

# Nigerian Media, Indigenous Languages and Sustainable Development

Harrison Adéníyì and Rachael Bèllò  
Lagos State University, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

The idea of a global village, the aspiration of man at this jet age, is aided not only by the Internet, but also more seriously by other types of media. Thus, man, through the media, can get what language form, fashion, music etc are in vogue. In little or no time through our listening to the radio set or watching the television set, we could get to do what others are doing. The media, therefore, become a fast means through which we could get anything promoted. The objective of this paper is to examine the role of the media in the development or otherwise of Nigerian languages. We trace such contributions to the developmental stage the country, at present, finds herself.

Development in this study covers a number of concepts, which range from education, social, cultural, to indigenous linguistic maturity. For the study therefore, we examine the radio and television programmes of two media houses each from inception to date. We see how these organisations have consciously or otherwise promoted or chocked the Yorùbá language and consequently culture, through their programmes. We link such positions to the people's mental and social developments.

The study is anchored on Gerhard Leitner's *The Sociolinguistics of Communication Media*. Geshard Leitner based his work on address media in the context of the communication dominion. He reveals what performance is, what parameters are that determine its norms. He equally looks at the functions the media aims to fulfill in the society.

## 2. The Scope of Study

The research is limited to two major media houses in Nigeria. These two media houses operate both radio and television stations. These are, The African Independent Television (AIT) and Ray Power owned by Daar Communications and Lagos Broadcasting Corporation, operator of the Lagos Television and Lagos/Eko F.M. The former is privately owned while the latter is government owned.

## 3. Definitions of Terms

In this section, we define some of the key terms found in the paper. These terms include the Nigerian media, indigenous languages and nation development. An exposition of the concepts is needed so that readers will understand how they relate to the central aim of the paper which is sustainable national development.

### *i. Nigerian Media*

By Nigerian media, we mean the various mass media that are used to persuade, entertain, enlighten, mobilize and inform the citizenry. The media currently in Nigeria is very articulate and vibrant. The media in the past had greatly helped in reviving democracy when it successfully, in partnership with other civil society groups, exterminated military rule in the country in 1999. In furtherance to this is its pivotal role in enthroning and entrenching democracy in the country. Nigeria today has numerous print and electronic media, through which the voice of the masses could be heard. Both the public and private owned media organisations abound in the country. Some of these include, *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *Daily Times*, *The Vanguard*, *Alaroye*, and *Isokan* among many others. We

also have electronic media such as *Ray Power and African Independent Television (AIT)*, *Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)*, *Channels*, *Lagos Television and Radio Lagos* and *MITV* among numerous others.

### *ii. Indigenous Languages*

By indigenous languages, we mean the various native languages spoken in Nigeria. These are languages that are aboriginal to the people. Currently, there are about 400 of such indigenous languages spoken in the country. Only very few of these languages have written forms. We can categorize the indigenous languages found in the country into three. The first consist of those three languages, which are national in outlook. These are Hausa, Igbo and Yorùbá. These major languages perform recognised linguistic functions in the country. The second are those that are regional in outlook. They are about twelve. Some of these are Ijaw, Nupe, Edo, Efik, Fulani, and Itsekiri among others. The regions in which they are located allocate each of these languages specific linguistic roles to play. The third constitute those that are limited to the locality in which they are spoken, with very little or no role given to them by the society. They are consequently recognized, if at all, only by members to which they are first languages.

### *iii. Sustainable National Development*

Although, some writers see the concept of sustainable National Development as an economic one (cf Anon 1967, Oloròdènià 1983, Essien 2003), we strongly believe that, as much as economy plays a major role in sustainable national development, other indices, such as unity, education, mass participation in government, activities, maintaining law and order equally have tangible roles to play in promoting the industrial state of a nation. We cannot be wrong to say that even with a buoyant economy a nation/state must still ensure the indices highlighted above to have a meaningful sustainable national development. We therefore hold that sustainable national development is the aggregate financial buoyancy as well as the education of and involvement of the citizenry in activities that will lead to the nourishing of a country's economy. It is all of these things that aid the development of any nation, both overtly and covertly.

## **4. Theoretical Framework**

Leitner's (2000) *The Sociolinguistics of Communication Media* looks at media as a discourse. By this, he refers to the forms, structures and uses of language and other semiotic codes that are specific to the media. This goes beyond the examination of the content and forms of the 'packages' to looking at the underlying cognitive systems that is the ideologies of media. To Leitner, events would not happen the way they do nor would they have the same impact as they have without language. They (i.e. events) are in themselves mirrors of reality while they inform, interpret, entertain, and educate.

In an attempt to locate media discourse formally and functionally, Leitner arrived at the following:

- Content moves from a source, the medium to a target
- Communication may take place on a single or on several layers of axes
- The media get information in an already mediated form from an outside agency
- Production of messages is controlled by internal factors or bear upon its work from the work of the outside world.
- They 'design' messages for an audience

In all, Leitner examined the different levels, domains and audience design of the mass media. For the purpose of this paper, we borrow Leitner's submission of the impact the media ought to have on recipients. In his words, "In order to gain and maintain a stable audience, communication media must include recipients' needs and expectations early on in message production." In this paper, we look at how far the mass media is able to take care of the recipients' need so much so that the citizenry, through it, become socially economically, and linguistically advanced. Being the model on which the study is anchored, therefore, we examine the Nigerian media in light of these:

- What the media is, as performance?
- What are the parameters are those that determine its norms?
- What the public thinks of it?
- What functions it fulfils?

## 5. Methodology

A number of methods were employed eliciting data for this study. One of the various ways employed was the participating observation of researchers. Being citizens of the country, the researchers have, for some time now, examined the attitudes of the Yorùbá (informants under study) to their language, the Yorùbá culture, the media and national growth and unity.

The questionnaire is another means through which information was gathered. To test how much the media has contributed or done otherwise to the linguistic, cultural and social development of the instruments, we designed a questionnaire that tests their attitudes to and reasons for watching or listening to Yorùbá programs, if they do. Informants (sourced from Lagos, a metropolitan city) were classified into two groups of educated and uneducated Yorùbá speakers.

Our educated informants constitute Yorùbá who have had the National Certificate of Education (NCE) in the least. One hundred and twenty (120) questionnaire forms were distributed in all, out of which one hundred (100) were analyzed.

The informal interview is yet another method used for collecting data. Here, researchers needed pad and pen to take down important facts. Interview was conducted in a relaxed manner so much so that informants opened up naturally.

In addition, we requested the contents of each day as outlined in the programs of both radio and television media. Such breakdown of contents provided insight to what programmes are featured in the television and radio station. They equally furnished the researchers with the time each programme comes up.

## 6. Analysis of Data

There are two major parts to the analysis. The first is the analysis of the program under study. Here, we take a look at the breakdown of the programmes slated for each day. We, for instance, look at the topic of, time of, duration of as well as the language used in transmitting the programmes. The second part of the analysis concerns the examination of informants' responses.

### 6.1 Analysis of the Programs

Going through the AIT program schedule we found that just one Yorùbá program *Mìnnìjòjò* is featured in the entire weekly programs. This program comes up every Sunday by 1.00 p.m. – 2.00 p.m. The LTV Station, on the other hand, has a number of indigenous programs. It is worthy to know, however, that more than half of these indigenous programs are religious ones. Other non-religious indigenous programs include *Ìròyìn Àgbáyé* (world news), *Ó ga jù* (it is superfluous). Though the Lagos Television (LTV) has more indigenous programs than do the AIT, the number of English programs in this station out-numbers greatly the indigenous one. English programs flush both radio stations, that is, Ray Power and EKO FM. One cannot, at a glance, identify an indigenous program from both stations. Surprisingly, a reasonable number of the informants still prefer the AIT to LTV. The fact that AIT sparingly features indigenous programmes contradicts the objective of the television house, which is that of promoting the African culture.

### 6.2 Analysis of Informants' Responses

Eighty informants, that is, 80% of the total respondents acknowledge that they watch and or listen to (Yorùbá) programs on both AIT and LTV, although more than half of this number would prefer to watch AIT. Seventeen other informants which is, 17% of our total number do not watch or

listen to any Yorùbá programs on either of the media. The remaining three, which is 3% of the total informants, would only sometimes watch Yorùbá programs. They claim to be omnivorous viewers/listeners.

Informants indicated the various programmes they take time out to watch. These range from news, movies, documentary, comedy programs and health/food programs. It is interesting to note, however that most of the informants are interested in watching or listening to programs that are educative as well as entertaining. Thus, almost all informants gave as examples of the programs they watch, ‘Nńkan ń bẹ’ (a documentary program that recounts mysterious happenings around) and ‘Şokoyòkòtò’ (a life program that educates viewers on how to prepare different recipes for cooking). Both of these programs are not only educating but also entertaining. The implication, therefore, is that the citizens will have their minds developed and their actions meaningfully directed when they are provided with the right input. The question, however, is how much of the Yorùbá programs can be said to be edutainment after all? For instance, virtually all informants said their choice of program is dependent on whether or not the program is both educating and entertaining.

That the citizens are willing to have a different view of life can be reflected in their various responses to the question, “What type of program do you suggest will bring about social change in you?” Again, eight-five (85%) of the informants claim that only programmes that are educative will bring about social change in the society. Some of the examples given include teaching cultural aspects of the group, news and security watch, motivational talks, political talks/debates among others. Some other informants as if to show the uncertainty over the efficacy of the media said they do not know how indigenous programs could bring about social change. The remaining two (2%) of the informants hold that any program could bring about some social change.

From our analysis of the number of Yorùbá programs, and the timing in the two media under study, it is clear that interested viewers/listeners have to consciously know when and what will come up, since the programs (where they are available) are scattered all over the hours of the day. Thus, for the question whether or not informants willingly or accidentally tune to a station, the following were got.

- Seventy informants (70%) will willingly tune to a station to listen to a Yorùbá program.
- Twenty-three informants (23%) accidentally find themselves listening to or watching a Yoruba program against their will.
- Seven informants (7%) could either willingly or accidentally find themselves at a station.

The implication of the analysis above is that the educated and uneducated Yoruba alike, will not only watch Yorùbá programs but are also eager to be moulded by them if certain conditions are met. Can we, as a matter of objectivity, say here that we could build in the citizenry values, custom and practice that are needed to make a peculiar people, which we are? How do we do these when the people are not well informed about life happenings? Some of the informants when asked whether they will remain at a given station even when they had accidentally found themselves there, answered in the affirmative, adding, however, that as long as the program in question is motivating, educational and entertaining.

Informants’ attitudes to Yorùbá programs in the media vary. Ninety-two (92%) of the informants see the importance of the media in promoting the Nigerian culture through these programs. Only eight (8%) of the informants do not see the importance of these Yorùbá programs since there could be alternatives found in English programs. This analysis shows, therefore, that even some of the informants who claimed they do not watch or listen to Yorùbá programs still see the need to promote the Yorùbá culture and even the country at large through various indigenous programs.

From our analysis of the questionnaire forms, it is clear that informants could gain knowledge of concepts ranging from health, indigenous culture, economic to political issues. Thus every informant who takes time to watch or listen to these programs becomes educated one way or the other. More importantly, however, informants see the major function of these indigenous programs as that of presenting to the entire world, a distinct people with an identifiable ideology.

Unfortunately, however, when the media is not there to inform and direct the citizenry using this indigenous language they result to listening to foreign music and watching foreign movies. Only an insignificant number of the informants will get themselves culturally educated by reading Yorùbá literature, philosophy and religious texts. Our fear is that the media may be pulling down rather building up a people, which is supposedly identified to be one of its functions through the

dissemination of news. Consider an informant's response in his reaction to whether or not anything is missing by our not watching or listening to Yorùbá programs. To him,

Yes, an appalling lack of ethnic nationalist and cultural awareness. This usually results in a lack of self and cultural pride and identity. In severe cases, it leads to some sort of socio-cultural and psycho-spiritual dislocation, not only in the individual, but also the general society.

## 7. Conclusion

We have attempted, in this paper, to look at how the Nigerian media, through the use of indigenous languages could bring about sustainable national development in Nigeria. We have seen from the study that the Nigerian media have not lived up to their expectations. One of the key functions of mass communication identified by Lawell (1948) and Wright (1960) is cultural transmission. This is the ability of the media to communicate norms, rules and values of a society. This function is also regarded as a teaching function of mass communication. However, what culture is there for the Nigerian media to transmit or teach when (as shown in this study), majority of what they transmit and teach are foreign to Nigeria? There is no gainsaying in the fact that the language (and culture) of development is the mother tongue or a language(s) rooted in the people's culture and tradition, a language in which the generality of the nation's populace have unimpeded and unconscious facility in all forms of communication (cf: Essien 2003). The Asmara declaration, which Nigeria is a signatory, recognizes the fact that 'the effective and rapid development of science and technology in African depends on the use of African languages; and modern technology must be used for the development of African languages'. Government, through the National Broadcasting Commission, should as a matter of urgency, take steps that will compel the various media houses in Nigeria to broadcast and transmit majority of their programs in languages indigenous to its people. If, however, government fails to do this, two major things are likely to happen. There is the likelihood of culticide – this is the extermination of cultures, an analogous concept to (physical) genocide. Also, billions of Naira that the Nigeria government has (and still) spends on all areas of developing the country will go down the drain because, according to Mazrui & Mazrui (2002),

.... No country has ascended a first rank technologically and economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages. Japan rose to dazzling industrial heights by scientificating the Japanese language and making it the medium of its own industrialization.... Can Africa ever take-off technologically if it remains so overwhelmingly dependent on European languages for discourse on advance learning. Can Africa look to the future if it is not adequately sensitive to the cultural past?

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