

NEW FINDINGS

IN THE STUDY OF

NIGERIAN LANGUAGES & LITERATURES

A festschrift in honour of **QLÁDÉLÉ AWÓBÙLÚYÌ**



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ABSTRACT

As soon as the colonial administration, vis-à-vis Christianity was introduced in most African nations, use of indigenous languages of their host nations was encouraged in achieving the set objectives of the colonial masters/missionaries. They were aware of the fact that the success or failure in reaching their vast audience would depend on the appropriateness of the choice of language.

The idea of indigenous newspaper production in Nigeria was first initiated in 1859 by an English Missionary, Reverend Henry Townsend. The first newspaper was the Yoruba Language Newspaper, ÌWÉ ÌRÒHÌN FÚN ÀWON ARÁ ÈGBÁ ÀTI YORÙBÁ (Newspaper for the Ègbá People and the Yorùbá) located in Ake, Abeokuta. Although the paper was established perfunctorily for educational and proselytizing purposes, it could hardly avoid dabbling into the politics of the sustaining environment, given especially Townsend's own personality and ideal.

In view of this, this paper argues that Yoruba indigenous language is a vibrant tool in Nigerian mass media from the era of colonial rule to the present day, using Development Media Theory as our framework. Also, its impact through the mass media in achieving a well-informed society and in inculcating the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society is strongly highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

According to Arohunmolase (1987:3), Yoruba language was first reduced to writing in 1819 by a British Diplomat in Ghana, Thomas Edward Bowdich in his book titled *Mission to Ashantee*. He did a compilation of a few African Languages among of which he worked on Yoruba numerals from 1-10.

Since this period, concerted efforts had been made by British scholars and missionaries like Hannah Kilham (1828), Clapperton (1820), John Raban (1830 and 1831), Edwin Norris (1841), Ajayi Crowther (1843 and 1852), C.A. Gollmer (1844), Henry Venn (1848), Lepsius (1854), Sigismund W. Koelle (1854), CMS (1875) and a host of others (see Awóniyi, 1978:28-42 and 2008:11-39). The

objective of these individuals and groups was to work out an acceptable orthography for Yoruba language.

As earlier mentioned, the remarkable event of it all was the introduction of the first indigenous newspaper in Nigeria, written in Yoruba language in 1859 and published by Reverend Henry Townsend. This recorded a landmark achievement in Nigerian communication industry after which other numerous newspapers followed.

This is evident in Ogunsina (2001:193-194) as tabulated below:

	<i>Iwe Iroyin</i>	<i>Odún</i> <i>bere</i>	<i>tó Oloòtú rẹ</i>
1.	Iwe Iroyin fun awon Egba ati	1859	Henry Townsend
2.	Yoruba		
3.	Iwe Iroyin Eko	1888	A.M. Thomas
4.	Iwe Eko	1891	Rev. J. Vernal
	In Leisure Hours/Nigba ti owo ba	1910	
5.	dile	1922	C.M.S.
6.	Eko Akete	1923	Adeoye Deniga
7.	Eleti ofe	1924	E.A. Akintan
8.	The Yoruba News	1925	D.A. Obasa
9.	Èkó Òsòòsè	1926	T.H. Jackson
10.	Eko Igbehin	1928	E.M. Awobiyi
11.	Akede Eko	1934	I.B. Thomas
12.	Ijebu Weekly News	1935	J.A. Olusola
13.	Osumare Egba	1941	
14.	Egbaland Echo	1945	
15.	Iroyin Yoruba	1947	
16.	The Ijebu Weekly Echo	1952	J. Odufuwa
	Irawo Obokun		

Ogunsina concludes that it was realized early enough by the Yoruba people that Newspaper is a veritable tool for public enlightenment/ education, hence they made good use of it for the development of their race. He puts it thus:

Ó tètè yé àwon omo Yorùbá pé ohun èlò pàtàkì fún àsoyè, àgbóyè àti àwíyè òrò tó n lo láwùjo ni iwe iroyin jé.

Wón sì lò ó lópòlopò fún isítí, isíníyè, imúdúró àti imúdàgbàsókè iran Yorùbá. (pp. 193)

(It was realized early enough by the Yoruba that newspaper is a veritable tool meant to explain and

understand the issues going on in the society. Hence it was adequately utilized for enlightenment, sustenance and development of the Yoruba race).

Apart from the print media, Yoruba Language has also played a vital role in the development of the electronic media in Nigeria. This is traceable to the advent of Television Station in Nigeria.

The first television broadcasting was established in Nigeria by the then Western Nigerian Government in Ibadan and was commissioned by the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo in 1959. The station was known as the Western Nigerian Television (WNTV), now the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA, Ibadan). Thus, it became the first television station in Nigeria and indeed Africa as a whole.

Considering the location of this television station, the importance of the use of Yoruba language as a major medium of transmission could not be over-emphasised. Till today, every electronic media house (Radio and Television) in the South West of Nigeria has given prominence to Yoruba Language cum Yoruba Programmes in their daily transmission; hence, there is better understanding of governmental programmes among the people at the grassroot level which also enhances people's participation in the developmental programmes. Therefore, it is crystal clear that Yoruba Language has been in the fore-front of the mass communication process among other indigenous languages in Nigeria since 1959.

THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATION

The etymology of communication is traceable to two Latin words. Communication can be said to have been derived from 'communis' meaning 'common'. It can also be said to have come from the Latin 'communico' meaning 'share'.

'Sharing' according to Cherry (1978:2):

does not only mean simply passing something, some sign, from one person to another; it implies also that this sign is mutually accepted, recognized and held in common ownership or use by each person (or thing).

Communication generally is any information sharing activity. It is an individual and collective activity embracing all transmission and sharing of ideas, fact and data. Whichever way one looks at it, communication is the means or the systems of exchange of ideas, attitudes, opinions, feelings, information and so on within a person (intra-personal) and among persons (inter-personal) and collectivities (mass). What this implies according to Oloyede (1990:27) is that without communication, the sharing of thoughts, opinions, ideas, feelings, attitudes, information and so on within, between and among human beings will be impossible, for communication is the process of transmitting ideas, values, attitudes and information from an identified source to an identified audience which shares the same experience, problems and goals with the source.

In the same vein, Adesanoye (1990:61) observes that communication should be viewed in its most basic sense as a process eminently concerned with the act of sharing and participation by everybody concerned. This also means that communication involves any process where a community of human beings shares experiences, ideas, information and meanings. By means of communication, we share ideas and information, live in infinitely varied cultures and extend knowledge and imagination, far beyond the scope of personal experience. Ideas and information are usually shared to achieve a purpose or an outcome.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Development Media Theory, which is an offshoot of Normative Theory. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) propounded four types of mass communication theories: normative theory, social scientific theory, working theory and commonsense theory. They are commonly referred to as "the four theories of the press".

Normative theory seeks to locate media structure and performance within the milieu in which it operates. It helps to explain the ways in which societal communication rules impinge on mass media structure, conventions and performance, and highlights the consequences of non-convergence between societal communication principles and mass communication principles. (Folarin 1998: 19). Four (sub) theories emanated from the Normative theory as at the time Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) wrote their book. These are the Authoritarian, Libertarian (or Free Press), Soviet-communist, and Social Responsibility theories. However, McQuail (1983) as cited in Folarin (1998), has drawn attention to two other emergent normative theories, namely Democratic Participant Media Theory and Development Media Theory. This brings the number of normative theories recognized in the literature to six.

DEVELOPMENT MEDIA THEORY

This theory seeks to explain the normative behaviour of the press in countries that are conventionally classified together as "developing countries" or "third world countries". The theory assumes that there are certain common circumstances or characteristics of developing countries that make it difficult to apply other normative theories to the press. These include: absence or inadequate supply of requisite communication infrastructure, relatively limited supply of requisite professional skills, relative lack of cultural production resources, relatively limited availability of media-literate audiences, and dependence on the developed world for technology, skills and cultural products.

This theory opines that even these "legitimizing circumstances" or "common characteristics" vary greatly between one developing country and another, they tend to be more homogeneous in one respect: their primary aim in media use is, at least professedly, development. They also tend to give priority to theories that emphasize grassroots participation.

According to the proponent of the theory, McQuail (1983:121), the major tenets of development media theory are as follows:

- Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.
- Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society.
- Media should give priority in their content to the national culture and language(s).
- Media should give priority in news and information to link with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally or politically.
- Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedoms in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.
- In the interest of development ends the state has a right to intervene in, or restrict, media operation; and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified.

However, Folarin (1998: 32-33) fine-tunes the expression of McQuail's (1983) tenets, so as to make them more useful (by expressing them in clearer developmental terms) and at the same time in terms acceptable to all conscientious journalists, as working guidelines. He, therefore, suggests a fine-tuning of the tenets of Development Media Theory as follows:

- (i) Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy (or in line with national ideology), without prejudice to their traditional functions of information, education and entertainment.
- (ii) Media should also accept and helping in carrying out the special development tasks of national integration, socio-economic modernization, promotion of literacy, and cultural creativity.
- (iii)(a) "National" media should give priority in their content to the national macroculture in so far as this can be abstracted from the national milieu, then to regional cultures and then to local cultures, all in a descending order of priority.
- (b) "Regional" media are of course normally expected to accord priority to regional cultures (and languages), while
- (c) "Local" media give priority to local culture(s) and language(s).
- (iv) Media should carefully identify, and give due attention in their foreign news to link with other countries with similar sociocultural orientations and/or political and economic aspirations.
- (v) In order to safeguard the ideals of press freedom, journalists and other media workers should at all times faithfully fulfil their obligations and stoutly defend their rights in the course of their information gathering and disseminating tasks.
- (vi) The state with its systems has a duty to see to it that media or journalists presumed to have contravened any national law(s) in the course of their

information gathering and disseminating tasks can conveniently face prosecution, expecting a fair and speedy trial.

In a nutshell, Development Media Theory, as modified by Folarin (1998) is found most appropriate for this study, because it accords priority to the regional and local languages in disseminating information to the grassroots, thereby leading to overall development of the society.

THE FUNCTIONS AND AESTHETICS OF THE MASS MEDIA IN NIGERIA

The best way to appreciate the role that mass media play in our society would be to imagine what it would be like if, all of a sudden, the whole system never existed. Obviously, the mass media are a pervasive part of our life. We need to realize that different media have different primary uses. Mass media function among other things, to educate, inform, and entertain. They have also been perceived to persuade, assist in the transmission of cultures, and as a useful force in mobilizing people for any cause.

Dominic (1987) cited in Adeosun (2002:100-101), describes mass media functions as surveillance, interpretation, linkage, transmission of values and entertainment. The roles which the media perform in the modern society are numerous. It is the traditional functions of the media to inform, educate and entertain society and to help sell goods and services.

Beyond these traditional duties however, the media, according to Oloyede (1990:60-69) perform sundry other equally important and indispensable roles in the service of the modern society such as: informational role, educational role, entertainment role, commercial function, cultural role, a bearer of danger signals, a crusader for social justice and an indispensable instrument of governance.

Moreover, language is vital to communication and, of course, to journalism. Without language in any form, there can be no communication of whatever nature. The use of language in any particular way can evoke emotions of diverse kinds ranging from love, joy, hope, peace, fear, hatred, anger, sadness and the likes. Therefore, we say language has power. Language is deliberately used in a particular way to convey a particular idea or to evoke a particular emotion. It is with this understanding, presumably, that Woods (2001) quoted in Salawu (2003:9-10), points out that excellent journalism starts with an understanding that language has power. He explains thus:

Language is the brick and mortar of the profession, transmitting in a single word, phrase, or juxtaposed facts countless intended and unintended messages to readers, listeners and viewers.

The mass media have become one of the principal means through which we gain access to a large part of our information about the world, as well as to much of our entertainment. The language used by the media to represent particular social and political groups, and to describe newsworthy events, tends to provide the dominant ways available for us to talk about those groups and events (see Linda, T. et. al. (1999:50).

Therefore, to carry out the traditional institutional functions of educating, informing and entertaining, and the social functions of surveillance, interpretation and cultural transmission, the mass media – the print and the electronic media use language as a means of reaching their vast audience. However, a well-planned, purposeful mass media message effectively transmitted to the audience, if the language does not serve as an effective conveyor-belt. Thus, Okenwa (1993:67) submits that language, in the business of mass communication is to be seen as a factor that should convey the purpose of the communicator.

YORUBA INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AS A VIBRANT TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Okwori (1994:25) sees alternative means of communication (exemplified in indigenous communication) as the viable means to use in a country like Nigeria which has the larger part of its population in the rural areas. Indigenous communication is seen as the solution to the problems of the modern systems of communication because they are consistent with the people's tradition in developing regions. Information or messages communicated through the use of traditional forms of communication are seen to be more credible than those communicated through modern mass media of communication because they are characterized by emotions, feelings, values and social experiences shared by members of a community.

Wang (1982) cited in Mundy and Compton (1995:20), defines indigenous communication as:

The communication system which existed before the arrival of mass media and formally organized bureaucratic system and is still existing today.

The above definition attests to the fact that indigenous communication has been in existence even before the advent of mass communication. Indigenous has seen from the above definition is regarded as an interpersonal medium, where the man is spoken to in his own language, in his idiom. It would also deal with problems of direct relevance to his situation.

Indigenous communication has value in its own right. It is an important aspect of culture and is the means, by which a culture is preserved, handed down, responds or adapts to new situations. Indigenous languages have high credibility because they are familiar to the people and are controlled locally. Audience throughout the world often treat with skepticism or hostility, messages transmitted through the externally controlled mass media. This was better understood by the colonial administrators and the white missionaries when they first set their feet on the soil of Africa. Their aims were achieved in earnest as they were able to understand and communicate with the people in the language they understood best. This is further explained when Oyelaran (1982:304) affirms that:

it is true that a child, or anybody for that matter would find learning relatively easy if conducted in the language he knows best.

In the same vein, Oyetade (1990:102) observes that just as in many other African nations, a larger proportion of the nation is kept perpetually in the dark because contemporary Nigerian life is dominated by the English language. The havoc this wreaks on the Nation is so enormous that the only potent avenue for public enlightenment is the mass media and it is through the mass media that the activities of the government can be transmitted to the people at the grassroot. And in this milieu, more programmes and discussions are done in English Language than in the indigenous languages. For instance, in recent times, the Economic Reforms policy embarked upon by the Obasanjo led administration were discussed on the media by the Nigerian elite, while the majority who are mostly illiterate could not make their views known, not so much for lack of understanding of these issues, but because of the language of discussion. This further alienates the illiterates, who constitute the majority of the Nigerian population. Yet in talking of a well-informed society and in inculcating the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society, everybody has to be carried along, because it is an issue that affects all and sundry.

Most importantly, indigenous channels offer opportunities for participation by local people in development efforts. They allow local people to communicate among themselves and with development professionals and decision makers. Local people can retain control over indigenous media more easily than over technologically intensive media.

Indigenous communication according to Tosanwumi and Ekwuazi (1994:70), is culture-based. Since the ultimate purpose of communication is the development of the individual, the community and the society at large, how the message will get to everybody must be considered. The only way this is possible is for the message to be relayed through the medium that reaches the remotest areas of the society. Owens-Ibie (1993) also supports this view by saying that indigenous languages have played and are still playing a vital part in the communication system. He argues further that they still constitute useful avenues through which a huge number of people could be reached. He says:

Since they are an integral part of the society in which they are found, people easily identified with the messages that are passed through them. This would make an information passed to be adequately utilized, thereby leading to development.

To achieve development therefore, Andah (1982:4) says the culture of the people has to be taken into consideration and these aspects of culture are embedded in indigenous languages as recognized among the major tenets of Development Media Theory employed for this study.

Moreover, Oyetade (1990:104) observes that the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society and the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around can be effectively achieved through our indigenous languages. This is further corroborated when Fafunwa (1982:295) strongly advocated that mother-tongue should be used as medium of instruction, saying:

It is universally accepted (except in most African countries) that a child learns best in his mother-tongue and that the mother-tongue is as natural to him as mother's milk.

Fafunwa's position is clearly stated on the effectiveness of mother-tongue as a medium through which knowledge is imparted. Through the transmission of information from one person to another, communication brings about knowledge which is important in development. However, the kind of communication used in most development processes does not bring about development. What mainly exists is a one-way flow of information from the government or policy makers to the people.

Therefore, indigenous language as the most effective way of communication has value in reaching the people at the grassroot level, thereby enhancing the chances of true collegial participation by local people in any government programme.

Presently, the impact of Yoruba language in Mass Communication media in Nigeria is still so great that apart, from its usage in almost all electronic media in the South West, there is a reasonable number of electronic media in the Eastern and Northern parts of Nigeria where some request programmes are presented in Yoruba Language. There is no gainsaying the fact that Yoruba Language is still in the fore-front in Nigerian Communication Industry since its inception in 1859, when the first indigenous newspaper was established. In Nigeria today, the Yoruba indigenous newspaper is flourishing along side the English-medium newspapers and magazines, as we have the likes of; *Aláròyè*, *Ajorò*, *Akèdè Àgbáyé*, *Ìròyìn Yorùbá* and a host of others. Also, in the electronic media, virtually all Radio and Television stations in South-west of Nigeria have given prominence to Yoruba language in their programmes, thereby passing information across to the grassroot people who are predominantly illiterates.

This recent development has tremendously increased the awareness of the rural people which make their information seeking habit improved. The role played by 'Alaroye' Newspaper in this respect could not be undermined. It enjoys almost the same patronage with any popular Newspaper written in English language, hence there is a tremendous improvement in the information seeking habit of the people at the grassroot level, thereby enhancing their participation in governmental programmes.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have been able to establish the role played by the Yoruba language via communication industry in Nigeria since 1859, when the first indigenous newspaper was established. The white missionaries and the colonial masters identified the importance of a nation's indigenous language toward a meaningful development, hence, it was maximally utilized to achieve their purpose.

Also, it was identified that the process of reducing Yoruba language to writing was first accomplished by Edward Bowdich in 1819 in his book *Mission to Ashantee*. And since this period, Yoruba language has been in the fore-front in the areas of teaching and communication.

There is no doubt that ÌWÉ ÌRÒHÌN FÚN ÀWON ARÁ ÈGBÁ ÀTÌ YORÚBÁ provided the impetus for the subsequent flowering of printed news in the Southern Niger protectorate. Yet, of about fifteen to sixteen newspapers that had been born by the turn of the century and following after ÌWÉ ÌRÒHÌN only two were indigenous from other parts of the country, Unwana Efik (Light of the Efiks) and Obukpong Efik (soul of the Efiks), both founded in the year 1885. (see Coker, 1968:116).

However, to keep this trend moving, the government at all levels should make a legislation that would give recognition to the use of indigenous languages in official and decisive matters (where necessary), if genuine development is desired. Also, effort should be intensified by the mass media in giving prominence to indigenous languages in their programmes.

In conclusion, there should be an attitudinal change on the part of the generality of the people. Speaking or using our mother-tongue should not be seen in derogatory terms, rather it should be enhanced, so that it would not experience total extinction.

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