

LANGUAGE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE NIGERIAN MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Communication is the sharing of experiences, ideas, thoughts, beliefs and notions represents life. Language as a tool of exchanging idea and sharing of experience perfects communication and its importance cannot be over-emphasized. The study used secondary data sources. It examines the relationship between language and communication, how language can aid or destroy communication and cases of misuse of language among the Nigerian media and as well as how to promote appropriate use of indigenous language in the mass media. In one of its recommendations, this study canvassed for increased use of indigenous languages in the media contents to save them from sliding into extinction and facilitate better understanding. It also called for more radio and television stations whose language of transmission would be solely indigenous.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is pervasive, ubiquitous and takes place everywhere, every time and every day. Man existence can be traced to communication. Communication started between the first man and his Creator. Biblical account noted that God established communication with the first man, Adam. Since the creation of first Man, communication has come to stay as Adam communicated with his family and the animal folks. It is vital to conclude that communication is the basis of human and animal existence and interaction. This paper examines the interrelatedness of language and communication, how language can aid and how misuse of language obstructs communication as well as tips for communicators on effective use of language. Effective communication require concerted effort on the part of message encoder, the appropriate choice of words, correct contextual application and simplicity. Communication is traced to a Latin word "communis" meaning to share and that it is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, visuals, signals, writing or behavior. Communication is also the transmission of experience from one person to another, from one person to a group of people or from a group of people to another group of people. Communication is pervasive. It is an index of existence and regarded as lively. Okunma (1996) sees communication as a complex process of sharing information or a message which requires certain basic components. It is essential to conclude that communication is pervasive and a fundamental way by which human beings interact through language and other symbolic means. Communication sustains, lubricates and dominates every facet of human existence.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Communicating in the appropriate language is becoming a source of worry to language experts especially on media contents. This concern is hinged on the belief that the media is the conscience of the society and that people have greater inclination to believe their messages. The fear is the misuse of language of communication in the mass media in Nigeria and who to make correction as languages are being used to promote violence and vulgarism. Also, the palpable threat to extinction of indigenous languages due to wider acceptance of foreign languages over indigenous ones is a serious challenge.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

The objective of the paper is to explore the world of wrong usage of language of communication especially among Nigerian media where some practitioners have thrown caution into the wind through

misuse of language of communication and also to explore the benefits of given indigenous languages more media attention.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION/LITERATURE REVIEW

Functions of communication

Communication do not exist in a vacuum, it has certain functions in the society, apart from getting people to share ideas and experiences, it is also facilitates entertainment and promote social order. Communication process requires a sender, message, receiver and channel and its does not necessarily need the awareness of a receiver on the intent of the sender. However, it is pertinent to state that both the sender and receiver need to have shared some communication commonalities for the communication process to be whole and complete. In the opinion of Wilson (2006) human communication is unique because it is transactional, processual, and interactional and an intellectual exercise. He was coming from the standpoint that communication among human beings is boundless, timeless and intentional.

Intra-Personal Communication

This is a communication that takes place within an individual. It is self-responsive, personally experienced communication.

Interpersonal Communication

This takes place most between two people, one regarded as the sender while the other is the receiver. It also known as face to face communication. Feedback is readily available. It is conversational with sight and sound as channels. It is informal and not structured.

Medio Communication

This is the interface between interpersonal and mass communication. The use of telephone, walkie-talkie, letter and so on. It can be rowdy and facilitate misunderstanding. Feedback is available. This type of interaction is mostly purposeful.

Public Communication

It takes place where there is a speaker (sender) and an Audience (receivers) this type of communication is planned and purposive. The audience has limited opportunity to feedback compare to inter personal and group communication.

Mass Communication

It is well structured and planned. The message is meant for heterogeneous audience with varying sociological, psychological and physiological traits. Feedback is delayed. Example; a message coming from a radio programme could not be responded to immediately, even if there is avenue to do so, only infinitesimal proportion of the listeners could be accommodated.

Verbal Communication

It involves the use of spoken and written word(s) to share experience in communication. Verbal communication is the oldest and most common element of human communication

Verbal communication is using language which is symbolic to create meaning in communication process.

Non Verbal Communication

Words alone might not be sufficient to perfect communication; other means of bodily expressions are used to perfect communication either as complimentary verbal or exclusive depending on the need. Nonverbal include body movement, facial expression, gesture, signs, posture and so on. They are used to convey information or message.

WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

Language is a form of communication which allow animal (both lower and higher) to engage in transaction and share thoughts, beliefs, notions, ideas, experiences and so on which are presumably known to both parties. As transaction takes place with human beings, so also in the animal kingdom as

they use various languages common to them to communicate, some domestic animals understand and respond appropriately to human language which they have learnt over the years.

Alao (2012) traces origin of language to God who inspired the first Man, Adam to give name and communicate with all creatures including animals. He refers to the Bible, when God was annoyed with the construction of tower of Babel which led to the emergence of many languages. Nancy Bonvillain (2000) notes that language is an integral part of human behavior .It is the primary means of interaction between people. Speakers use language to convey their thoughts, feelings, intentions and desire to others. The writer was obviously referring to language as vehicle of conveying communication from the sender to the receiver and vice-versa in form of feedback. Pearson et al (2003) write: “Language is a collection of symbols, letters or words with arbitrary meanings that are governed by rules used to communicate”.

Language whether spoken or written has a purpose to fulfill; it is to create meaning and perfect communication. Daramola (2003) identifies four attributes of language as; to create unity in a community, facilitate sense of belonging for speaker of that language, a tool of mass mobilization and can cause disharmony if not properly guided. Adebisi and Ojo (2010) explain that language is a phenomenon which allows human being to express their feelings, aspirations, desires, and to interact with one another as far as human society is concerned.

To understand language, one needs to know how it is used to create meaning.

Arbitrariness- People give meaning to word based on their conviction or other not too known inferences. Example, the word Okada is a name of a village in Edo State in Nigeria. An indigene of that community operated an airline named Okada Air regarded then as one with the largest fleet, few years after the Airline folded up, commercial motorcycle is called okada in the south west region of the country.

Personal- Language meaning can be personal, based on one’s experience, religion, country, education among others. Words spoken or written mean different thing to different people. Example, Sheriff is a name common in Muslim countries, in United States of America, Sheriff means an officer of law. A Muslim who did not know about Sheriff being an officer of law will definitely be confused.

How can language be used to Enhance or Obstruct Communication.

There is no gainsaying that people use language to enhance and obstruct communication. At times someone would say something and people would give different meanings to it, whereas communication is regarded as complete and whole when the response provided by the receiver is equal to the intention of the generator (sender). The opposite of which is known as obstruction to communication message. Scannell (1991) points out that, “*the communicator must affiliate to the situation of their audience, and align their communicative behaviour with those circumstances. The burden of responsibility is thus on the broadcasters to understand the conditions of reception and to express that understanding in language intended to be recognised as oriented to those conditions*”.

Careful selection of words or symbols creates understanding between a sender and receiver while noise creates distraction and impedes meaning. The under listed are identified areas of obstruction to language of communication. Pearson et al (2003:82) again writes

... language used in a specialized way may be an obstacle to communication;

and in still others, it may add beauty or a depth of new understanding.

Alternative language includes grammatical errors and the use of colloquialisms, metatalk, clichés, euphemisms, slang, profanity, figures of speech, jargon, regionalisms, street language and sexist, racist or heterosexist language.

Cultural Noise

People are emotionally attached to their culture. They can be stereotypically labeled based on their cultural belief. This, often is a barrier to communication as it is a distorted view and do not represent the true situation.

Semantic Noise

It is common to hear someone saying 'I didn't mean what you think', meaning that the receiver read wrong meaning to the sender's message. Feedback from the receiver which did not compliment the intention of the sender shown that the message has been misinterpreted. Psychological reasons like anger, sadness and other emotional outbursts can lead to semantic noise.

Syntactical Error

This comes in form of grammatical mistakes in the use of tenses. Misapplications of tenses often lead to wrong information. Example, where you are expected to use present tense and you applied past tense. This will definitely give wrong message and affects communication.

LANGUAGE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE NIGERIAN MEDIA

English language is the official language in Nigeria. It became the official language through the colonialists who found it convenient to administer the country. Nigeria has over four hundred indigenous languages even though three; Hausa Ibo and Yoruba are also selected by successive governments to transact national business likewise is the Pidgin language. It is instructive to note that Yoruba language was the first indigenous language of mass communication in Nigeria, as the first newspaper Iwe Irohin fun Awon Egba was published in 1859. Meanwhile, there are other publications in other indigenous languages including the Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo in Hausa by New Nigerian newspapers, Al-Bashir and Al- Turari now defunct, Ogene circulated in Eastern Nigeria and so on.

Both the print and electronic media in the country use verbal and non-verbal communication means to reach their audience. It is imperative to state that while some print media outfits try to define their readership through the choice of words use in their publications, the same cannot be said of the electronic media. Radio listeners and television viewers are at the mercy of broadcast stations programs 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. Viewers became confused on what they see on television except in some cases where the visual complement the audio.

The Print Media

The print media consists of daily, weekly and monthly publications including the Guardian, ThisDay, Nigerian Tribune, Punch, Vanguard, Daily Trust, Leadership, Daily Independent, The Pilot and so on.. Weekly including Tell magazine, The News, The Source and so on. Most of the bi/monthly magazines are soft sell Like Celebrity, Ovation, City People and others. In print media, 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 these newspapers and magazines have thrown caution into the winds as they often over-sensationalize their stories with 'complimentary' wild headlines.

It is common to read a headline that has no correlation with the main story. The choice of words and the style of writing are contra-indication to the rules of the language of publication. Newspapers and magazines by their nature use both verbal and non-verbal language to create understanding. Pornographic and obscene pictures are spread across pages of these publications making one to wonder if such publications are fit for children consumption. For example, the The Sun newspapers on weekend are replete with human photographs which the papers, themselves, had passed various comments on their lewdness and indecency.

It is a fact that Nigerians are religious and people attached great emotion to their religion belief, but how often writers and reporters do take this into consideration in their write-ups is a big question. This Day Newspaper reporter, Isioma Daniel incurred the wrath of Nigerian Muslims and non-Muslims through her report on a beauty pageant organized in Abuja that if prophet Muhammed was alive, he would relish the beauty of those ladies that participated in the competition. The aftermath was series of protests by Muslims and the attacks on This Day offices. This is a classic example of language abuse by media practitioners.

Language of transmission

According to the National Broadcasting Commission, the electronic media shall be made accessible and affordable to all Nigerians, be used for the preservation and promotion of the nation's culture and values among others. The radio and television stations in Nigeria can be classified as federal, state and privately owned. Federal Radio has stations in all the states of the federation. The same apply to Federal Television NTA which has stations in all the states. All the federating states also have their radio and television stations. Meanwhile, when broadcasting was deregulated in 1992 with Raypower Radio pioneered private broadcasting. Some of the privately owned radio and television stations include Africa Independent Television AIT, Channels TV, Silverbird Television, MITV and Galaxy TV, Rhythm FM, Cool FM, Inspiration FM and so on.

Most radio and television stations in Nigeria transmit in English language, the nation's official language. Even those owned by the public are not left out of dominance of English language contents. This often hinders understanding of the message. Communication experts have established that understanding of communication content is enhanced through the use of indigenous or mother tongue. In some cases, inappropriate choice of words and bad contextual applications of the language rob the audience of proper understanding of the message and lead to public rage.

According to an online entertainment newspaper, three radio presenters on WAZOBIA FM Kano were arrested and charged to court for using unsavory language on the activities of Immunization Officials in the state which the prosecutor said must have incited Boko Haram sect members to kill nine immunization officers. Media practitioners generally shape the thinking of media consumers hence it is important for practitioners to be conscious of what they say or write. Scannell (1991) again submits that "the communicator must affiliate to the situation of their audience, and align their communicative behaviour with those circumstances. The burden of responsibility is thus on the broadcasters to understand the condition of reception and to express that understanding in language intended to be recognized as oriented to those conditions"

Pertinent questions begging for answer are: what is the language culture of the media? Do the Nigerian media have language culture? Who control what is written or said in the media? What orientation do the Nigerian media have in using language to improve communication? This writer's experience in the media for over fifteen years revealed that control is a paper tiger either in the print or electronic media especially in government-owned.

It is instructive to note that most radio and television stations in Lagos area are without content in Yoruba language which is widely spoken in the area. Raypower FM Lagos has one programme in Yoruba language MINI JOJO, Rhythm FM has none, so are Cool FM, Classic FM, Beat FM, Inspiration FM, TOP FM, City FM, Continental Radio, Brilla FM. The same can be said of major television stations in Lagos state, Channels TV, Silverbird TV, Galaxy Television, TV Continental, AIT, ONTV sparingly have programmes in indigenous languages.

Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) as a regulator

NBC as a regulator has actually not done enough to critically scrutinize the language in the media. The organization has concerned itself with license granting and frequency allocations. Although, it has a code of conduct for broadcast organizations but the enforcement of the document has always been a

suspect. Vulgar and obscene languages are freely used on Nigerian broadcast organizations contrary to section 4.2.2 of the NBC code. Also, some broadcasters freely subscribe to information on the internet without proper verification of the authenticity of the content which in some cases turns out to be false. Even though, this is against the NBC code, the enforcement of compliance has become a suspect as some stations still flout these regulations. Candidly, NBC is not doing enough.

LANGUAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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 “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 find it difficult to write correctly. United Kingdom’s Guardian newspaper cites 2010 English Spelling Society survey which traced mis-spelling and grammatical mistakes among UK children to web-based activities. 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.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important for Nigerian media to employ people who have good grasps of language of communication combined with the ethics of journalism as both the print and broadcast organizations are guilty of misuse and misapplication of their language of communication. Adequate media education is also required for practitioners.

It is recommended that local languages should be used widely by Nigerian media to facilitate quick understanding of communication contents rather than English the lingua franca especially in issues bordering on social integration and development. In Lagos state for example, the likes of Bondfm, Radio Lagos Tiwa ntiwa, and lately Faajifm accommodated more programmes in local languages. Meanwhile, the benefit of using local language to disseminate information cannot be underestimated as recently confirmed in the acceptance rating of Faaji fm and captured through various feedbacks from the public. Various agencies designated for regulating media content and message including the NBC, NPAN, Guild of editors, should live up to their responsibilities. It has been observed that most program presenters do not have a script, this often make them resort to using any words that comes into their memory not minding the correct use of such words and the environment-friendliness of such words, broadcast media gate-keepers should be up to their responsibility by ensuring that no presenter comes on air without having a script as guide.

Language can be effectively used if the sender of information takes into consideration peculiarities of the receivers. Wilson (2006:43) again opines that information originators should consider characteristics of receivers (audience, viewers, readers and listeners) which include their knowledge of the subject matter, their reason for taken part in the communication and other demographic variables for effective and impactful communication.

As it is difficult to control what is posted on social media, it is recommended that the etiquette of using social media should be taught in all secondary schools and higher institutions as part of general studies so that the abuse and misuse of language could be reduced. A recent study of Reppler Service posted on the Internet found out that forty seven percent of a sample of 30,000 of Facebook Users use profane words on their walls.

The government of Nigeria needs to come up with a national language policy that would promote indigenous languages especially the broadcast media by ensuring that substantial number of their programmes are produced in indigenous languages and vetted by experts in the language of transmissi

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