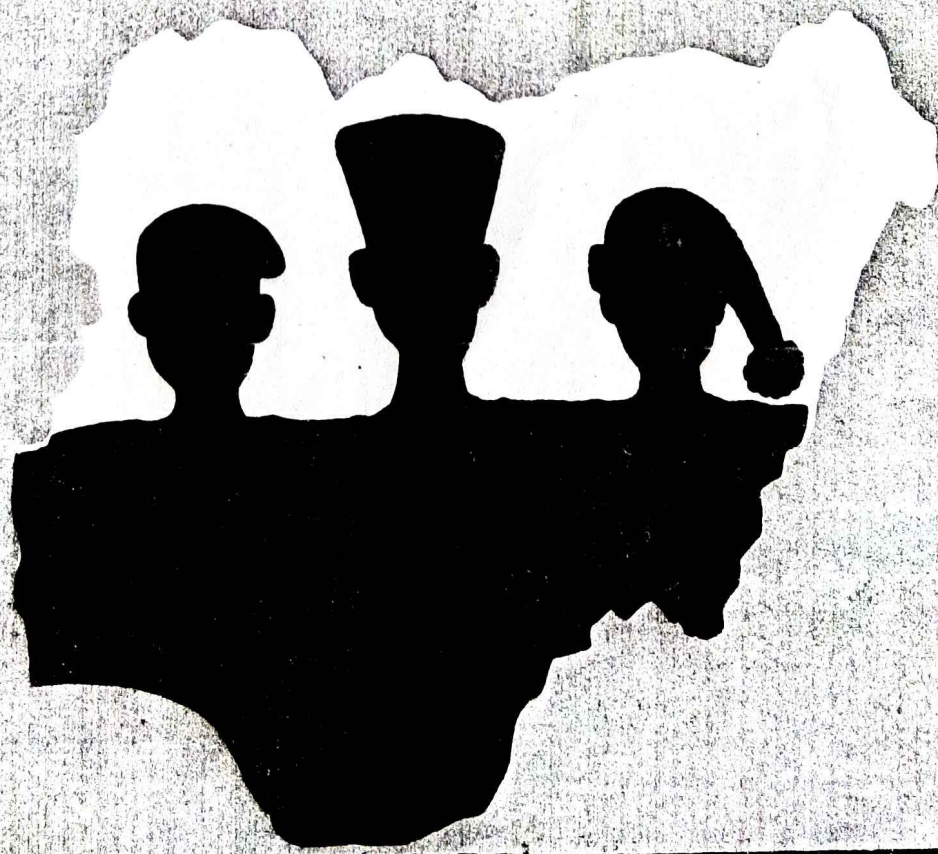


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**NIGERIAN LANGUAGES FOR
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AND UNITY**



Edited by
Oyewole Arohunmolase

Nigerian Languages for National Development and Unity

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20 Problems Confronting the Effective Use of Nigerian Languages as Broadcast Languages

Nnaji Chales Ikechukwu

Introduction

The broadcasting industry is dominating the lives of people everywhere. The impact of the industry on the lives of people in the developed countries is multivariant and capricious. In the developing countries, the nature of the impacts has not been really determined. Advertising on the media indeed has tremendous impacts. It is known to control consumption and electoral patterns: fashion tastes, good and bad behaviours. Currently, the American President, Bill Clinton and the tobacco barons in U.S.A are on the war path over the tendency to control the advertisement of tobacco because of its impact on the youth.

In Nigeria, it is the radio rather than the television that has the dominant impact. Television ownership is restricted and limited to people living in the urban and semi-urban areas of the nation. High cost of television sets and lack of electricity are among the factors responsible for the restriction in the ownership of television sets. According to Mytton (1983:121):

"Television viewing will continue to be restricted throughout Nigeria by the high cost of sets, the difficulty of obtaining good, inexpensive maintenance, the

underdevelopment of mains electricity supplied (power failure are frequent occurrences), and the insufficient number of transmitters."

A Family size 17" black and white television costs between seven and fifteen thousand naira for unpopular and new brands; and between ten and twenty thousand for the renowned brands. The coloured television sets cost fortune. A fourteen-inch coloured television set costs between twelve and twenty thousand naira while bigger sizes range between eighteen and thirty thousand naira. A fresh university graduate would have to save his whole salary for about three years to have thirty thousand naira. The state of the economy and the income of most Nigerians would not permit them to own television sets: black and white or coloured.

Radio ownership is relatively widespread. This is in part due to the advent of transistorised radios and the fact that most of them use ordinary dry cell. The situation enables people in remote villages to own radios as the prices are not entirely unreasonable. Also, the adaptation of radio to local milieu is one other factor for its wide usage. Programmes of local interest on cultural and sporting events; local history, folklore, traditional education and music that are presented on both radio and television are listeners and viewers delight.

Radio service in Nigeria runs in general from about five o'clock in the morning to midnight, while television programmes run between late afternoon to midnight too. It is very obvious therefore that more people have opportunity to listen to the radio, if they wish, at one time or the other within a day's broadcasting time. The radio service equally has more "prime times" than televisions. Because radio stations run their programmes for longer periods than television stations, they have more opportunities to cater for the interests of a wider audience. It is possible to have children, mothers, young husbands, spinsters or language teaching programmes on radio often due to the time available.

In most parts of Africa, radio is discovered to be more effective in social or mass mobilisation because of its greater reach. It has

been used in many countries with good results and that has led the government of most countries to exercise monopoly over the control of the broadcast media. In Nigeria, for instance, all radio stations are owned by the government until very recently (1995) when some private stations were licensed to operate, for example Ray Power 100 in Lagos and Minaj Systems Radio, Obosi, Anambra State. The private radio stations are only on FM band. FM band has a limited coverage. The Federal Government monopolises SW band and allows states to run radio stations on MW bands only.

With the above policy, the Federal government has greatly reduced the audience of a state or private radio station. The policy, though essentially political has linguistic implications. The audience of most state and private radio stations are often linguistically homogenous. If they do not speak and understand the same language, they share many cultural or political ties. It is therefore possible to use a common Nigerian language or a group of them to broadcast most of the programme schedules in such areas. The situation makes languages selection less cumbersome than it is with the national stations. The national stations find it troublesome selecting indigenous languages to use for their broadcasts. It is only by political fiat that Hausa, languages are used in making broadcasts on national stations. Nonetheless they are not meaningfully used in the station.

Now, despite the fact that the magnitude of the problem has been reduced in the radio services of the state and private radio stations, we still see that the indigenous Nigerian languages are not maximally used in radio broadcasting in the country. Generally, the state and private radio stations do not allocate up to fifth of their broadcasting time to the language of the area they cover. Nevertheless, the managers of the stations would readily accept that they reach more people in the local languages and we would not doubt them. It is necessary therefore, to find out and articulately address the factors that are responsible for their not allocating reasonable percentage of their air time to broadcasts in the local languages.

The Problem Confronting the Effective Use of Nigerian Languages as Broadcast Languages

Except Ivory Coast, other African countries do not broadcast in all their languages. Benin broadcasts in eleven languages. The broadcast languages in Cameroun are thirteen. Burkina Fasso has forty-nine indigenous languages (Ugboajah, 1987:195). Nigerian language situation is more complex than those of most other African countries. With over four hundred indigenous languages only three-Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are regarded as main Nigerian languages and used for broadcast in the national station but not for network services. However, the major factors hindering the optimal use of Nigerian indigenous languages in radio and television broadcasting could be discussed under the following headings: finance, equipment, staff and environment.

(i) **Finance:** In the developed countries of Europe, America, Asia and in some developing countries, mass media institutions are self-sustaining. This is irrespective of whether or not they are private or public institutions. In Nigeria, the situation is different. No mass media institution like radio or television sustains itself. The radio and television institutions depend on the finances of the government or that of interest groups or individuals. The problem is that of poor finance and the complications that arise from external sponsorship. In the first place, if the radio and television stations are self-sustaining, they could have a free hand to run their programmes according to the standards and ethics of the profession. Poor finance makes it possible for the institution to acquire equipment, hire personnel, sponsor or buy ready-made programmes and pay overhead cost as and when due, among other things.

Communication industries are capital intensive and cannot be effectively run in a backward economy with public funds.

(ii) **Equipment:** This problem relates and derives from the former.

Procuring and maintaining broadcast equipment need huge initial and recurrent capital outlay. The equipment are so many and rather expensive. The major equipment needed for a radio station include studio, control room, recording channel, switch room, amplifiers, studio controllers, filters, reverberation equipment, transfer equipment, telephone, microphones, complete Mobile or outside Broadcast units (so-called OB Van), disc and tapes, etc.

The television house on the other hands, requires transmission monitor(s), control panel, vision mixer, consoles, cameras, headphones, microphones, lighting devices, tape recorders and mobile unit (OB Van) among others.

The problem here in the case of Nigeria is complicated by depreciating economy and low advertising income. In addition, electronic equipment used for broadcasting become obsolete and require change within a very short time. Lack of equipment hampers the coverage of events in the rural areas. For many events in the villages to be reported on radio, there should be vehicles, tape-recorders and microphones and mobile staff for the job. For the television, there should also be vehicles, video cameras and microphones among other things. For on-the- sport report, there is need for outside broadcast (OB) Van for both radio and television service coverage.

Telephone is another important equipment that is generally lacking in most of our broadcast stations. It is needed for information reception, sourcing, dissemination and verification of sources. A broadcasting station should have several telephone lines and always in good working condition.

(iii) **Staff:** Human resources of our communication industry in Nigeria is still at its low ebb. The industry has no doubt produced veterans, people who risked their lives to promote the course of journalism especially during the colonial era and soon after independence. Right from those days, we have continued to have notable newsmen who were not necessarily trained in the profession but who nevertheless made names due to their industry and assiduity.

Previously, we lacked institutions for training journalists. We now have many and the impact of their efforts is noticeable in the variety and qualities of their news writing. What we still lack according to Mytton (1983:125)

"... is determined, energetic and independent minded newsmen. Few journalists ever cover stories that require patience, time and money."

Similar observations have been made by Akinfeleye (1982) and Mogekwu (1987).

Besides the lack of investigative and daring journalists, we also lack journalists who can champion the course of development of our languages. Apart from a few native language graduates that are grudgingly recruited, most of the journalists in our broadcast media lack basic skills in our indigenous languages or in mass communication. In the broadcast media of the Igbo speaking States of Eastern Nigeria, efforts are made to keep to one language at a time. Hardly does a continuity announcer speak two languages in a programme like translating what he says in English into Igbo or vice versa. This is despite Mogekwu's (1987:83) observation that:

"The journalist, by training, should be well grounded in the history of the people, their language, the components of the social system, how these components function and relate to one another, their psychology and general world view."

To worsen the situation, very few hours are allocated to the indigenous language programme with little or no changes from year to year. The previous situation makes it difficult for those who do not understand English to follow or appreciate the programmes. This is largely responsible for people leaving their radio or television on all the time awaiting chance, or so it looks, to look on the programme they would understand.

Worse still, many of those doing the job are not enthusiastic about it. They do not do it with the interest and the determination to break new grounds through inventing new programmes or

creatively using the existing ones. Most of them do not see anything wrong in adapting foreign programmes wholly for their audience without modification.

(iv) **The Environment:** The greatest environmental problem of the broadcast media in Nigeria, is its dependence on government. In practice, public radio and television stations in the country are arms of the ministry of information. The stations are greatly controlled by the ministry. In that instance therefore, the ministry must approve the quarterly programmes schedules of the stations before they are used. This practice puts a lot of restraint on the programme planners. The interference is largely responsible for the media attending to the wishes of the minority ordinary citizens. As Ibrahim (1987:114) notes:

"Nigerian media practitioners - both print and electronic, have always been accused of concentrating their coverage and programming on the urban dwellers."

The urge to control the media makes the government underrate the efficacy of using the media to achieve laudable programmes in social diffusion and manipulations through creative and entertaining programmes.

Another peculiar environmental problem is that most of our media audience are passive, non participatory and non- contributory. Our media content and output would have been greatly improved if our audience is articulate. Furthermore, the mass media in Nigeria are generally propaganda outfits or propagators of falsehood and this affects their credibility. Another problem arises from conflicting and confusing religious interpretations and understanding of media messages. Some religious groups condemn listening to the medium to propagate their doctrines and yet others sponsor programmes on the media.

Suggestions for Improvement

- (i) Communication outfit should necessarily be preceded by a thorough investigation of how to fund and sustain the outfit for many years before advertising revenue begins to meaningfully flow in. Launching communication industries without adequate provision for their sustenance is the major cause of high rate of mortality in the industry.
- (ii) It is high time government began to use public revenue for the purposes they are meant. To that end, they should hands-off ownership and control of the broadcast media as they have done on the print media and allow the law of natural selection and free market conditions to select the media that should survive.
- (iii) The wave of appointing only people known to be members of the management is sacrificing excellency on the altar of mediocrity. There are many sound mass communication graduates of various levels and even those who are gifted but trained in other areas. Such people should be tested and hired. It is from such sound products that we will have creative programmes. We are desirous of creative inputs to our broadcasting stations.
- (iv) If we are serious about the ineffective use and short time allocation to our local languages in radio and television stations in our society, we should speak out as a body and make our feelings known to all and sundry. The various language associations like the Society for promoting Igbo Language and Culture, and Egbe Akomolede Yoruba should make their views known to various media stations. In addition, they should come out with something concrete for the stations like offering part time service to them, sponsoring and producing educational and entertainment programmes for the stations, sponsoring guest artists and recommending resource persons to their stations or providing such services through their associations.

- (v) The Language associations should sponsor a workshop for their different language broadcasters to acquaint them with the recent developments in the languages, and thus publicise the authorised metalanguage through their adaptation and use in everyday translation of news and current affairs reports. By so doing, the metalanguage would be taken to the village and would be known to all.
- (vi) Ours is a vast land. Our nation is large and so are our states and even local governments. This makes it difficult for our journalists to cover the remote areas and still meet deadlines. There is therefore need for outside Broadcasting (OB) vans for radio and television stations so that when roads are passable, events and incidents in the remote areas could be covered and reported timely.
- (vii) The management of our communication industries should consider encouraging investigation journalism and provide resource for same. It is worth the risk involved in doing so for credibility and increased audience.
- (viii) A course in Nigerian language and culture should be incorporated as an ancillary course in the course content of mass communication programme for training our future journalists and broadcasters. This will acquaint them with the important elements of the culture of the people.

Conclusion

The problem we have raised and discussed has a far reaching implication for the newly founded Association of Nigeria Languages Teachers (ANLAT). As a new association, it would have publicity and credibility problems but if she delved into this subject with commitment, she will soon be known and be making outstanding contributions to the society and the history of the broadcast industry in Nigeria.

We owe it a duty to develop Nigerian languages into virile broadcast languages.

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