

SOCIETY OF YOUNG NIGERIAN WRITERS

**ARTICLES, ESSAYS AND E-BOOKS ON DANIEL
OLORUNFEMI FAGUNWA**



THE LESSONS IN FAGUNWA'S WORK

No one anticipated Bisi Ogunsina's move. The professor of Linguistics at the University of Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, who delivered the 3rd Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa memorial lecture on Monday, December 7, gave no inkling he would eventually adopt Yoruba until well into the lecture.

Speaking on the topic, 'Yoruba Philosophy in the Novels of D. O. Fagunwa: Implication for Indigenous Language Teaching in Nigeria' at the Afe Babalola hall of the University of Lagos, Ogunsina chose not to toe the path of his predecessors.

Ayo Bamgbose and Olaoye Abioye (translator of Fagunwa's five novels into French) who delivered the first and second memorial lectures in 2007 and 2008 did so in English. Ogunsina however underscored the resolve of the D.O. Fagunwa Foundation's commitment to promote speaking in the mother tongue with his decision. A rousing applause followed his move.

Immortal works

Fagunwa, according to Ogunsina, was a compassionate and altruistic man who has placed the Yoruba on the world map. After a detailed explanation of philosophy and its components, the guest lecturer held that elements that constitute philosophy-metaphysics, ethics and epistemology, are present in Fagunwa's novels.

Ogunsina added that all of the late author's works confirm that he is a gifted, exceptional writer. "He is one of those that have written immortal works in Yoruba, he is a pride to the Yoruba." The lecturer also noted that quest, mystery and other elements that human beings encounter in their journey through life are evident in works like 'Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole', 'Ireke Onibudo', 'Adiitu Olodumare' and the other works.

"There are immortal lessons in his works," Ogunsina said. "Fagunwa was a master. The South West states should give him a merit award for his invaluable contributions," he added. Ogunsina

further likened the late headmaster of Saint Andrews Primary School, Oyo to Imodoye, the wise character in his 'Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole.' "Fagunwa gan ni Imodoye, ohun loye ka fi je oye Imodoye of Yoruba land (Fagunwa is really Imodoye, he should be awarded the title of Imodoye of Yoruba land), the linguist noted in Yoruba, adding that, "Language becomes a vivid, descriptive tool in his hand."

He further affirmed, "Fagunwa's works are a challenge to every Yoruba. He used Yoruba when English was in vogue and showed that no language is superior. Fagunwa is to Yoruba what John Spencer is to English novels. It is time to write in indigenous languages so that our language doesn't become extinct. Knowledge abounds in Africa, if we use it well, we will have enough and develop from generation to generation," Ogunsina concluded to a standing ovation.

The mother tongue

Other speakers had reinforced the importance of promoting indigenous languages before the lecture. Ibukunade Sijuwola, Fagunwa's oldest child and chair of the Fagunwa Foundation disclosed that, "The foundation was, and is still keen on organising a stakeholder's conference on the use of the mother tongue as a medium of teaching in all our nursery schools. The National Policy on Education has already stipulated that the mother tongue be used in the nursery schools but no school is implementing this directive.

"English is still used in all schools in the South West Nigeria. Our thinking is that no matter how much we yearn or wish that our children should speak, understand and appreciate our language, there will be no progress unless the state government makes it compulsory for the usage of the mother tongue in nursery schools."

She thanked Chams Plc, sponsor of a theatre series involving the adaptation of Fagunwa's novels for the stage and the University of Lagos for creating space in the institution's main library to accommodate materials on the author.

Lagos State Governor, Babatunde Raji Fashola, represented by Adetunji Adebisi, renewed the

call for the use of indigenous languages as a medium of speech and instruction. The governor referenced Ngugi's decision to write in his native Gikuyu and former Minister of Education, Aliyu Babatunde Fafunwa's experiment at Ife in the 70s when students were taught in Yoruba to underscore the advantage of using the mother tongue.

He said of Fagunwa: "He was first to write in Yoruba language and blazed the trail for others to follow. This is genius." He added, "Maybe if he had lived longer, we would have been celebrating another Nobel Laureate. His works preaches love and courage. Issues that are timeless and universal."

Retired Army general, Alani Akinrinade also urged the gathering to learn from Fagunwa by promoting "our language and culture."

Former Governor of Lagos State, Bola Ahmed Tinubu who was represented by Dele Alake noted, "We mustn't forget our roots." He prayed that Fagunwa's name will not disappear in Nigeria, Africa and the world. "Tinubu said to urge you in Fagunwa's name that we should go back to the roots, to speak Yoruba to our children so they won't get lost," Alake who gave a cheque of N500, 000 on behalf of his principal to support the foundation, added.

Playwright Akinwumi Isola, Duro Oni, Ropo Sekoni, poet Odia Ofeimun, chair of the Fagunwa Foundation, Olu Falomo, Vice Chancellor of the University of Lagos, Tolu Odugbemi and other eminent Nigerians were at the lecture.