Research Article

Media language in Nigeria and Africa: a unique blend of culture, context, and connection

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Abstract:

This article provides a linguistic analysis of the media landscape in Africa, with a specific focus on Nigeria, a West African nation. The primary objective of the study is to explore the linguistic dynamics of Africa, a continent characterized by remarkable linguistic diversity, encompassing numerous languages and dialects. The research further investigates how this multilingual context shapes the functioning of African media,

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for which language serves as a fundamental operational tool. By drawing on examples from prominent media organizations, such as Nigeria's Wazobia FM, the study highlights key media practices across the continent. Additionally, it examines the role of Pidgin English in media operations and its reception among audiences.

The analysis extends to extralinguistic factors, including nonverbal communication and digital language, assessing their influence on media practices in Africa. The study also considers the impact of international media entities, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), on African media frameworks. In its conclusion, the article offers insights into the challenges facing the future of African media from a linguistic perspective and proposes recommendations to address the issues identified. Through this comprehensive exploration, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between language, media, and society in the African context.

Keywords: media, language, Nigeria, Africa, multilingual, linguistics

Introduction

According to Fowler (1991) media language refers to the established conventions and communication styles used to create meaning in media. It incorporates both linguistic components, like words and sentence structure, and non-linguistic elements, such as visuals, audio, and layout, all functioning within particular social and ideological contexts. Media language functions as a symbolic system of communication, relying on codes and conventions to convey messages. It encompasses the creation of meaning within media content as well as how audiences interpret these meanings, shaped by cultural, political, and ideological influences (Hall,

1997). Media language in Africa, especially Nigeria, is an interesting dynamic of cultural values, linguistic variation and contemporary media. On a continent with thousands of languages and dialects, the media has had to develop a language that is widely understood but that still reflects the peculiarities of local circumstances. An insight into the evolution of media language in Nigeria and in Africa helps to align with the core values and expressions of the African language, one that can only be identified by the African choice of words, idioms, proverbs and reflections embedded in every Nigerian language.

1. The Multilingual Landscape

Africa's multilingualism stands as a hallmark of its cultural diversity, with more than 2,000 languages spoken throughout the continent. This linguistic wealth presents both opportunities and challenges in areas such as education, governance, and social cohesion. (Bamgbose, 2003). Bandia (2008) opines that Africa's multilingualism goes beyond the simple coexistence of various languages; it involves the intricate dynamics between dominant, high-status languages like English and French, which often provide access to opportunities, and local African languages that carry profound cultural and historical meaning.Nigeria's linguistic landscape is one of the most diverse in the world, with over 500 indigenous languages spoken across its various ethnic groups. This linguistic diversity reflects the complex social and cultural fabric of the nation (Bamgbose, 2000). In Nigeria, the dynamic interaction among indigenous languages, English, and Pidgin fosters a distinctive multilingual setting. The integration of these languages in education, media, and everyday interactions reflects the country's intricate language policies and diverse linguistic

practices.The multilingual environment in Nigeria highlights the ongoing struggle between maintaining native languages and the increasing dominance of global languages, especially English and Nigerian Pidgin. Such diversity has required media producers and content creators to adopt a multi-lingual approach more broadly, particularly concerning radio, television, and print media. English serves as a universal lingua franca especially in Nigeria, where English is the country's official language. Though Pidgin use is widespread, and therefore a major mode of communication that is accessible to the masses, Take Nigerian Pidgin English for instance, an amalgamation of English with some local jargon, which creates a neutral ground for the people of different backgrounds to correlate with each other.

Where inhabitants converse in Swahili, Arabic, Yoruba, or Hausa, competitively-marketplace media shops blossom. These languages add cultural and social value, and are important for establishing familiarity and trust. If the implication is that a news report in, say, Hausa or Swahili has more gravitas with rural and regional audiences, then it is a deliberate ploy to target some audience.

2. Pidgin English — A Language for the People

The Nigerian Pidgin English is a vital part of the media language in Nigeria and in some other parts of the West African region. Pidgin has a sort of cadence and elementary nature that anyone can understand while appealing to every social class, especially in cities and among younger generations. Several media houses, like Wazobia FM have exploited this language, advertising solely in the Pidgin and raking in as much audience they can get. Pidgin renders media more accessible, easing the distance between

the formal English of media and the average Nigerian street talk. According to Jowitt (1991) Nigerian Pidgin serves not just as a common language for communication across Nigeria but also as a powerful marker of identity and unity, bridging ethnic and regional divides for its speakers. Despite being dismissed by some as a "broken" or inferior version of English, Nigerian Pidgin has evolved into a fully developed and versatile means of communication. It is not only rich in expressive depth but also widely embraced across diverse social contexts, proving its significance and utility in everyday life. (Enfield, 2009)

Pidgin is also used in Ghana but also well received in Cameroon, and some regions in Liberia and Sierra Leone. It enables media houses to engage with a fast moving, varied audience in a language packed with words of our people – idioms and proverbs well known to the locals. This strengthens humor and emotionality which are the defining characteristics of African media content.

3. Second part non-verbal communication visual and cultural symbols

The use of non-verbal communication — body language, imagery, symbols, videos, and sounds have a significant part to play in the African media landscape. The lively Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, relies on symbols, gestures, and archetypes familiar to its audiences that are rooted in African social structures and values. There are a myriad of proverbs, folktales, and rustic visuals that make it relatable to audiences as they see their lives reflected on screen. For example, culturally vested symbols such as the Kente cloth, masks, or stylish native wears do find their way to commercials, films, and social campaigns and are used as

representation of pride and unity. By providing a visual language that closes gaps between sets of languages and regional dialects, it makes media content more accessible to all.

4. Include Oral Tradition and Storytelling

African communication is steeped in an oral tradition, and the media have delved into this by using storytelling and "call-and-response" elements in broadcasting. Radio shows that listeners love usually will also have someone call-in with their personal story, offering their opinion, or some form of commenting, which is similar to how traditional people talk about controversies and issues. The Nigerian programme "Berekete Family", itself an embodiment of this approach, has its anchors parlaying with the audience almost synchronously, reminding one of the African communal interconnectedness.

Another of the ways in which media adopts the tradition of storytelling is through their use of proverbs and idioms. Proverbs are usually used to distill some wisdom for our use, or to warn us against something, and they are always read with interest by Africa's numerous audiences, who are used to their mystical layered meanings.

5. Digital Language — Slang, Social Media

New forms of language that have become prevalent amongst the African youth, thanks to the advent of social media. Slang is the filter used to convert memes, hashtag, and Twitter conversation to more formal radio show and TV program and finally news articles. Slang such as the Nigerian japa (to run away or leave the country), wahala (trouble) and, chop (eat; or to enjoy) have become commonplace in online conversation.

In African media landscapes, social media platforms have turned into sandboxes for dialectic English, slang, and abbreviation — the result is a new living language. Social media platforms have facilitated the emergence of a novel domain for linguistic innovation across African communities, characterized by the development of hybridized language forms that integrate indigenous languages with global digital vernaculars. This phenomenon reflects the dynamic interplay between local linguistic traditions and the evolving communicative practices of the digital age.Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram, and even Facebook now, play into that social expectation of cool distance and epigrammatic wit, as if any attempt to express complex emotion or any moment of visible effort would be to swipe left on your sophisticate card. This language is more flexible and more dynamic than language is used for general media in Africa.

6. Adapting International Media Product

Leading global media houses like the BBC & CNN have aimed African audiences through localized strategies. They employ local journalists, embrace African languages and tell African stories. The BBC for instance has formerly succeeded with its Pidgin service reporting news and stories in Nigerian Pidgin for countries like Nigeria and Ghana. Through local languages, they make their presence credible and in the people's comfort zone which justifies to the significance of using a relatable media language.

Beyond that, social influencers and content creators on the continent are helping connect global inspirations with the local context. They localize content according to the language of their

followers and culture behind it, making the global story beat local relevance.

7. The Future of Media Language in Africa: The Challenges

The linguistic diversity of media language in Africa, notwithstanding, still has hurdles to cross. Even funding for regional language media can breed dependence on English, and can leave some rural communities behind. Another challenge is to maintain a balance between local specificity and global standards, which continues to be hard as digital media reaches ever larger markets.

The challenge for media language in Africa is to find the creativity to preserve the indigenous languages while making them relevant to a changing global audience. The improvement and development of translation technology and greater appreciation for African heritage languages could ensure that African media maintains its more unique language form but also its audience at the same time.

Conclusion

That truly says a lot about media language in Nigeria and Africa as a whole as a part of the capabilities and diversity of our great continent. Together with the Pidgin-inflected English, local languages, body language, oral traditions, online slang, this rich, indigenous, synthesized, hybridized, media vernacular comes into being. The language is not just another medium of expression, but rather a unifier of other cultural identities where Africans can tell their own stories in their own words. With the shifts of media through time, the African experience of media language will

remain a depiction of its peoples, language and heritage through time, one that is unifying in identity beyond borders.

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