

“He Taught Us How To Teach by Learning” - Ọ̀ṣúndáre

Kóla Túbòsún

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For Ayò Bámgbóṣé at 90

When I called him the “**doyen of African linguistics**” in my valedictory lecture at the University of Ibadan in July 2005 (a celebratory *oríkì* which, to my greatest delight, has caught on since then), I did so with not the slightest fear of exaggeration or effusive adulation. Pioneer, pathfinder, scholar, teacher, administrator, relentless researcher, and organizer *par excellence*, Ayò Bámgbóṣé has shown us how to teach by learning and how to learn by teaching. Hardly any of us in the linguistic and literary fields can deny being touched, one way or another, in the past six decades by the scholarly output of this giant as well as his total, infectious dedication to the cultivation of the faculty of the mind. A thorough teacher and demanding supervisor, Bamgbose is also endowed with a robust sense of humour and capacity for that kind of witty laughter that is capable of lighting up the darkest mood. He possesses a curious combination of the gravity of the sage and the insatiable inquisitiveness of the aspiring learner.

An agent of innovation and also its ardent practitioner, Bamgbose is always at the forefront of current trends in language studies and the scholarly enterprise. If he hears of the publication of a new book in faraway Bora Bora or Outer Mongolia relating to these fields, he will spare no effort until he has that book securely on his shelf. In this and other ways, Bamgbose has enriched our intellectual culture with a single-mindedness and profound, unwavering commitment lamentably rare today. His life and legacy have taught us how to pursue the intellectual vocation with dignity, pride, total commitment, and supreme sense of purpose.

In Bamgbose’s legacy, we have the antidote to mediocrity and opportunistic careerism whose current spread has reduced Nigeria’s Academe to a House of Hollow Rituals. *Bamgbose-ism* is both

a rebuke of our present state and a vision of our positive possibilities. For this Agbedegbeyo, this scholar-teacher who upholds the beauty of our tongue and the grammar of our values; this Olukoni Agba who makes learning so desirable by making teaching so purposeful, here is a song from many seasons ago, whose content, tone, and circumstance are still as true as the day it came into being.

FOR AYO BAMGBOSE

Ọjògbón, Agbédègbeyò

In the Beginning was the Void

And the Void was Silence

And Silence spawned Seven Intimations

And Seven Mists, and the form-

Less Inarticulacies of errant Winds

The Sun knew not yet its sky

Earth was flat fare and liquid riddle

And the Universe quaked into Chaos;

From the liquid loins of the Wind

The Vowel was born

And the Vowel was all flesh, all flair

From the silent bone of the Mist

The Consonant erupted into being,

All hard, intemperately mute

And the Consonant quaked into the Vowel

And the Vowel melted into the Consonant

And the Syllable was born

* * *

And the Syllable begat the Word

And the Word begat the Phrase

And the Phase begat the Clause

And the Clause begat the Sentence

And the Sentence begat the Paragraph

And the Paragraph begat the Discourse

And the Discourse begat Meaning

And Meaning begat the Universe. . . .

Behold, the Vowel wed the Consonant

And Chaos quaked into Cosmos

And Language was born

• * *

And Language begat its own pupils

And the pupils matured into pundits

And the pundits blossomed into scholars:

Between pragmatic Firth and mathematical Chomsky

From the systemic 'statement of meaning'

To the generative calculus of 'deep structure'

Bamgbose pitched the African tongue

In the centre of the global fair

His vision delicately clear

His method assiduously indigenous;

This **doyen** who doctored our silence,

And gave us the language

For talking about our tongue

To this man of primal flair

Ninety Consonants & Ninety Vowels!

Emeritus Professor Ayò Bámgbóṣé is the first African Professor of Linguistics.

Niyi Osundare is a leading African poet, dramatist, critic, essayist, and media columnist. He has authored 18 books of poetry, two books of selected poems with several literary laurels to his credit.