

Ozo-mekuri Ndimele (Ed.)

Language & Culture in Nigeria:

A Festschrift for Okon Essien



Language & Culture in Nigeria

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Table of Contents

Dedication	v
Editorial Note	vi
 Section A: Language in History & Society	
1. Exploiting Information Technology Resources in the Development of Nigerian Languages <i>-Eno-Abasi Urua</i>	1
2. Sociolinguistic Rules for 'Learning to Live Together': Implications for Education for a Culture of Peace <i>-Appolonia U. Okwudishu</i>	13
3. A Study of Warri English as Socialese <i>-Anthony Chukwuemeka Oha</i>	23
4. Linguistic Imperialism & Minority Rights: The Language Question in Calabar Municipal Area <i>-Stella A. Ansa</i>	33
5. Nigerian Languages in Technological Development <i>-E.O. Agbada</i>	39
6. Sociolinguistic & Cultural Significance of Traditional Make-up among the Ibibio <i>-Escor E. Udosen</i>	45
7. The Concept of <i>Four</i> in Igbo Mythology: A Symbolic Inquiry <i>-Chigozie Bright Nnabuihe</i>	51
8. The Unifying Role of English in a Multilingual Nation: The Case of Nigeria <i>-Mahfouz A. Adedimeji</i>	67
9. Assessment of the Implementation of the Language Provision in the National Policy on Education at the Secondary School Level in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja <i>-Yotam Iko Tsumba</i>	77
10. The Havoc of Modernization on African Culture: The Case of Children & Language in Nigeria <i>-Abiodun J. Oluwabamide</i>	85
11. The Kiong Language in the 21 st Century: Problems & Prospects <i>-Magaret M. Okon</i>	91
12. Languages in Contact: The Case of Efik & English <i>-Offiong Ani Offiong</i>	97

13. Naming in Nigeria: An Exploration of the Enterprise among some Ethnic Groups <i>-Okon Essien</i>	105
14. Language, Communication & Enviromental Sustainability <i>-Sarah N. Oden</i>	125
15. Language & Development in Nigeria: A Focus on Akwa Ibom State <i>-Dorothy Motaze</i>	135
16. Language, Literacy & National Development <i>-Dele Orisawayi</i>	139
17. Effective Use of Nigerian Languages for Rural Development: Problems & Solutions <i>-Suzanna J. Umoh</i>	147
18. Reconstructing Non-Obstruents in Tentative Proto Igboïd-Yoruboid-Edoid (tPIYE) <i>-Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche</i>	155
19. Empowering Nigerian Languages of Less Circulation for Education & Development: The Example of Ijo <i>-E.N. Emenanjo.</i>	173
 Section B: Stylistics, Literature & Gender Issues	
20. Retrieving the Pearls of the Past: Towards a Sociology of the Igbo Novel <i>-Chidi T. Maduka</i>	187
21. Linguistic Experimentation in Saro-Wiwa's <i>Sozaboy: Novel in Rotten English</i> <i>-Uzoma Nwachukwu</i>	205
22. A Study of Transliteration & Rhetoric in Select Plays of Sam Ukala <i>-Anthony Chukwuemeka Oha</i>	219
23. The Yoruba Futurist Playwrights <i>-Oyewole Arohunmolase</i>	227
24. Casualty in Selected Igbo Cultural Novels: Perspectives in Igbo Metaphysics <i>-B.E. Nwigwe</i>	231
25. Obu Udeozo's <i>Stimulus and other Poems</i> in Focus: Stylistic Peculiarities <i>-Faith Obiageri Ibhawaegbele</i>	245
26. Core Linguistic Elements in Stylistic Criticism <i>-Ngozi Anyachonkeya</i>	255

27. Shared Multiple Points of View in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Armah's *Fragments* and Soyinka's *The Interpreters* 265
-Chijioke Joseph Ihiegbunam
28. Interacting from the Pulpit: An Illustration with 'The Brilliant Sermon' 273
-M.A. Yunus
29. The Teaching of Literature: Approaches & Methods 285
-Ugochi Happiness Ikonne
30. Ethnic Englishes: Igbo Proverbs & the Themes of Achebe's *Arrow of God* 291
-Osita C. Ezenwanebe
31. Patterns of Characterization in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Armah's *Fragments* and Soyinka's *The Interpreters* 299
-Chijioke Joseph Ihiegbunam
32. Language & Identity: Linguistic Perceptions of Gender & Culture in Karen King Aribisala's *Our Wives and Other Stories* 307
-Austin Uzoma Nwagbara
33. The Feminist Temperament in Traditional West African Folktales: A Study of 'Nolue Emenanjo's *Omalinze – A Book of Igbo Folktales* 313
-Teresa U. Njoku
34. Transcending Patriarchal Subjugation: The Female in J.C. Maduekwe's *Uru Nwa* 325
-Martina Chinelo Onuegbu
35. The Izon Concept of Fate: Towards a Definition of Tragedy 335
-C.B. Agbegha
36. The Stylistics of D.T. Niane's *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* 345
-I. Awokumaka, F.A. Ogunleke & I. Ken-Maduako
37. The Nigerian Woman in the Emerging Nigerian Society: Policy Thrust 351
Tonia Umoren
38. Useful Theoretical Considerations in the Study of Gender Differences in Communication 363
-Stella I. Ekpe
39. Terrorism or Heroism? The Portrait of the Rebel in French Caribbean Novels 371
-Zana Itiunbe Akpagu
40. Appropriateness in Language Behaviour in the Nigerian Novel: An Examination of Speech Events in three Nigerian Novels 389
-Ako Essien Eyo

41. Literature & Society: The Quintessence of Nigeria's Corruption in <i>Once Upon Three Robbers</i> -Patrick Agu Ohiero	397
42. Semantic & Syntactic Analyses of Intensifiers in Achebe's <i>Anthills of the Savannah</i> -Godwin Ogar	405
43. Ejagham Proverbs -Roseline N. Egbe	411
Section C: Linguistics & its Application	
44. Language Education Programme in Nigeria & the Language Disordered Child -Ekaete Evangel Akpan	425
45. A Preliminary Linguistic Analysis of Children's Narrative Discourse: Implications for Language Teaching in a Second Language Situation -Eno G. Nta	433
46. Inhibiting Attitudes & Pedagogical Problems Impeding the Learning of the Use of English -M.E. Obinna	443
47. Le Français à la recontre d'autres langues: à propos des contraintes phonologiques de l'apprentissage du Français au Nigeria -Dele Adegboku	455
48. Concept & Practice of Learning Strategy in Applied Linguistics -Amechi B. Oha	463
49. Language Teaching & the Semantic Implications of Nigerian Personal Names -C. Chidinma Egenegbe	475
50. The State of the Teaching & Learning of English in Nigerian Secondary Schools -P.A. Ezema	481
51. Igbo Official Orthography: A Call for its Modification -Chibiko Ndubisi Okebalama	489
52. Phonological Processes & Orthography in Urhobo -Rose O. Aziza	497
53. Complementary Distribution, Free Variation & Child Phonology -Shirley Yul-Ifode & Ekaete Akpan	505

54. An Application of Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) to Mother-tongue Sequences in the Classroom in Selected Schools in Rivers State <i>-Iknezam Ozuru</i>	517
55. Bilan d'une Décennie au Village Français du Nigeria pour un Meilleur Enseignement et Apprentissage du Français dans un Milieu Plurilingue <i>-O.A. Laditan</i>	527
56. The Problems & Prospects of English Language Teaching & Learning in Nigeria <i>-Maria E. Afangideh & Alice E. Udosen</i>	539
57. Towards an Effective Teaching & Learning of Nigerian Languages in Delta State School System <i>-O.C. Aruya</i>	549
58. Translation & Terminology in Igbo: Problems & Prospects <i>-P.N. Ijioma</i>	553
59. Speech Recognition in Language & Linguistics <i>-Inimbom James Akpan</i>	559
60. Language & Psychology: Any Point of Convergence? <i>-Obad N. Ojukwu</i>	567
61. Towards Leggbo Orthography <i>-Imelda Icheji Lawrence Udoh</i>	575
62. Towards a more Phonemic Efik Orthography <i>-Paulinus Noah</i>	587
63. Towards a Re-visitation of Acculturation Programme (AP) <i>-Lucy Uruije Nwosu-Izuwah</i>	595
64. Orthography, Globalization & IT: A Proposal for Ibibio Text Technology <i>-Eno-Abasi Urua & Dafydd Gibbon</i>	609
Section D: Communication Studies	
65. Grapho-visual Appeals & Meaning Signification in Newsreporting: The Case of University of Ibadan Official Bulletin <i>-Adeyemi Adegoju</i>	621
66. A Study of Year 2003 Newspaper Presidential Campaign Advertisements in Nigeria <i>-Charles Ikechukwu Nnaji</i>	629
67. Styles of Yoruba Newspapers for Development Communication <i>-Abiodun Salawu</i>	635

68. Community Broadcasting: A Strategy for Rescuing the Endangered Languages of Nigeria -Ogu Sunny Enemaku	647
69. Persuasion in the Language of Advertising: A Special Variety of English -F.O. Ibhawaegbele	655
70. Contents & Style of <i>Alaroye</i> News Publications -Abiodun Salawu	661
71. Public Image of Librarians in Nigeria -Chris O. Enyia	671
72. Bibliographic Compilation in Nigerian Languages: Processes & Challenges -Franscisca M. Ikoro	683
73. Advertising in Nigerian Pidgin -Bassey A. Okon	693
74. The Advertising Practitioner in Integrated Marketing Communications -Nwachukwu Faustinus Ginikanwa	713
75. On the Communicative Import of Ngwa Igbo Birth Poetry -Nkechi F. Ukaegbu	719
Section E: Formal Linguistics	
76. The Tone of Ibibio Questions & Statements -Bruce Connell	727
77. On the So-called Vowel Harmony in Edoid Languages -Edosa Victor Omozuwa	739
78. Complex Articulations in Tɛɛ (Tai) -Ogbonna Anyanwu	749
*79. Binariness & Properheadedness in Igbo Prosodic Words: An Optimality Account -Evelyn E. Mbah	755
80. Tone & Vowel Elision in Isoko -E.O. Agbada	763
81. The Phenomenon of Noun Class Systems: The Case of Batonu -Issa O. Sanusi	771
82. Tone as a Governor in Igbo Syntax -B.M. Mbah	787
83. The Realization of Plural in Kana -Sordum Owen Akata	803

84. Verbs of Planting & Harvesting in Igbo: The Ngwa & Obimo Dialects Example <i>-Ogbonna Anyanwu & Modesta I. Iloene</i>	815
85. Negative Polarity in Metta (Utah) <i>-George T. Teke</i>	823
86. Syntax & Semantics of the Clitic: The Case of Igbo <i>-Philip N. Anagbogu</i>	831
87. Verbal Derivation in Agholo-Ogbia <i>-Caroline Mary Isukul</i>	841
88. The Expression of Mood & Modality <i>-P.E. Ejele</i>	851
89. Gender-based Derivatives in Igbo Morphology: Towards an Etymology of the Masculine & the Feminine in Igbo Lexicon <i>-Frances N. Chukwukere</i>	869
90. The Igbo Syllable & Autosegmental Licensing <i>-George Okey Iloene</i>	877
91. Revisiting the Ibibio Tense System <i>-Márcia Santos Duarte de Oliveira</i>	889
92. The Adverbial Ideophone in Serial Verb Constructions: A Case Study of Ibibio <i>-Michael E. Ekere</i>	907
93. Pro-drop in Ibibio Questions <i>-Willie Udo Willie</i>	919
94. Assimilation in Anaang <i>Itoero Michael</i>	929
95. Negation Marking in Igbo <i>-Ozo-mekuri Ndimele</i>	939
Section F: Okon Essien as a Celebrity	
96. From the Classical to the Forensic: Celebrities at Linguistic Signposts <i>-David Eka</i>	959
97. Okon Essien & Nigerian Linguistics: The Ibibio Perspective <i>-Eyo O. Mensah</i>	967
<i>Obed Ojukwu: Tell Essien: A Collection of Poems</i>	977
Appendix: Professor Okon Essien's Curriculum Vitae	991

66. A Study of Year 2003 Newspaper Presidential Campaign Advertisements in Nigeria

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Abstract

This is a survey study of political advertising patronage of the Newspaper Media during the 2003 Presidential election in Nigeria. It is a content – analytic study of the *Guardian*, the *Champion* and the *Vanguard* Newspapers. The results indicate that the *Guardian* received the highest advertising patronage followed by the *Champion* and the *Vanguard* Newspapers in that order. It was also discovered that the negative political advertising is high in Nigeria.

Introduction:

Nigeria began to practice the presidential System of Government in 1979. The year 2003 Presidential Election was the 5th Presidential election since the system was adopted. The earlier ones were held in 1979, 1983 and 1999. Each of the elections was keenly and vigorously contested. However, it should be noted that the effort of 1993 was thwarted by Babangida's annulment of the results of the election, which was believed to have been won by Chief M. K. O. Abiola.

Political advertising is a form of social advertising used to support the candidacy of individuals in election campaigns. Broadly, it is defined as a sponsored communication for the presentation, promotion and exposition of political parties or the candidates gunning for political posts to the electorates often through the mass media.

It is through political advertising that the electorates are exposed to the images, ideologies, ideas or ideals or manifestoes of the party or their political office contenders. Its primary objective is often to win the electorates' goodwill and votes.

Political Advertising includes communications that appear in pamphlets, circulars, fliers, billboards or other signs, bumper stickers or similar forms of written communication. It also includes communication published in newspapers, magazines or other periodicals or communications broadcast by radio or television in return for consideration (Texas Ethics Commission). Balloons, buttons, emery boards, hats, lapel stickers, magnets, pencils, pens, pins, wooden nickels, candy wrappers and similar materials are all often used for political advertising.

This paper, however, is mainly concerned with political advertising in the form of adverts that appear on newspapers. It is not interested in editorials, op-ed pieces, news articles or letters to the editor among others. This is done to ascertain the level of attention given to the Nigerian elites who purchase and/or read newspapers regularly in terms of persuading or luring them to vote for particular candidates during the last presidential election. The results would also be a pointer to media acceptance/ preference among the politicians and their agents. Being that patronage is one of the indices of knowing the "reach" or the quota of the market controlled by the media, the results could as well be used to make comments in that respect.

or the quota of the market controlled by the media, the results could as well be used to make comments in that respect.

Political Advertising in Nigeria

"In Nigeria, Political Advertising was not too common until about 1963 when the Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the defunct Action Group introduced sky-writing and dropping of leaflets / handbills from the skies to inform the voters of the benefit awaiting them if they could vote for him and his party" (Adebisi, 1992).

It is obvious from the above that the art of political advertising was not entirely non-existent in the country before that date but, probably, it was hitherto practised traditionally or on a very little scale. It could not have been otherwise because nationwide or even regional political contests were unknown until about that time. What was known then were community and ethnic political rivalries that were won by military prowess rather than political maneuvers. It was the bid to sell goods, ideas or services to people in dispersed environments that could not be adequately reached by personal contacts that necessitated advertising. Prior to the Awolowo campaign above, writes Nzeribe (1991:3) "all political activities had been limited to rallies, soap-box speeches and where possible, press editorial efforts".

The major media for political advertising campaigns are the press, radio, television and outdoors. In the words of Seymour - ure (1974: 206) "One cannot talk sensibly of a national campaign at all in the absence of mass media.... The national campaign is formed by a continuous interaction between the behaviour of party leaders and managers and that of the mass media".

The press, radio and television are not of very long origin in Nigeria. The history of newspaper industry having started in 1859 when Rev. Henry Townsend founded the *Iwe Iroin Yoruba*, the history of broadcast media began with the establishment of what was then known as the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) in 1952 with the arrival in Nigeria of a British rediffusion company. The story of the founding of television service began in 1959 when the then Western Region established what was called the First Television Station in Africa and named Western Nigeria Television (Duyile, 1983). The recent histories notwithstanding, the media are meeting up with the demands of the time. Advertising agencies now play very significant role in political communication in the country. They create the advertisements the are sold to the people by the media

In 1979, five political parties contested the general elections. The campaign for supremacy was between Alhaji Shehu Shagari - National Party of Nigeria (NPN); Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe - Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP); Chief Obafemi Awolowo- Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN); Mallam Aminu Kano - People's Redemption Party (PRP) and Mr. Tunji Braithwaite of United Nigerian People's Party (UNPP) as Presidential Candidates. Alhaji Shehu Shagari of NPN won the contest. In 1983, the same political parties above recontested the elections with their former respective flag bearers. Alhaji Shehu Shagari of NPN again won the election but with great controversy surrounding the victory. He was overthrown by a military junta led by General Buhari soon after the inauguration

The practice of political advertising during the 1979 and 1983 elections were similar both in tone and magnitude (Nnaji, 1992). The advertisement of the politicians and their parties during those periods involved the use of posters, handbills, party banners, advertising

specialists like caps, hats, T-shirts etc. performing drama or musical troupes, radio jingles and TV advertisements.

In the 1993 general elections, political advertising shifted emphasis to the press. There was a great deal of advertisements on the print media during this period than there had been in the country at any other time. The advertisements on the broadcast and other media were not few either. The advertising campaigns of that period attracted more comments than it used to be and rejuvenated interest in the whole area of political advertising. This condition is not unconnected with the personalities in the arena as at that time - Chief M. K. O. Abiola, the presidential flag bearer of Social Democratic Party (SDP) and his rival Alhaji Bashir Tofa of NRC. Chief M. K. O. Abiola garnered tremendous resources and wealth to actualize his political ambition and so did Tofa. Chief M. K. O. Abiola was the publisher / owner of the National Concord Newspapers and as such was very much acquitted with the awesome power of the media and made optimum use of that knowledge to his advantage. However, the result of that election which he was believed to have won was never to see the light of the day. Political advertising flowered, flourished and towered during that period. Advertising agencies, consultants and quacks alike had a very buoyant business season then. Though there were only two parties, there was a lot of sponsorship from political action committees, clan associations, religious bodies, groups and individuals especially in favour of Chief Abiola having been himself, a philanthropist to needy individuals, group and associations earlier. The main kinds of political advertising normally used by political practitioners and their agencies are: image, issue and negative advertising. Observation reveals that politicians or their agents employed the use of image and issue advertising at the beginning of their campaigns but negative advertising at the end to attack, ruin or injure the chances of their opponent(s). The trend today is changing. There is presently an increasing use of negative political advertising. According to Chang, Park and Shim (1998:2) "In today's political campaign, candidates, either challengers or incumbents, use negative ads from the beginning of a political campaign".

Design And Method:

This is a content - analytic study. Three national newspapers: The *Guardian*, *Champion* and *Vanguard* newspapers were purposively selected for the study. All the selected newspapers are owned by private entrepreneurs as their independent business ventures.

The period covered by the study was February 1st to April 18th 2003, as a result of the short period of time allowed for the presidential campaigns all the editions on the three selected newspapers was studied and coded by the researcher. The variables noted in the coding include page, date, title, size, whether the advert is in colour or black and white, message content and sponsor.

Findings And Discussion

The results showed a total of one hundred and twenty two adverts in the three newspapers during the entire period of the presidential electioneering campaign. This score is quite high as the entire duration of the campaign was very short. The size of the adverts were generally full page and to a large extent in coloured print. The *Guardian* had a total of fifty adverts on its pages during the period. Out of this number Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) had 42 or 84% while All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP)

had mere 2 or 4% and Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJ). 2 or 4% while Justice (JP) had four or 8%. The other political Parties attracted no adverts in the newspaper under study. It should be noted that thirty political parties contested the year 2003 general elections in Nigeria. However, the foremost ones were the ones observed in this study as the results indicated.

The result of the study of *Champion* newspaper indicates that PDP had 18 or 6% of the total of the thirty adverts for the entire presidential electioneering campaign period. ANPP had 7 or 23.33%, MDJ 4 or 13.33% and All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) 1 or 3.33% respectively.

The Vanguard newspapers attracted a total of forty two adverts for the period. The PDP had 30 or 71.43%; ANPP 2 or 4.76%; JP 2 or 4.76%; APGA 2 or 4.76%; MDJ 5 or 11.9% and UNPP 1 or 2.38% respectively.

From the above it is evident that the *Guardian* attracted the highest number of adverts during the electioneering campaign process among the sample. This finding therefore agrees with an earlier one (Egbochukwu 1999) which says that the *Guardian* is the most favoured among all the Nigerian dailies in terms of advertisement patronage. According to him that was so because "most of the advertisers belong to the segment of the market it covers" (P. 156).

The Vanguard was very close to the *Guardian* having attracted just eight adverts less. The study shows that there are a lot of political action committee in Nigeria who exist primarily to support the various presidential candidates and their political parties. These associations are manifested as sponsors of the adverts which bear their names. They are not usually party officials but independent groups. The study revealed that PDP had the greatest number of such associations. ANPP had only two of such groups but PDP had eleven. All the other parties had none as far as our study is concerned.

The PDP Support Committees include:

1. President Obasanjo - Atiku Victory Movement
2. Obasanjo / Atiku Organisation.
3. Obasanjo Solidarity Forum
4. Volunteers for Obasanjo and campaign/ Enlightenment Group
5. The committee for Democracy.
6. Operation Fix the Nation
7. Sigmon: The Mandate for Stability and Continuity
8. Equity union/M. Owolabi Salis Auxliary Campaign Organization
9. V. O. A. UK Chapter
10. Ofo Ndigbo Group
11. The Core North Group

The two political action committees (PACS) working in favour of ANPP are:

1. Ozuruigbo: Igbo and Friends
2. Buhari Support Group

Negative political advertising was substantially manifest in the presidential elections campaign adverts. Specifically, adverts sponsored by the Committee for Democracy in favour of Obasanjo and Atiku were all attacks on Buhari and his party. The MDJ adverts were mainly negative too. On the other hand, the JP adverts were mainly on image and issues.

Conclusion

Political advertising practise and patronage is growing very well in Nigeria. The newspapers reading public are increasingly recognized judging by number and size of the adverts targeted at them in the sample. The buyer's purchasing discriminatory tendencies are evident but a matter of can't help. The buyer maintains his right to choose except when there is no alternative. The lead of *Guardian* in attracting adverting patronage is noteworthy and enviable. However, the gap between the members of the sample is not really wide. What is rather very wide is the range of patronage. The increasing wave of indulgence in negative political or attack advertising and the corresponding neglect of image or issue advertising is worrisome and needs to be checked. If this is not done, a time will come when presidential flag bearers and their supporters will abandon the real issues completely and engage solely in attacks and counter attacks.

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