linguistics Philipp Strazny, 2013-02-01 Utilizing a historical and international approach, this valuable two-volume resource makes even the more complex linguistic issues understandable for the non-specialized reader. Containing over 500 alphabetically arranged entries and an expansive glossary by a team of international scholars, the Encyclopedia of Linguistics explores the varied perspectives, figures, and methodologies that make up the field.

yoruba words and phrases: Ancient Text Messages of the Yoruba Bata Drum Amanda Villepastour, 2016-12-05 The bata is one of the most important and representative percussion traditions of the people in southwest Nigeria, and is now learnt and performed around the world. In Cuba, their own bata tradition derives from the Yoruba bata from Africa yet has had far more research attention than its African predecessor. Although the bata is one of the oldest known Yoruba drumming traditions, the drum and its unique language are now unfamiliar to many contemporary Yoruba people. Amanda Villepastour provides the first academic study of the bata's communication technology and the elaborate coded spoken language of bata drummers, which they refer to as 'ena

bata'. Villepastour explains how the bata drummers' speech encoding method links into universal linguistic properties, unknown to the musicians themselves. The analysis draws the direct links between what is spoken in Yoruba, how Yoruba is transformed into the coded language (ena), how ena prescribes the drum strokes and, finally, how listeners (and which listeners) extract linguistic meaning from what is drummed. The description and analysis of this unique musical system adds substantially to what is known about bata drumming specifically, Yoruba drumming generally, speech surrogacy in music and coded systems of speaking. This book will appeal not only to ethnomusicologists and anthropologists, but also to linguists, drummers and those interested in African Studies.

yoruba words and phrases: The Yoruba God of Drumming Amanda Villepastour, 2016-01-19 As one of the salient forces in the ritual life of those who worship the pre-Christian and Muslim deities called orishas, the Yorùbá god of drumming, known as Àyàn in Africa and Añá in Cuba, is variously described as the orisha of drumming, the spirit of the wood, or the more obscure Yorùbá praise name Asòròlgi (Wood That Talks). With the growing global importance of orisha religion and music, the consequence of this deity's power for devotees continually reveals itself in new constellations of meaning as a sacred drum of Nigeria and Cuba finds new diasporas. Despite the growing volume of literature about the orishas, surprisingly little has been published about the ubiquitous Yorùbá music spirit. Yet wherever one hears drumming for the orishas, Àyàn or Añá is nearby. This groundbreaking collection addresses the gap in the research with contributions from a cross-section of prestigious musicians, scholars, and priests from Nigeria, the Americas, and Europe who have dedicated themselves to studying Yorùbá sacred drums and the god sealed within. As well as offering multidisciplinary scholarly insights from transatlantic researchers, the volume includes compelling first-hand accounts from drummer-priests who were themselves history-makers in Nigerian and Cuban diasporas in the United States, Venezuela, and Brazil. This collaboration between diverse scholars and practitioners constitutes an innovative approach, where differing registers of knowledge converge to portray the many faces and voices of a single god.

yoruba words and phrases: African American Humor, Irony and Satire Dana A. Williams, 2009-03-26 African American Humor, Irony, and Satire: Ishmael Reed, Satirically Speaking includes select proceedings from the annual Heart's Day Conference, sponsored by the Department of English at Howard University. Among the collection's many strengths is the range of essays included here. Essays on Ishmael Reed center the collection, and satirists from George Schuyler to Aaron McGruder are examined as are popular culture comedians Richard Pryor and Dave Chappelle. Thus, the collection adds broadly to the body of scholarship on traditional and non-traditional interpretations of humor, irony, and satire. What these essays also reveal is how the lens of humor, irony, and satire as a way of reading texts is especially useful in highlighting the complexity of African American life and culture. The essays also uncover crucial but not so obvious connections between African Americans and other world cultures.

yoruba words and phrases: The Classical Arabic Maqāma in Yorubaland, Nigeria Sulaiman Adewale Alagunfon, 2025-02-27 This book offers a fresh perspective on the re-emergence of a classical literary genre, showcasing a fusion of tradition and innovation. It examines the cultural dynamics that shape the development of Arabic maqāma in Nigeria. The maqāma, a genre traditionally associated with the MENA region, experienced a revival and gained relevance among contemporary Nigerian writers. Through meticulous exploration and in-depth interviews, this groundbreaking research offers invaluable insights into the process of adaptation and evolution of the maqāma, witnessing its transformation into a thriving literary tradition. It thus unravels a vibrant, yet overlooked, chapter in African Arabic literary culture, redefining our understanding of its globalizing nature.

yoruba words and phrases: Ecology and Literatures in English Françoise Besson, 2018-12-14 In all latitudes, writers hold out a mirror, leading the reader to awareness by telling real or imaginary stories about people of good will who try to save what can be saved, and about animals showing humans the way to follow. Such tales argue that, in spite of all destructions and tragedies, if

we are just aware of, and connected to, the real world around us, to the blade of grass at our feet and the star above our heads, there is hope in a reconciliation with the Earth. This may start with the emergence, or, rather, the return, of a nonverbal language, restoring the connection between human beings and the nonhuman world, through a form of communication beyond verbalization. Through a journey in Anglophone literature, with examples taken from Aboriginal, African, American, English, Canadian and Indian works, this book shows the role played by literature in the protection of the planet. It argues that literature reveals the fundamental idea that everything is connected and that it is only when most people are aware of this connection that the world will change. Exactly as a tree is connected with all the animal life in and around it, texts show that nothing should be separated. From Shakespeare's theatre to ecopoetics, from travel writing to detective novels, from children's books to novels, all literary genres show that literature responds to the violence destroying lands, men and nonhuman creatures, whose voices can be heard through texts.

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yoruba words and phrases: The Upper Guinea Coast in Global Perspective Jacqueline Knörr, Christoph Kohl, 2016-02 For centuries, Africa's Upper Guinea Coast region has been the site of regional and global interactions, with societies from different parts of the world engaging in

economic trade, cultural exchange, and conflict. This book examines how such encounters have continued into the present day. This title was made Open Access by libraries from around the world through Knowledge Unlatched.

yoruba words and phrases: Principles and Concepts of Yoruba Language and Yoruba Proverbs J. S. Olaoye, 2012-06-30 Author J. S. Olaoye encourages the preservation of good heritage in his new book *Principles and Concepts of Yoruba Language and 1,122 Yoruba Proverbs* (2nd Edition) Chapter one deals with the basic principles guiding the writing and speaking of correct and modern sentences in Yoruba language. It begins by drawing peoples' attention to the recognition and pronunciation of the letters of Yoruba alphabet a, b, d, correctly; to the formation of syllables and difference between old and modern writings. The guide includes the composition of short sentences. Civilization seems to have brought corresponding challenges and possible changes on peoples' outlook and lifestyles. Among these challenges is the preservation of their native culture and language. There is a great potential of losing their skills to use their mother tongue. Thus, author J. S. Olaoye releases his new book to solve and help prevent this problem from occurring. Chapter two gives and explains purposes for which Yoruba uses proverbs; and chapter three provides the different types of proverbs that are used in different situations. Chapter four contains one thousand, one hundred, twenty-two Yoruba proverbs; each with a literal English translation. This fourth chapter ended the first edition of this book with only eight hundred, sixty-two Yoruba proverbs. with the tittle *Yoruba Proverbs*. Chapter five contains the concept of calculation, which brought about Yoruba numerals from one to five hundred; followed by Yoruba calendar. The Yoruba calendar in turn brought to light different festival that formed up the concept of market days including weekly, monthly and yearly activities. Through *Principles and Concepts of Yoruba Language and 1,122 Yoruba Proverbs* (2nd Edition), by author J. S. Olaoye, parents or teachers will have perfect guide to teach their children or students the very basic skills in Yoruba language from A, B, D, to proficient conversation and reading skills, a step to preserve a great legacy.

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