Emerging role of media as the language art in children's literature in Kenya

Jerry Agalo[1]
Department of Linguistics, Moi University, P.O. BOX 3900, Eldoret-30100, Kenya
E-mail: jakondele@yahoo.com

The growing need to understand a Kenyan child in learning situations today indeed broadens our quest to understand literacy and related text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. Media today constitute socialization avenues for children in the contemporary society. They play a relation in family and school life for children regarding children's socialization and cultural transformation. Therefore there is a need to harness the benefits of the 21st century information technologies in children's learning. The paper's main concern is on media's symbolic meaning involving interpretation, negotiations and making compromises for potential meaning of representational forms. Firstly it recognizes how media have meshed into contemporary society. Therefore we are pedagogically faced with presentation problems in children's literature where African values, beliefs and codes of behaviour can be inculcated. Secondly it argues that children's literature calls for a rethinking, such that it is made 'integrative' and new media such as television, videos, and internet use are given a role in contributing to learning. Thirdly, representation strategies to embrace the information age are described.

Keywords: Pedagogy, literacy skills, multimedia technologies, integrative approach, multiliteracy , multiculturalism.

Introduction

> It seems the world of learning and knowledge is no longer confined to textual information… it is increasingly being captured in images, sounds, moving pictures and combination of these
> (Investing in A Learning Society Singapore 1994)

Our understanding here is that literature available to children needs to relate to the impact of media as an emerging language art among children in Kenya today. We are here looking at language the way Brunner(1986: 131) described it, that language has a two-faceted nature of "being both a mode of communication and a medium for representing the world about which it is communicating". Thus, we consider Kenyan children's literature as intended to promote the African culture, traditional heritage and cultural identity while at the same time giving the children honest facts about emerging developments in their society, and a recognition of language representation which promote ideas and emotions that develop among the children of the information society.

Let's begin by considering these questions. Whom do we call a child? In what environment do we find this child? In what format is this children's literature prevalently presented in Kenya? And how does this literature develop their competence for the emerging needs of the information society they find themselves in today? Can the use of media in children's literature become a recipe for cultural ambiguity among the children? These are the leading questions in this paper, questions which are of serious pedagogical importance.

In contemporary society, childhood studies continue to emerge from modern ideas of childhood which have splintered such studies into alignment on two different epistemological approaches – universalism and particularism, in which particularism is linked to socio-cultural factors and universalism linked to biological laws; in Prout's words "a heterogeneous biological-discursive-social-technological ensemble" (Drotner & Livingstone 2008: 78).

In Kenyan traditional society, the particularism approach applies in cases where various communities practise their different cultural rite of passage ceremonies upon children essentially to establish a move from one stage in life to another along the socio-cultural trajectory. In such cases, one is considered to be a child until the age of initiation which, for some communities, is marked by circumcision (of boys and in some cases boys and girls); others practise the extraction of six lower teeth. These practices in ethnically differentiated communities have been used to gauge who a child is, and set a trajectory toward adulthood through maturation of puberty.

Therefore, a Kenyan child belonged to one world, that of his community, a community that provides the child with security and traditional skills for survival in a world around him, the ideas shared by African scholars (Mbiti 1969). However, because of the current global impact on Kenyan society, this is no more. The societal transition – from that which was pegged on an experience of one world – that of a community, is increasingly going through socio-cultural transformation ushered in by new media. And the change has been fast. The Kenyan child today is a child of many worlds living in the pressures of the networked society and that of a revolution of information age which has come to embrace

1. Agalo Jerry PhD is a senior lecturer in Linguistics in the Department of Linguistics and Foreign Languages, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya. His research interests explore prosodic patterns of African languages; children, media, and culture with writing on effect of media on children and youth.

Africa. He lives in an age of a 'technological trap'; an age that has made the world a small networked society where accessibility to its diverse experiences is accessed fast enough at the touch of a button. The influence on his culture is enormous. From another angle, the technologising capability of the 'new' digital communication continues to contribute to the rhetoric of globalisation linking this with modernisation and development but Kenyan scholars have begun to demystify the new digital communication technologies and have called into question their effect on children and what may be regarded as new.

With the increasing information onslaught, the children's learning development has become critical. The correlation between learning and media among children has attracted few studies in the past (Drotner 1998) and continues to do so. Most of available studies focusing on the influence of media on children's cognitive development and processes have relied mostly on media content, exposure and children's developmental levels (Starter 1989, Buckingham 2011, Drotner 1998, Livingstone 2009). Such studies have yielded knowledge on the processes underlying the encounter between the child and the media with few inferences on the social and cultural setting where the children find themselves. In fact the traditional clichés still remain paramount: 'roaming around the known' for the acquisition of new knowledge.

When we talk of inferences of cultural influence, we understand culture in the sense of a whole life. And our whole life continues to be under the influence of the driving force of the media, causing significant changes in our traditional practices. As Caronia and Caron (2008: 373) have pointed out, the emerging culture is: "a system of ideas, representations, values and knowledge about the world ... contents derived from the media, thus the media culture consists of a set of media-specific skills and competencies needed to decode and recode content".

The competencies acquired by children have therefore made Kenya parents lose the socio-cultural yardstick that was used to gauge a child's age. The parents have taken a new dimension where the school curriculum following the biological law perspectives is used as an indicator for age sampling. Thus for schoolgoing age, we find children mostly in kindergarten (2-4 years), primary schools (5-13 years), and secondary schools, between 13 and 17 years. The picture given here, however, is that of an urban child. The ages vary greatly in Kenyan rural areas and are difficult to describe because of mitigating factors of poverty and diseases. Therefore we should regard a child as one aged below fourteen years; we don't dispel other people's ideas who see the age limit of a child to range to seventeen years. We have however collapsed the age range between 18 to 25 years to be designated for the youth, a growth period immediately preceding that of an adult.

However, the concept of childhood differs not only culturally but even in units as small as the family. Fred Inglis (1981: 76) has pointed out that "the history of childhood is necessarily an intercalation in the history of the family." Interestingly, the most satisfactory generalisation made by scholars (Livingstone 2009, Buckingham 2011, Prout 2000) is that childhood is a period of life which the immediate culture thinks of as being free of responsibility and susceptible to education.

Kenyan children and their literature

While we may hold the belief that children are essentially passive, dependent and powerless, some psychologists (Vygotsky 1962 and Piaget 1969) have known them otherwise: as being good players, their playing activities being characterised as absorbed, elaborate and meaningful. Of course, children also display a large variety of different needs and abilities because of the age range involved in any activity. However, it will be wrong to deal with children as a homogeneous group, as they will at any given age and environment display a wide range of abilities.

The concept of children's literature has often been understood by adults as merely books written for children. But in practice, it is vastly more complicated. Which brings us to the Piagetian definition of a child as a way of unraveling what children's literature should be. Piaget (1969:7) sees children as "those whose minds and bodies have not yet matured in various definable ways". However, from a literary point of view, we need to recognise children as developing readers – or in an African sense, partakers of cultural mores either orally or as readers. Thus their literature should be defined by their audience and focus on the audience specific cultural frames of reference which shape the role of language, social interaction, cognition and lifetime experience. The audience here is not merely anonymous but specific as African, since the significant underlying factor here is culture.

The Kenyan 8-4-4 education system has not emphasised media in defining children's literature. It has designated a dividing line between books that are for children and those which are not, on the basis of content rather than frameworks combining visuals for facilitation of understanding of the text. We often find children's literature consigned to areas covering poetry, fairy tales, non-fiction (educational) and comics not specifically African.

The pertinent question that arises is what literature would be relevant for Kenyan children. Indeed, as children are known to be innately curious, their literature today should not be taken as a simple idea: books written for children or books read by children. Odaga (1985) has defined literature as an art whose medium is the word, and its subject according to Satre (1967: 116) "has always been man in the world ..." Thus, the definition sees literature as an

experience, personal, aesthetic and cultural; this demonstrates that culture is always foregrounded in any literary work. In this way, an African child's experience begins with appreciating literature through songs and stories from their grandmothers or parents, read by a teacher or heard from a recording artist. And these are meant to teach the children the names of objects animate and inanimate, taboos, seasons and community morals.

In African history, however, literature was chiefly oral and included proverbs, myths, riddles, tales, chants, legends, songs, taboos, tongue twisters, dances and superstitions which formed a way of life in the rural countryside and the communal culture of the village. The intention was to make this oral tradition a culture of the people. The Kenyan oral tradition was dominated by spoken language which made the communities what they were and held them together through the use of language in face to face interaction. Their social memory was transmitted in a spoken tradition from one generation to the next, was memorised, enjoyed and entertained the communities as life went on from day to day and from week to week, season to season and marked by certain events like feasts, funerals and eloping events, that is, marriage. It exposed the children to many values and value systems, ideas, and practices, sometimes at sharp variance with their own.

Nevertheless in the current technological and information explosion, literature is taking another dimension. We cannot talk about children's literature with disregard to the impact of media in literate culture – a culture dominated by computer-mediated communication. Writing is a system of record in which things are put down as information and transmitted through space over great distances.

With the new media, Kenyan children's literature is slowly losing the African cultural touch – the art of life – and seems deeply inclined toward Western culture, although with loose African features. Hunt (1994: 1) has precisely described today's literature thus "… it involves and integrates words and pictures, it overlaps into other modes – video, oral storytelling, and other art forms." The implication is that pictures or images of things are good exercises especially for the imaginative life of children – they develop their acquisition of literary representations in literate culture. Thus children who appreciate illustrated tales in their readers would like to demonstrate for themselves or role play the pictorial depictions. They will often do this with a freshness of detail and instinct for pictorial effect and vivid use of creativity surprising to older people.

The pictures or drawings like those of a Maasai man with an ochred hairdo standing on one leg and a spear in his hand assist children in making better sense of the implicit world of a text's content, thereby improving their retention. This argument may help us unravel the much talked about problems in illustrated books and picture books: that pictures are accessible to children but the meanings derived from them are not; that the picture 'closes' the text – that is, it limits and cuts off the possibilities of interpretation; and that a picture may complement or contradict the words.

However, recent studies (Allen 2004) have argued that pictures in children's readers stimulate their imagination, and that is the reason for their popular use in children's readers. Such use is a way of helping the child in the acquisition of multiliteracy. Other new dimensions found in children's books today include talking books intended for blind children, pop-ups, books accompanied with audio cassettes and of late discs. There are also stories in videos often characterised by cartoons and puppets.

This scenario balances the description of old and new materials for children's literature. On one hand, the old approach has functioned as the orality of our heritage for the continuity with our past, since most of Kenyan early literature was not written. On the other hand, the new approach is the written and illustrated literature intended to establish children's relationship with print and their world today and in the future and the joys and sorrows in technology that are part of contemporary life.

Making children's literature integrative

However, despite all the media have made available, intense debate still lingers concerning the use of media by children. Putnam (2000), for example, argues that print is continuing to be the repository of rational thought since written words enable the reader to reflect upon ideas being expressed. He also strongly asserts that "to forsake print, therefore, is to give up on intellect and reason" (Putnam 2000:100). Critcher (2008) also has argued that "… words are better than pictures, reading better than viewing … children to eschew all media and sit down to read a good book" (Critcher 2008:96).

Counter reactions to these arguments also abound. Today, the campaigns about the dangers of new media have become narrower; nobody today inveighs against the whole idea of the internet as was once done on moving pictures. Indeed, we are beginning to see a major shift from 'pessimist elitism and censorship', through 'tacit paternalist measures' to a 'democratic pluralism' (Springhall 1998:156; Drotner 1999). Thus the nature of debates has changed as media technologies continue enter children's lives and learning contexts.

Children's literary texts in Kenyan prevailing social order are largely dominated by multimedia presentation, including films, comics, still pictures, video and audiotapes, to provide an infinite variety of visual experiences. Indeed, the current information age would require the children's literature to be 'integrative', making use of printed word, pictorials and orality to unify the various senses for conceptualisation, such that skills should help the child to acquire the ability to interpret and represent information. It is an ability that will enable him to become media literate and equips him with the skills to analyse, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of representations. Seemingly, this is a shift of emphasis concurrent with the events in the contemporary global society.

For a learning situation, an integrative children's literature serves to help the child process and acquire sequences of language structures that conform to his contextual affordances of that language as ordered by the culture. The child can then relate the linguistic elements so acquired via pragmatic mappings for use in his communication to suit his extra-linguistic context. In other words, the literary nuance so painted in the chant or proverb is a language art which is mapped cognitively and, for a child, helps him in the encoding of information through the use of words spoken and decoding extra-linguistic features for comprehension of prosodic features, gestures, still pictures, and other images.

Making children's literature integrative is a reformulation approach wherein 'integrative' refers to the inclusion of media literacy, print culture, and the ability to think creatively in the mother tongue and English; the attributes of national agenda in the Kenyan 8-4-4 education system.

Integrative literature for children therefore conforms to Mc Cann's (1992: 43-56) idea of children's literature as a "social sphere that influences children and extends beyond ethnic self involvement." Klassen (1993: 85) makes this vivid when he proposes that:

> Literature that is multicultural provides *children* with opportunities to reflect on their cultures (*mirrors*) and examine other ways of perceiving the world (*windows*). Specific cultures explored must be examined through multiple viewpoints that investigate their unique, diverse and universal characteristics. Literary experiences with such literature transform *children's orientation* of the world they live in and create a *critical consciousness* of their world experience.

Kenyan schools where presentation is through 'read about' strategy are only making the representation to remain deficient of the rich milieu of the media where a lot of children's literary works abound.

Nonetheless, the opponents argue that the pictorial medium is inferior to the process and habits of mind stimulated by language (Postman 1994). He claims that the picture "does not put forward a proposition, it implies no opposite or negations, there are no rules of evidence to which it must conform" (Postman 1994:72-73).

'Read about' strategy nonetheless has substantial problems. First, there is the problem of language, which to many readers in Kenya schools is English. Second, there is the problem of the availability of such readers.

The general tendency shows that such readers are only affordable to middle class parents. Third, any literary works in the children's mother tongue are rarely available, and any that exists has a tendency to distaste among Kenyan children because of the power and prestige of English which tends to pull the children away from reading in their mother tongue. Fourth, the present society is rapidly getting out of phase with the past. So we face the question of 'which cultural heritage should children's readers inculcate?' Should it be that of the highly English culture portrayed in the available readers or the few which portray African culture and are available in mother tongues? We suggest that both English and mother tongue readers be made available equally for children's use.

Kenyan children

Many Kenyan children are living in a language setting where there is an interaction of various mother tongues, the national language Kiswahili and the official language English, hence their problems in acquiring the correct linguistic structures of their mother tongue. In Dholuo for example, new lexical items tend to abound in today's language setting and the original ones are beginning to lose currency. A few of the following examples of Dholuo words for a Luo child of 10 years illustrate the point:

Table 1 Coinage of current Dholuo words

Lexical items (old)	Lexical items (new)	Gloss for new lexical items
nyamburko	mtoka	A new lexical item for car, coined from English word "motor car"
beti	opanga	A new lexical item coined from Kiswahili word "panga" for a machette
agola	jikon	A new lexical item coined from Kiswahili word "jikoni" for a kitchen
ruoth	chief	A new lexical item borrowed from English word "chief"
dero	sito	A new lexical item coined from English word "store" for granary
Kartiegruok	Sikul	A lexical item coined from English word "school"
--	Ojiko	A lexical item coined from Kiswahili word "Kijiko"

Luo children in primary school use the new lexical items in their face-to-face interaction and are not conversant with the old ones. Lexical borrowing and any coinage system in languages are processes common in language development. However, high use of these processes may weaken or become detrimental to language maintenance. In fact, the pleasure of African culture is well portrayed in language when old lexical items are used to paint the cultural scenario which is effectively African. Therefore those authors who may be willing to contribute to the advancement of children's literature in their mother tongue will be faced with problems of lexical selection because of language use by their target audience.

Kenya has more than forty mother tongues. Many will question what lexical items to use whereas others will be wondering about the proficiency level of the mother tongue among the children, even though many schools in Kenya do very little in making mother tongue readers available. We suspect that this may be due to examination demands in schools where competence in English, an official language in Kenya, is of paramount importance, as English continues to be a compulsory language in the Kenyan examination system and the language of the curriculum. The children are therefore made to work hard in English to pass their examinations.

A keen observation of children's readers made in the Children's Section at Moi University Library in Eldoret at one time revealed a cultural hiatus that continues to loosen our link between our past and present cultural values. Content in most of the reader's depicted scenario of modern setting related to western culture. No more folk tales that relate to local adventures of 'stories of the village beauty tormented by snakes visiting her home in a quest to marry her' stories on taboos that made a mother lose all her children drowning in the lake and others eaten by hyenas, stories of a father losing an eye for refusing the marriage of his only daughter', and the animal stories of the tricky hare competing in pulling duel with an elephant.

Such stories have a setting basically in an African context and are rich in their cultural import. Culturally they enthrall and delight the children and appeal to them as their import is meant to create a literary imagination of an African context. Media enhances this imagination but their stimulation in children's readers to influence and treat children as homogeneous, if not carefully used, may impact negatively on culture.

The fear of a negative impact of media on children is not new. Childhood, a period for learning the skills and abilities necessary in adult life, is when the children are highly impressionable and will respond to media with passion and be quick to model their conduct on what they see shown on the screen or illustrated.

In the survey of readers in Moi University Library, we found that readers of levels I – II in the children's section predominantly had a setting of an Africa village portrayed as rural where life interacts with wildlife around it. Surprisingly, no hunting with dogs and arrows was portrayed. But a historical scene of European hunters using guns in the African wilderness was illustrated in level II. The depiction of hunting using guns negates the lawful hunting practice in the rich expanse of African wildlife and the joy of traditional hunting among Africans.

Kenya is renowned worldwide for its wildlife. Levels III and IV began with a home now urban. The urban type of life in these two levels was strongly depicted through pictorial portrayal of cars, policemen, aeroplane, airport, whisky, TV, radio, street lights and a computer on a table. Whether this is meant to epitomise the fundamental four archetypical forms of modern education: exclusion, assimilation, multiculturalism and pluralism remains a question for further research. For many Kenyan rural children, depiction of such media infrastructure at some homes portrays them as less media-literate consumers and belittles their preferred social identity. What they experience is a state of difference of emphasis: the reading texts do "not take cognizance of what these children already know implicitly, *so as to turn the* 'passive' knowledge into 'active' knowledge" (Buckingham 2011: 69).

Kenyan culture needs to be inculcated in children's mind by reading materials through practising a 'read about' strategy. However, this is increasingly becoming elusive in many English readers the children use. As such, so long as mother tongue materials rich in Kenyan culture in schools remain scarce, we shall continue to be tormented with the fear of the scope of information most of our children consume today, information which is cross-cultural and voluminous, fast and sophisticated in psychological depth. It is even becoming more sophisticated for the word of mouth, through 'Tell me a story' strategy, to relate. There is therefore a need for a mediating process to capture this, hence a challenge in pedagogy for survival in the information age and for the children who must partake of this survival effectively.

The point is that literacy requirements have changed and will continue to change with new technologies entering into children's daily lives; the change is a trend that must be captured in children's literature guided by our "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1984). Unless children's education takes the lead in developing appropriate pedagogies using the new media, corporate media moguls will end up determining what the children learn and what constitutes their literacy. The Kenyan educators must therefore be familiar with pedagogical issues at stake in the current knowledge society.

Reading and viewing compared

Theories vary about the difference between reading and viewing experience. One position holds that visual messages go directly into viewer's cognitive structure without the processing delay necessitated by decoding print symbols into concepts and images. Gettegno (1969:4) represents this view when he concludes:

> Sight is swift, comprehensive, simultaneous analytic and synthetic. It requires so little energy to function, as it does, at the speed of light, that it permits our mind to receive and hold an infinite number of items of information in a fraction of a second ...

Another way of looking at this proposition is that whatever the source of stimulus experience – printed words, spoken words, or visuals, a child will undergo a mental processing to perceive the implicit content to enable him make sense of the experience (Jerslev 2001). Is there any difference between print reading and the viewing of pictorial images? Does the print reader find himself in total thrall like the viewer who as proposed by Forman (1934) "loses ordinary control of his feelings and his thoughts, he identifies himself with the plot and looses himself in the picture, as he is possessed by the drama (Forman cited in Starker 1989:103). For Foreman (1934) perspective, viewing the visual media provides children with comfort, requires their formal skills, appeals to them and makes little distinction between fantasy and reality. Ordinarily, children are regarded as impressionable and pick fast the fantasies on the pictorial medium.

The children are of course expected to carry forward all that they experience in the literary reading into their speech or habits because any media used in a literature text is regarded as an emotion producing machine (Grodal 1997, Tan 1996). Their demonstration of language use needs to mirror the experience of their surrounding and certain linguistic structures gained from the literary work they read. What we are likely to see in most of children's literature texts used in schools, more so in primary schools in Kenya, are texts geared toward improving language use, apart from being seen as work that exist to be enjoyed, to entertain and for knowledge building.

We have to take cognisance that all the children's perceptions of the world around them are created by the sounds they hear and the objects they see which provide them with comfort in their day-to-day life. For example in Kenya, these include events like marriage rituals, immovable heritages, language, initiation ceremonies, songs, traditional dances, foods and forests and animals. The value of images in Kenya is well illustrated in our African shrines for example, shrines of 19th century paramount chiefs, the KAYA shrines in the coast region along the Indian Ocean, and the burial ceremonies – 'tero buru' – among the Luo community in western Kenya. Ogot (1974) has illustrated a number of these events in the history of East Africa.

All these form cultural objects or texts for children and their meanings are obtained through understanding or reading which feed into the children's lived experience, which in turn impacts on their processes of language production.

Reading among the children should therefore not be understood simply as a matter of an isolated encounter between the child (reader) and the text. It is an activity that takes place in a specific social setting implied in the content of the text, giving various social relationships as the text positions itself as of the parent for the child.

The process of reading requires a decoding of words into an abstraction of what is said to make meaning, while viewing images in books requires an encoding of visual images into words in speech to complete the communication of meaning. Children are very good at making sense of visual images and are quick to express the cognitive mapping experience. They will talk their hearts out to express what they see in books, on TV or video. With new media surrounding them in contemporary society, the children will continue to adapt to or negotiate their identities depending on the emphera they find themselves in.

From their perspective we begin to see media as a form of language art the children acquire. Thus the impact of visual images upon a child's cognition involves a restructuring of experience which manifests as a means of his effective-interpretive communicative skill of response. The restructuring experience is a condition in which the child goes through a cognitive process in developing skills in imagination and creativity as the child communicates messages across, thus restructuring his experience, a view well demonstrated in constructivist theory. This is language art. As Bolinger (1980:3) says:

> … language is not just a matter of communication. It is a way of expressing one's fastidiousness, elegance and imaginativeness; ... a way of displaying one's control over a medium just as a fine horseman displays his horsemanship by the way he sits in the saddle and handles his horse ... *or in a Kenyan experience, a Maasai moran chases a lion alone and kills it*

In this way, the effect of pictures in children's literature is to enhance the chance for a child to gain insight into himself, into his own feelings about the visuals, and perhaps make him express and incorporate some character traits from what he

sees into his ideal self. Many Kenyans today still remember the dangers caused by the film *Superman* among Kenyan children in the 1990s. Many children broke their arms in the city of Nairobi trying to somersault or fly the 'Superman' way since there was no caution to warn the children of the danger in practising the same at home. And in the mid-1990s in Kisumu town along the shores of Lake Victoria, when a number of children could be seen performing gestural acts by imitating the crooked feet and the jerking hands in a walking style of the world famous comedian Charlie Chaplin. The children had borrowedthese Chaplin's videos from the British Council library in Kisumu City. What I learnt from them was that curiosity among children triggered by visuals and the search for models of desired qualities is easily satiated by media.

Parents' attitude towards media

The parents and teachers in Kenya hold diverse attitudes towards media; some positive and others negative. The positive attitudes focus on amusement, entertainment, informing and educating aspects while the negative ones are anchored around cultural alienation and a threat to language maintenance, the aspect of moral practice where values, beliefs and codes of behavior are concerned. Just as we understand culture as 'learned behaviour of a given social group' we thus see it as a historically transmitted pattern of meaning in symbolic forms by which the Kenyan people communicate, develop their knowledge, and attitude toward life.

Of course, in a multilingual society like Kenya where Kiswahili serves the purposes of a uniting language – a national language, understanding media as a cultural forum is to set a base for cultural capital that should be infused in language education and family as a cultural institution, and enhancing literacy for learning. This is the view that would be likeable to Kenyan parents. It will enhance parent-child relations, the relations built by new cultural capital.

As a developing country, the general relationship between media, education and social change in Kenya needs to be viewed from the perspectives of the contribution of media to culture; for example, the improvement of the relationship between education and social change. Indeed, the dynamics of the relationship between education and social change in Kenya is fluid, since there are many interfering social factors, including poverty, illiteracy, traditional beliefs and diseases. Though media have little effect on backstage culture, the parents will remain wary of social changes broughtabout by public media.

Such changes will often overspill and creep into our culture. The Kenya School Parents Association (KSPA) has argued for the mutual interaction between the Kenyan past state of societal dynamics and the present social values while being kept in check by education, such that none loses its strand as both are needed to weave a conducive milieu for social change. The social values are important in the content of children's literature today, as we consider childhood as a socialization construction.

Such mutual interaction can be understood by drawing a demarcating line between two interacting societies – the past and the present, as shown in the figure below. The disjointed line in the figure represents the past society, and the bold line represents the present society.
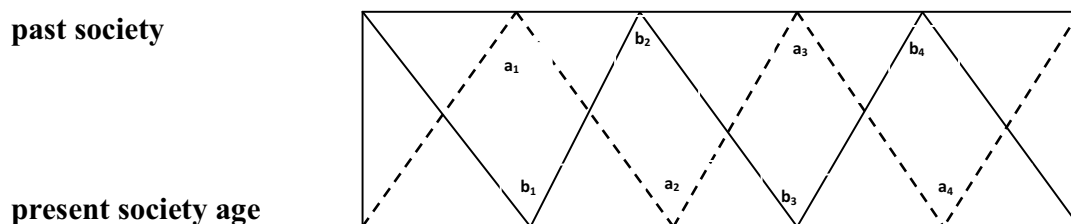

past society

present society age

a_1 b_2 a_3 b_4

b_1 a_2 b_3 a_4

Fig. 1 Past and present cultures mutual interaction

In the illustration, the joined conical shapes – a_1, a_2, a_3, a_4, b_1, b_2, b_3, b_4, form contexts for societal polarisation at different stages of growth of a child. The vestigial past society (continuous line) conically illustrated as b_1, b_2, b_3,b_4 today continues to intermesh with the present society (dotted lines) – a_1, a_2, a_3, a_4.

Many older parents will tell stories of how the Kenyan cultural past was rich in its folk tales, dances, flora and fauna. These formed the texture of an African cultural dependence and carried powerful ideas for everyday life in oral culture. They have today diminished in existence and their essence has been overtaken by events in the media. The media dominate the present society and have ushered in cultural encounters causing adaptive living cultures. This has made

people construct their identities from the symbolic resources at hand, which today include those of the media, hence giving the media a role in shaping the language.

That being the case, the Kenyan children's literature therefore must draw from this emergent context – it must be 'integrative', such that the past values are not forgotten for being elusive and inconsequential and the present ones over-consumed for being too enticing and absorbing. Exactly, this is what parents would like the media to capture for the children; the past to be retrieved by the media and the present to be retrieved in its ever increasing volume in the media, whether it is educating, entertaining or informing. Surprisingly, there is no guarantee that this ever increasing trend will abate or change. And most of all, the parents do not have dominant hands in decisions about what tastes in electronic forums are constructed, such as to make children's texts accommodate the views of the parents on what children should learn.

For long, literature teachers in Kenya have loathed the use of media in the classroom for teaching children's literature, arguing that media mostly provide entertainment from European/American culture for the children. When they see children laughing aloud, giggling, pinching one another, imitating characters on TV or puppet shows, they unfortunately regard that as an offshoot of merely an entertainment for the children. Can that be true? Some teachers have also argued against children's story book illustrations as being of no educational value or too graphic (Starker 1989). Wertham (1955) suggested that media reliant on visual images, from comic books to the TV, should be perceived as inherently inferior. Thus no matter what the media do, they cannot reach the heights of great literature in the written word. These arguments give support to teachers' fear. There is also disillusionment among Kenyan parents that most films, TV and video shows have diverting tendencies for children.

However, pedagogically the use of media in children's literature was intended to underscore the educational and entertaining aspects which the media capture and promote in children's literature. It was also intended to inculcate media literacy skills among children. Learning is therefore facilitated through such use of media for the creation of a relaxed and entertaining atmosphere which engenders pleasure in learning activities and multiliteracy skills. In the light of this, media depiction of literary world should promote cultural practices of the society and arguably must constitute the content which is adaptable to the Kenyan context; an attempt that will place the children in a distinctive, historical narrative; a narrative of folk origins of common cultural roots and of enduring traditions of the society. This is an underlying general aspiration of parents towards seeking an assurance of a parental bond, a bond that accommodates the experiences of the media in socializing children, yet with the caution that "… media are not to be trusted if upbringing is seen as the locus of character formation and childhood is defined in terms of development (Drotner 1999:613).

Role of media in children's literature

Some of the most vivid roles for media use in children's literature texts are understood to include:
1. greater learning experience when media are integrated into the traditional learning process
2. equal amounts of learning participation to be accomplished in less time
3. a high retention rate, and
4. facilitation of preferred learning proffered by learners when compared with traditional instruction.

In general we can argue that the media increase interest, comprehension and enhance retention. This argument underscores the hypothesis that the more abstract the content of the message is the more difficult it is to comprehend. Thus the rationale for use of media lies in their ability to mediate reality for any literary comprehension, or as Buckingham has proposed, "... media do not offer us a transparent 'window of the world', but a mediated version of the world. They do not just present reality, they represent it" (Buckingham 2011: 57). Media therefore allow the children to interpret abstraction more easily, through the channels of more than one of their senses through vicarious presentation. Gestalt psychology describes this state in their argument that media provides an affordance for all senses to be used by the child for acquisition of reality. Thus graphics, video, TV and cinema have enormous roles in the acquisition of concepts and attitudes for the present generation of children. As Fothergill and Butchart (1990:14) proposed, "already many children are being influenced and even educated more by television than by the school."

Many people outside Africa got the sorrows of the famine in Sudan and Ethiopia on TV in the late 1980s just as people in Africa got the sorrows of 9/11/01 of the Trade Centre in the US. Rwandan genocide and the problems of Darfur are known to people outside Africa only through TV and print media. Thus the use of the power of the visuals is enormous despite the claims of opponents.

One may question then that how many homes in Kenya have TVs and VCRs for the purposes of watching documentaries, films, news, football, athletics and other amusements? There is no research to ascertain this yet; however, impressionistically there is an increasing tendency for the acquisition of media resources, for example, telephone, TV, radio and computers for home use in urban areas. The trend is slowly picking up in rural Kenya.

This is a sign of rapid transformation of a society by the new media. Why then shouldn't the new media have an impact on children? Why shouldn't Kenyan children take their fairytale books and sit to read and enjoy them, as used to happen in the past? Many Kenyan adults still remember the etiological tales in Dholuo, Kikuyu, Luhya and Nandi readers that we need in mother tongue readers in schools. What do visual media offer over and above the printed materials (books) in the realm of learning and entertainment that makes children today spend less time reading books and more time glued to screens for entertainment? Why are their bedrooms increasingly becoming media rich, especially children from middle class families?

Any research to give an exhaustive response to these questions may be wide reaching, because the capacity of children for acquiring knowledge is vast and knowledge itself today is available from a wide variety of sources and in a wide variety of forms. As Lord Bullock (1975:59) said, "dealing differently with information must now be recognized as one of the major problems in modern society." Variety might sound rather a weak benefit with which to begin, but the effectiveness of media contribution to children's literature is always obvious. If media could offer nothing more than what books or oral discourse could achieve, then media could not have appealed to the children as they do today. We may say that it is a question of monotony and semantics of the printed word that children experience in printed materials that has changed their mode of information consumption. Just like the body, the mind thrives on easily digested food and a varied diet. And inherent in the idea of variety is the merit of the media to provide alternatives to facilitate comprehension and multiliteracy skills.

By implication, the visual media are emerging to provide a contest to print, though opponents of the media hold different opinions. Postman (1994) for example has proposed that "... print is the repository of rational thought because words enable the reader to reflect upon the ideas being expressed (Postman 1994: 100), all this is argued to portray pictorial medium as "… inferior to the process and habits of mind stimulated by language" (Citcher 2008:86).

Postman's proposition invites us to acquiesce in his opposition to the contest the media are today positioning. Indeed, this has made Barker (1984) and Starker (1989) note how this opposition sets up a series of binary oppositions between literacy and media cultures, shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Binary opposition between literacy and media culture

Literacy culture	Media culture
Rational	Emotional
Abstract thought	Concrete situations
Analytical	Intuitive
Individual response	Group response
Psychological distance	Psychological involvement
Linearity/ chronological	Time reversal/ or fragmentation
Largely verbal	Largely visual
Mainly factual	Mainly fictional

Source : Critcher 2008:101.

Researchers (Goetz *et al.* 2005) constructed an international study in four nations (USA, Germany, Korea and Israel) on the question "what can children's fantasies tell us about their developmental needs and what part do media fantasy narratives and characters play in this?"(Goetz *et al.* 2005:17).

Their conclusion was that:

> Media do play a central role in children's make-believe worlds … in ways that are used mainly to help children symbolize their own experiences and self-image and as a springboard for their own narration of a world that allows them a personal space for developing who they wish to be

Opponents of children's media may see this view as benign as it concerns the relationship between the psychological well-being of children and media use. But other scholars (Kinder 1991; Kline 1993; Buckingham 1996) hold the opinion that media use is beneficial to children and promote their 'proximal development'. Whatever the case, what today appears as a proliferation of hybrid and frontier media forms is increasingly becoming commonplace and is generating new text-based knowledge and cultural configurations. The children therefore need a head-start to participate in these for the acquisition of critical literacy to enable them to understand how knowledge, ideas and information 'bits' are structured in different media (the metalanguage).

This does not mean we downplay the prominent role of print in education for the stimulation of cognition, but rather argue that the meaning of literacy pedagogy has to change. Cope and Kalantzis (2000:14) pursuing a similar thought have proposed that:

> Local diversity and global connectedness mean not only that there can be no standard; they also mean that most important skill students need to learn is to negotiate regional … variations in register that occur to social context ... visual and iconic meanings; and variations as in gestural relationship among people, language and material objects.

Thus the new media and hypermedia channels have emerged to provide opportunities for children to find their own voices, to find language markers of their life world and ascertain their identities. This creates a challenge for literacy pedagogy which will see media as a representation of language art.

The other argument that has frequently been put forward in support of media is that the written word is 'the least memorable form of communication'. This is a problem even with Kenyan university students who demonstrate it in deceit in examinations. Few of Kenyan university students not adequately prepared for examinations go into examinations hall with what they call 'Mwakenya' (i.e. short notes in tiny sheets of paper concealed in the pockets of their tight jeans or sleeves of their pullovers). They secretly make use of these notes during examination time with dexterity that defeats the sharp eyes of examination supervisors. If university students continue to find difficulty in retention with print, what about children?

Yet what are the most popular media people have access to these days? Definitely they are the internet, radio, television or video which are becoming increasingly common home infrastructures for providing the seeing or hearing experience. American research has also produced some very interesting information that 'we learn 83% of everything we know through our eyes, whether literate or illiterate.'

If children's literature in schools' curriculum is meant to develop humanising effects among children, then the opportunity to use new media to manage established knowledge and enhance their ability to handle new ideas and meet new situations must be inculcated among them. Buckingham (2003: 95) described effects as "development of sensitivity to language, culture and human relationship". We expect Kenyan children to be prepared to meet the basic intellectual and social demands of an adult life which has increasingly become international, multiracial, and multi-ethnic and is undergoing a rapid information revolution. This state or condition is putting pressure on the developing world to reassess the power of media in society.

For the education of children to be effective, the Kenyan school's curriculum must allow or involve the use of different channels of information provision. The schools must contribute to children's preparedness for the consumption of huge volumes of media information, whatever the age and stage of growth and development they have reached, so as to guarantee them the chance to take advantage of the opportunities available to them in the current information age. Fothergill and Butchart (1990:15) have claimed that "audiovisual and visual experiences are close to the manner in which individuals learn about their environment and interpersonal relationships through mental processing."

Therefore, in teaching and learning among children today, we need to use media to support traditional modes of teaching so as to engage the children's attention and make them enjoy the learning or reading activities.

Pedagogical issues concerning media use assume that for learners to engage in active learning, we need to ensure that the media material used will provide engaging activities for thinking, language and reasoning. These activities are likely to enhance a child's attention, meaning and concept formation.

Conclusion

In this paper three points stand out clearly. Firstly, it is about what should be the content of the children's literature today; secondly, it is about the emerging role of media in every aspect of the life of children both outside and inside school; and thirdly, it is the contribution of media to learning and teaching.

These points stand as imperative issues that need research in children's literature whether seen as 'books for children' or a 'read me a story' strategy. What tends to escape the minds of some literary conservatives in teaching and learning is that while they are at the very point of advocating achieving the literary ideal, the immediate practical needs for literacy and inclusion of media literacy simply tend to elude their understanding either because of a hate or fear of technology.

Educators are today actively engaged in assessing the contribution of the use of media in learning situations in order to understand the emerging learner profiles related to the perspectives of a binary opposition between literary and media culture. Thus they do not see the fear other people have against the use of media in learning and teaching.

The teaching of a literature curriculum in Kenyan schools seems to be caught in a double confusion. On the one hand, the language is being destabilised in writing – the standard (be it English or mother tongue) is losing its ideal linguistic grip

as fewer and fewer children learn to read and write well. On the other hand, there is yet no restabilisation of speech – here we begin to be faced with a linguistic problem rather than language, where newly spoken codes fail the test of language generation (that is 30 years as one language generation).

Increasingly, the rate of emergence of new lexical items in various Kenyan languages tends to be high because of borrowing and coinages. For a spoken code to become fully stabilized, it needs to pass three language generations tests. This establishes the reason why in Kenya, Sheng, the combined coinage of Swahili and English, has never stabilised as a language. The problem of Sheng may be suspected to have caused the loss of oral delivery of our oral literature through the 'tell me a story' strategy. When children begin to lose linguistic strands needed for competence (listening and speaking) in their mother tongue, L2 (English) or Kiswahili in educational and cultural contexts, what will they obtain from their school curriculum?

The stated problems therefore suggest that media stands as a language art and can circumvent children's learning problems. As there is a need for children's literature to be integrative, the idea requires that our schools need to reform and conform to the present-day technological wave of events. Education needs to transform to allow children to experience how present cultural values interlace with the values of past societies, through the use of new media in today's information age. Indeed, the new media are where the volume children's literature is provided in abundance today.

We are not suggesting that media images are here to render print (children's readers) irrelevant. But it is worth pointing out that developments in the new media and information processing will certainly have a major impact on the way we live, which forms part of children's education. However, this aspect of the emerging vicarious potential of new media culture should not be mindlessly prioritised over the equally valuable traditional practices such as traditional dances, songs and other ceremonies that children need to experience in order to live and identify in their communities.

Education needs to weave an African society in children's literature, and make it concurrent with the technological events in the present rapidly changing environment. Today's technological events have formed unavoidable cultural mortar that holds the society together and tucked us into a globalised world if we are ready or not.

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