LANGUAGE USE AND THE MEDIA: PRESERVING THE AFRICAN VALUES

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Abstract

African culture is functionally linked to the popular media forms - radio, television and the press since they play a significant role in their struggles against colonialism and exploitation. Since time immemorial, the media have helped to rescue, incorporate, preserve and mediate elements which serve the interests of the African society. These interests include not only the people's aspirations, but also those factors which define their beliefs, expressions and historical cultural development in general. This study explores the role of the media in communication and preservation of African values. The study calls for more media content programmes that will help promote and preserve the African values.

Introduction

Prior to the British intrusion, urban areas existed in Africa. Nigeria in particular already had advanced cultures relative to their environment before their contact with the Europeans. But these were preserved orally and later in the print medium, however, no efforts were made to preserve these in the electronic media. When placed in the same historical context, historians assert that Nigeria, and Africa in general, achieved developments comparable to that of Europe if not better in the said century, it is also a known fact that, Nigeria achieved great strides in development in her own way before contact with Europe and before she was integrated into the capitalist agenda. There was remarkable political organization as well as socio-cultural development in Nigeria before her contact with Europe contrary to the white man's view that Nigeria had nothing to sell except slaves.

Nigeria is already falling prey to the dictates of Westernization. As a result, there is a high level of alienation in our cultural realms. As agenda setters, the Mass Media have many roles to play in promoting the cultural heritage of Nigeria. Any specialised form of discourse has its own unique language and media literacy is no exception. Media language has always attracted the attention of linguists particularly applied linguists and sociolinguists. There are four practical and principled reasons for this interest according to Bell:

First, the media provides an easily accessible source of language data for research and teaching purposes. Second, the media are important linguistic institutions. Their output makes up a large proportion of the language that people hear and read every day. Media usage reflects and shapes both language use and attitudes in a speech community. For a second language learner, the media may function as the primary or even the sole source of native-speaker models. Third, the ways in which the media use language are interesting; these include how different dialects and languages are used in advertising, how tabloid newspapers use language in the projection of their assumed readers' speech or how radio personalities use language and only language to construct their own images and their relationships to an unseen, unknown audience. Fourth, the media are important social institutions. They are crucial presenters of culture, politics and social life shaping as well as reflecting how these are formed and expressed. Media discourse is important both for what it reveals about a society and for what it contribute to the character of society (9).

Theoretical Framework
The Cultural Norms Theory forms the theoretical framework for this paper. Through selective presentation and emphasis on certain themes, the mass media create the impression among their audience that such themes were accepted norms of the society. This makes members of the society to pattern their own behaviour along the line of such media presentations. The Cultural Norms theory resembles

the Agenda Setting Theory which suggests that the mass media direct discourses in the society by emphasizing some certain issues. The theory presents a clear description of the relationship between the mass media and culture. However, it portrays the media as all-powerful. For instance McBride argues that "communication is powerful, but not all powerful communication is most effective when its impact is strengthened by other social factors and the messages conveyed and are already reflected in public opinion or in emerging interest" (Tsebee 31). This implies that media impact on our lives is not total but reinforced by other social factors in society. The Cultural Norms Theory, in spite of its inadequacy offers a valid explanation of the relationship between the mass media and culture.

Language

Language is a form of communication which allows human beings to engage in transactions and share thoughts, ideas, beliefs, notions, experiences and so on. These feelings are known to the parties involved and they understand and respond appropriately to one another. According to Bonvillan, "language is an integral part of human behaviour. It is the primary means of interaction between people; Speakers use language to convey their thoughts, feelings, intentions and desire to others" (15). The writer obviously refers to language as a vehicle for conveying communication from the sender to the receiver and vice-versa in form of feedback. Pearson et al writes: "language is a collection of symbols, letters, or words with arbitrary meanings that are governed by rules used to communicate" (82).

Language whether spoken or written has a purpose to fulfil; it is to create meaning and perfect communication. Hence, Daramola identifies four attributes of language as: "to creating unity in a community, facilitating a sense of belonging for speakers of that language, a tool of mass mobilization, and a symbol of harmony among people" (31). Adebiyi and Ojo opine that language is a phenomenon which allows human beings to express their feelings, aspirations, desires, and to interact with one another as far as human

society is concerned (Odegbenle 164).

The Mass Media
Deffeur and Dennis define mass media as "a device for moving messages across distance or time to accomplish mass communication process" (Tsebee 30). They look at it as not only mechanical devices that transmit and sometime store messages (television, camera, radio, microphone, printing press) but also institutions that the mass media can be categorized as: Print media- newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets, direct mail, curricular, billboard, scripts writing and any technical device that carries messages to the masses by appealing to their sense of sight; Electronic media – this is subdivided into (a) radio and audio recordings that appeal to the sense of sound; (b) television: motion pictures and video recording that appeal to both the sense of sound and sense of sight; (c) the internet, podcasts, and text messages . Media are the collective communication outlets or tools that are used to store and deliver information or data. It is either associated with communication media or the specialized communication business such as: photography, cinema, advertising, or publishing. The oldest media forms are newspapers, magazines, journals, newsletters and other printed material.

Language and the Media
Since the colonialists left Nigeria, English language has remained our official language for convenience in administration, despite our over four hundred indigenous languages. At some point the media deemed it necessary to use these indigenous languages in communication, using the three major ones – Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, likewise the Pidgin English which started making waves in the media. Some newspapers were written in our indigenous languages (Odengbenle 164) and movies acted with them too. This was all in the bit to sustain our cultural heritage and communicate with even the uneducated. Both print and electronic media in the country used verbal and non-verbal communication means to reach their audience.

Traditional oral forms of communication that played a central role in maintaining social and political order ensured continuity and reinforced values and norms of behaviour. Oral communication was gradually confronted by a quite different form of communication based on print and generally in a foreign language. If an African language was used, it was a language not necessarily employed in traditional oral communication thus the introduction of the new print media marked the beginning of a break with the past. It is significant to note that the press played an important part in the colonial history of Africa. Whereas the major newspapers of Nigeria and the Gold Coast (now Ghana) were organs of protest and political agitation, those of East Africa were vehicles for the culture and concepts of the rulers with the considerable resources of white capital at their command. East Africa had the greatest number of language newspapers during the struggle for independence and although these were government newspapers supporting the colonial status quo, they all employed African journalists. The extent of African control of the print media to maintain language has had marginal success, particularly in the West African sub-region. African newspapers are remarkably influential. The greatest media contribution that helps to maintain Africa culture, language and continuity, however has come from radio and television.

Media has an important role to play in effective communication and with the IT revolution; it has now been of inevitable use and vitality. Some of the earlier methods used for communication have been visual and audio in the form of gestures, sounds and pictures/drawings. Technology today has transformed those sounds and gestures to produce speech, videos, films, posters and theatre.

For Odegbenle it is imperative to state that while some print media outfits try to define their readership through the choice of words used in their publications, the same cannot be said of the electronic media (165). The author notes that "radio listeners and television viewers are at the mercy of broadcast stations programmes to create

meaning to whatever language of broadcast, whereas the acronym 'KISS' 'Keep It Simple and Short' has been thrown into garbage in broadcast writings" (165).

In print media, according to him, language of reportage and headlines writing calls for serious concern as nearly all of them care less about rules guiding language of publication. Some of the newspapers and magazines have thrown caution to the winds as they often over sensationalize their stories with 'complimentary' wild headlines. The choice of words and style of writing are contra-indication to the rules of the language of publication. Pornographic and obscene pictures are spread across pages of these publications making one to wonder if such publications are fit for children's consumption (Odegbenle 166). These obviously endanger our cultural values. Radio and television stations in Nigeria transmit in English language. Even the newspapers are not left out of dominance of English language contents. This often hinders understanding of the message by all and sundry. Communication experts have established that understanding of communication content is enhanced through the use of indigenous languages. This way the media are able to reach a wider audience.

Social media is also guilty of language misuse as it is practically not exposed to any kind of control. Communicators on social media arbitrarily use language pleasing or appealing to them. Many indigenous languages have suffered in the hand of communicators who adulterate them in what can be described as "free styling" with words. The art of texting which facilitates abridged words worsened the understanding of language and how to write it appropriately. Some users are so engrossed in the text messaging art that they found it difficult to write correctly. People on social media care less about the socio-cultural and security implications of their choice of words hiding under the guise of anonymity. Many social network users post messages without taken into consideration their clarity and logic (Odegbenle 167).

At the onset, establishing mass communication was a political necessity, an international demonstration of African sovereignty; and a way of consolidating national unity. Today, using popular art forms with the available modern media have helped strengthen the national bonds that Africans desire to forge ahead. This cultural and communication hybridization has also encouraged the African resolve to accept what is good whilst perfecting one's own cultural dimensions. After decades of existence, the various African media has given rise to a number of issues; questions abound to whether they are playing a significant role in new development strategies and how they are meeting their goals.

African Values

Every society has set of values covering every aspect of human endeavour. These values are the guiding principles found in any society. West Africa (and Nigeria in particular) has its own cultural values or value system. These values cover the whole ramifications of the society, and these values apparently play regularity roles in human relationship and stabilizing the society. Value systems of the people are the understanding of the belief system s and cultural systems of the people in question. These values make a comprehensive system which gives the African man a holistic outlook.

To many of us culture means many things. At a reduced level, culture is regarded as those aesthetic aspects of our society. These include our dance ensemble and its choreography, our folklores, our mode of dressing, language, food etc. At a more sublimated level, culture is a generalized perception of a people's application or disposition to a given contingency or challenges. According to Babawale, "it is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society" (Tsebee 30). In the same vein, Kluckhon "conceives culture as, the total way of life of the people, the social legacy that the individuals acquire from his group" (Tsebee 30). Baran defines culture as, "the learned

behaviour of members of a given social group" while Anyaegbunam says "culture indeed does underline our very existence as a people, or any other people for that matter. It pervades every facet of our life. Yet culture remains a very elusive concept (Tsebee 30).

African cultural value system is characterized by the following features identified by Onwubiko and Adani:

- Sense of sacredness of life
- Sense of hospitality
- Sense of good human relations
- Sense of the sacred and religion
- Sense of time
- Sense of respect for authority and the elders
- Sense of community life
- Sense of truth, uprightness, justice and equity
- Sense of personal worth and preservation of family name and image.   (Kur and Nwosu 9)

In other words, African values are those norms or mores that are largely unique to Africans and define the African identity. They are those cultural heritage that make us Africans and distinct from other cultures.

These values make a comprehensive system which gives African man a holistic outlook. The values are grouped as follows: (1) Moral values (2) Religious and spiritual values (3) Economic values (4) Political values (5) Aesthetic value (6) Social values. (kanu 152). For the author, social values appear to be the bedrock of African cultural values as it tends to cover the other range of values subsumed under those values mentioned above. Kanu explaining these African (Nigerian) social values opines that sense of good human relation in the community is "live-and-let live". This presupposes inter-personal and inter-community relationship realized in the interaction between individuals of the same community and different communities. Sense of community means the community offering the African the psychological and ultimate security as it gives its members both physical and ideological

identity. Its aim is to produce and present an individual as a community culture bearer. Sense of hospitality is inherently indispensable in the survival African values. There is always spontaneous welcome and accommodation to strangers and visitors. Africans have symbolic ways of expressing welcome. These are in forms of presentation of kola nuts, traditional gin, coconuts, etc in various communities. Sense of respect for authority and elders helps to sober and smooth social relations in African society. It is natural for Africans to respect an elder. The way the young ones salute the elders was, and still is regarded as evidence of morality or lack of it. "Living together" and the sense of "community of brothers and sisters" are the basis of, and the expression of, the extended family system in Africa. The most admired value in the traditional African economic arrangements is the social security or economic insurance guaranteed by the social organisation typified by extended family system. Finally, the sense of religion which is our spiritual selves is that of instinctive feelings of oneness with the divine, or our longings for, and intimations of immortality. It is the sense of religion that naturally endowed man with respect for human life and human dignity (Kanu 152 - 158).

Kanu further explains that the social values enumerated above are manifestations of African humanism. These values have survived the Western cultural adulteration by colonialism. African social values centre on human worth and form a comprehensive system which has behind it some identifiable metaphysical beliefs about man and his world. For instance, man in African traditional culture is not just an individual who 'contracts' to live with others in society, and presumably opts out if the balance of advantages is no longer favourable. Rather the African man is first and foremost a member of his family, the extended family, the community and his society in that order before being an individual. Thus, the influence of group consciousness is recognized as the motivating idea and thought" (159); African social values are both man-centred and community-centred. This being the case, it is not a surprise that human dignity and the respect for human life are of supreme importance.

According to the author, the social values are tailored to ensure a man's tenure of life, right from birth until old age. These social values considered are ingrained in African personality, which is taken as mirrors for our authenticity as Africans. The enduring nature of these values, in spite of cultural upheaval engendered by colonialism is as a result of the inherent humanism associated with them. For an African, what is morally good is what befits a human being, it is what is decent for man-what brings dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity and joy to man and his community. These social values enhance and safeguard humans. (kanu 159)

Consequently, the infiltration and adoption of certain western values into our system have brought abnormality in our society and especially through the media. The introduction of such western values into the political and economic arenas has rendered the society backwards. To this effect, the question arises as to what the media is doing to ensure that these values which are distinctively and uniquely African is not relegated to nothingness.

Media and Cultural Development

It has been long recognized that media and communication play a key role in development – social, economic and cultural. The media plays diverse roles in development by: improving governance, public decision making, transparency, accountability and responsiveness; promoting behavioural and social change in support of reforms and development (through social marketing and policy reform campaigns); and generating new sources of growth and employment, mainly through content creation by SMEs and significant multiplier effects (Hana 50).

The author explains that "the media is undergoing massive transformation as a result of digitalization of content, platforms and devices. The digital transformation is significantly enhancing the fluidity of media content and producing an abundance sharable content" (50). While paper based manual systems for processing information and communications are still very much evident,

computer based technology is increasingly undertaking most office functions and procedures.

Media Contents

In Nigeria, the language of broadcasting and publications are 90 percent English and the remaining 10 percent goes for local languages. Consequently, most news and programmes are largely elitist and self serving. Lawuyi, supporting this claim argues that most Nigerian newspapers devotes more space to advertisement on special projects commissioning, birthdays, congratulatory messages, obituaries and self adulations of government officials and private individuals against the detriment of reporting stories that affect Nigerians welfare. It devotes little time and space to critical issues of governance and accountability. This, he says questioned the social responsibility of the media (Ojo et al 26-27). In accordance with the national broadcasting commission guidelines, electronic media in Nigeria are expected to have 60 percent of the programmes in local content and 40 percent foreign. Unfortunately, most private televisions and radio stations do not have local content programmes or commission local content programmes. They devote more time for foreign music, chit chat and phone –in programmes due to pulsity of funds and the process of acculturalisation. Sometimes, they rely on programmes or rebroadcast of western programmes from foreign channels which have adverse effect on Nigerian youths.

Meanwhile, the public owned electronic media do commission local programmes which are policy driven and culturally rich in content. Magazines programmes on NTA, AM express, network programmes like tales by the moonlight, radio link, platforms are good informative and educative programmes on state owned electronic media in Nigeria. Such programmes include the following as seen in the programme schedule of some media houses: African Pot, Super Stories, Speak out, Ages of paradise, Do it yourself and Ezi na Ulo (source: www.NTA.ng); Nti Nara Rie, Inyom Ezuo and Surugede (source: BCA.ng.com). These are

culture based programmes featuring folktales, moonlight plays and stories. They educate and inform in the nuances of Igbo folklore. They look into our cultural family lives, the kinds of traditional meals to cook and also show case African fashion and child upbringing, etc. Others include columnists' pages on some Nigerian newspapers. For example: Punch wise - a column in Punch newspaper that talks on a wide range of topics that bothers on aspects of social and African values. The National Broadcasting Commission monitors the content of these television and radio broadcasts.

According to Sambe, the mass media is mandated by the Nigerian constitution of 1999 (as amended) in its fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy (article 21), to ensure that: "The state shall protect, preserve and promote the Nigerian culture and enhance human dignity consistently with the fundamental objectives" (Tsebee 31). This shows that the media is saddled with the task of making government to protect, preserve and promote the Nigerian cultures. It also shows that government is conscious of the fact that certain cultures of the country are for the furtherance of human dignity, and are universally recognized. Through their coverage of cultural festivals, traditional dances, exhibitions of local arts and crafts, folklore and vernacular discussion programmes on radio and television as well as publications in magazines, the mass media play a role in the enforcement and transmission of culture. Emenyeonu, corroborates the view "that through their coverage, the mass media help to promote heterogeneous cultural groups thereby correcting any misconceptions, and building a sense of pride in the citizen" (Tsebee 31).

New Strategies and the Media
One of the striking features of national and international media systems is globalisation. This is defined by Akanbi, in his lecture series as important phenomenon, a movement sweeping across the whole planet and beyond. Its derivatives are flow of ideas, labour,

capital goods, technology, people culture and foreign exchange (Ojo et al 31). However, this global village theory and movement impacted on the media systems of Nigeria. The effect of globalisation on the Nigerian media resonate more in the content of the media chain down the line. In short the content is Eurocentric all the way. The choice of language for broadcast and publication has a full semblance of a European identity to the detriment of Nigeria's cultural values and norms as Lawuyi, asserts. The use of latest technology for broadcast and publications are also noticeable in the media organisations across Nigeria. Technology has gone a long way in affecting human life in a manner which cannot be easily measured. We are living today in terms of great changes, that is, the information age where technology influences our lives far more than we could ever imagine as we are at the crossroad of the new information millennium and age of electronic innovation seems to have sneaked on us unprepared.

Based on the foregoing, Media is one major area in which technology has affected and is passing through technological changes as they adapt to Digital technologies in   all forms of operations. The technological developers today are having a significant effect on every facet – from the news gathering, presentation of the news and as well news organization's structure. Satellite feeds has assisted broadcast of online real time signals from any location across the world to millions of homes in Nigeria. Newspapers are now been printed in multiple colours and large quantity simultaneously in different locations in Nigeria to meet the readers demand. New media techniques have completely taken over the traditional media in the area of news reporting, production and circulation. According to Akinreti, the online journalism – a gift of the 21st century journalism practice have ensured that readers, listeners and other stakeholders have the choice of a instant feedback, interact and choose their news at a finger - tip. On the areas of digital migration of broadcasting, Nigerian government has set a 2015 deadline for all broadcasting stations to comply. Here, the use of HD Cameras, digital transmission takes over (Ojo et al 31).

Conclusion

The task of salvaging our culture as a nation will be enhanced if media plays its major roles in the implementation of cultural policies and in helping to democratize culture. This is because the media performs the role of agenda setting in the society. The press has many roles to play in the cultural development of a society. Such roles are identified thus: First, the media has the responsibility of guiding the society to avoid the mistakes we continue to make in Nigeria and the rest of Africa in addition to our being colonized culturally and religiously by other cultures, a mistake which has allowed the effects of scientific and technological culture of others to become the way we behave. This is because we have not cared to use these cultures of general application to develop our own responses to them; this has tremendous negative effects on the mental development and behaviour of our people.

According to Sambe, in the music arena, the salient lessons and messages embedded in our traditional music are either getting lost or dying gradually due to their abandonment and the modern craze for foreign music. The media has not done enough to enforce our cultural values, through music as well. Today, youths are more interested in foreign music than in Nigerian local music. The media owes the obligation of highlighting perennial existential problems of moral failure that have be-devilled the Nigerian society in recent times.

The press must as a matter of duty, begin to accord culture adequate reporting. The style and content of the media show a lack of interest in cultural reporting except for a few cases. The present interest seems to be on political, economic and social issues. The media must be at the vanguard of condemning the problem of nudity among our youths. The media has a crucial role to play in reporting of oral poets. Our present day society is already falling prey to the dictates of westernization. As a result, our oral literature is viewed by some people as anachronistic and moribund. Tsebee affirms that, there is no aggressive effort even by journalists for encouragement

and recognition, let alone preservation of our African values and culture (35). Therefore, this paper recommends that the media, especially the private owned, should have more local content programmes which are culturally based as we as model their language in such a way as not to endanger our cultural values.

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