

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MEDIA LANGUAGE OF BRITAIN AND NIGERIA NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

Media, all over the world, are regarded as the conscience of the society due to the important role they play in the socio-economic and political development of a nation. Britain and Nigeria have a knitted history of media development. This study looked into similarities and differences in the use of English language which is native to British newspapers and officially adopted in Nigeria and use by all national newspapers. The study used oral interviews as the primary source and major British and Nigerian newspapers, books, journals and archives as the source of secondary data to examine language of their news reports, feature articles, advertisements, announcements, headline castings and editorials. The study found out, among others, that most newspapers in Britain displayed professionalism and appropriate use of language as contrary to Nigerian newspapers who received the language. The study recommended that newspaper journalists should improve on their English language skills to be abreast of dynamism of the language. It also recommended that academic curriculum of media studies be enhanced to accommodate more English language courses.

Introduction

Britain and Nigeria are assumed to be media rich and media dependent society. Of course, the tastes and interest of their citizenry are well catered for by a wide range of media outlets and contents ranging from the national newspapers with a long history of publication to the latest internet-based newspapers. The language of contents in these media outlets is quite refined, and simple enough to interest both citizens and consumers. Also, the appropriate use of language has helped as a conduit for advertising to stimulate the market for goods and services.

However, this study concentrates on the assessment and justification of media language as an enhancement tool for adequate media performance. Also, we shall examine the similarities and differences of the two countries media language in terms of approach and applications.

Methodology

The Researchers collected their data for this study from both the primary and secondary sources. We used oral interview to collect the primary data while consulted books, journal, magazines, Newspapers (Local and International), archives, public and private resourced centres like libraries.

Theoretical Framework

The study utilized two major theories – Fourth Estate Theory and Social Responsibility Theory. The Fourth Estate theory previously known as the libertarian theory was most flourish in the early life of the 19th century during which references to the press as the “ Fourth Estate Of The Realm” became popular. The proponents of the theory are S.F. Siebert, T. B. Peterson and W. Schramm in 1963. The theorist are of the candid opinion that the media are expected media to act the fourth estate functions of serving as a government “Watchdog” and providing relevant , accurate and sufficient information that becomes the building blocks for public opinion .Kovach and Rosentiel (2001) asserted that “Civilization has produced one idea , more powerful than any other – the notion that people can govern themselves , it has created a largely unarticulated theory of information to sustain that idea called journalism.” Gans (2003) summarises this theory functions as - Journalists inform citizens, Citizens are assumed to be informed if they pay attention to the news and better informed citizens are more like to participate in politics and this participation will improve democracy.” He concluded that “ The democratic process can only be truly meaningful if citizens are informed and Journalism job is to inform them .”(p.1). The theory, however, advocates that the media be taken as partners in business with government in search of truth and reality rather than being a tool in the hands of government to achieve personal and inordinate ambitions.

The Social Responsibility Theory has its root to the mid 1940s panel of distinguished media experts otherwise known as the Hutchins Commission. After two years of meetings, the commission issued a book form report in 1947 that clearly established that the press was supposed to be free of government control and also had a responsibility “ for making its contribution to the maintenance and development of a free society.” (Blevin, 1997). Hence , the reasons for the media appeared to be known as a “ Social Responsibility Theory” . The significant elements of social responsibility theory is that , failure of the media to behave responsibly for themselves usually propelled the government capability to get involved in their professional activities. According to these theorist as cited in McQuail (2005, P .17) “ Social responsibility theory holds that the government must not merely allow freedom , it must actively promote it”

In conclusion ,while social scientists were scrambling to enshrine how mass media practices affected audiences and society in extension ,other ideas were emerging about what role or impact mass media should have on society. Both theories , however, falls within the axis which tends to explain and defined which parameters, norms and values that can be employed to promote maximum social development and progress. The theories are traditionally hinged on freedom of expressions as embodied in the two nations’ constitutions – Nigeria and Great

Britain. In its purest form, it is an absolute absence of restraint on the media and also in a legal sense, the theories are rooted in the opinion that personal liberty involves various related social and political freedoms including social mobility, self-determination, free and open economic systems and free expressions in which all voices could be heard.

Literature Review

In the literature review, the researchers are of the candid opinion that Britain and Nigeria shared almost the same media systems that are tailored towards the freedom of expression and absolute liberty of the press, this takes care of the systems similarity of purpose. However, the approaches, ideologies and professional techniques of the duo differs. The following are those few areas of disparity that this study shall be looking at.

The Use Of Language

Virtually all national dailies titles in Britain succeeded in establishing an apparently secured qualitative media terminologies and vocabularies. For instance, The Independent, Daily Mail, Daily Express, The Observer, Daily Telegraph and a host of others. Though, they experienced difficulties in maintaining a sustained and vibrant media language standard, but today, they are the pacesetter in analysing public policies and news delivery with the use of refined and unblemished media language.

While the number of local, regional and national newspapers titles has considerably developed, and overall total of national titles remained reasonably stable as a result of standardized media language and positive change of status.(Bell Allan, 1983). Broadcast media i.e Television, radio and every new media had also achieved normative values such as language balance, impartiality and objectivity . Indeed, broadcast media audiences understand that all news on all media is the product of a process of quality language selection and construction, and that the version of news event provided by any particular media outlet may be reasonably accurate and at the same time language unpolluted. (Scymour-Ure . C . 1999).

The style of writing, is the main uniqueness of English language in the print media in Nigeria as the Language is tailored with a particular audience in mind. Here we have the elitist newspapers which used high sounding and rich vocabularies that resonate to its group. The Guardian and This day Newspapers belong to this category. On the other hand, there are some newspapers that uses simple and grassroots English language that are easily understood by the people without necessarily using the dictionary to appreciate its meanings. The Punch and The Nigerian Tribune are good examples of these newspapers; hence they are widely read by both the elites and the commoners. Bell (1991) pointed out that the audience is usually the most important factor in choice of language style;

“The essence of style is that ...speakers are often primarily responding to their audience in the language they produce ...the audience are arguably the most important and certainly the most researched component of mass communication...communicators do work with an idea of

the audience they are speaking to and what they want”
(Bell, 1991).

Despite this uniqueness of the use of English language in the Nigerian media, misuse of language is still pronounced in some Nigeria newspapers arguably due to the direct interpretation of local dialect and English language. A Language expert, Ebere Wabara in his regular column in “The Nation” on Sundays, picks and corrects some of the errors made by some newspapers.

Language Of Reporting Style

Britain media language style is rich, simple, descriptive and explicit. For instance, in the news room the editing of news has been improved by electronic language news systems, while on screen, presentation has been enhanced by computerized language graphics. The impact of this new language technology is also evident in news distribution and consumption.

Furthermore, it is not just quantitatively news that is now on tap but qualitatively different sort of news styles. Established broadcasters find it easier to attract audience to traditionally language news bulletins especially among the youths. This create an opportunity to provide more background coverage of running news stories of traditional political actors, pressure groups and news social movements- all of whom can now contribute information through appropriate language use to audience without the filtering, gatekeeping intervention of journalists. (Fishman, Joshua.A. ,1991)

Other types of news are also available on the web, including blogs- the personal on-line diaries of journalists and politicians among others. The supremacy of national titles in the Britain newspaper market stands in markets contrast to the situation in the United States, Nigeria and other places where local, regional and city newspaper dominates supply.

British readers, howbeit, tend to use local and regional papers as a supplement to rather than a substitute for reading a national title while most city newspapers are published as evening titles so as not to compete directly with the morning national dailies. (Turow , J . 1999) . Also, good use of language in coining content and brand image style are both important factors contribute to keeping a paper competitive.

Almost all media organization have become actively involved in the provision of on-line services to users, consolidating a strong web presence to complement news and comment supplied by their traditional offline outlets .Newspapers for instance, have set up websites to ensure that they are not left behind by the internet growing popularity. This is a substantive move to attract and retain readers.

Nigerian reporting style is still not encouraging like that of the British media. The Nigerian print media report only for the privileged few that reside in the urban centers. The newspapers impacts have not been felt at the grassroots of the country for an effective consumption by average Nigerian.

Though, E-newspapers are introduced to consolidate web presence, yet, local and regional newspapers are not feasible enough to substitute or complement the national newspapers like that of the British media. Again, this development are attributed to poor internet accessibility and low disposable income of Nigerians.

Use Of Names And Titles

Unlike other media in the world, British media are unique in terms of names and titles. British media have no respect for nomenclature attached with names. They believe in mentioning name solely rather than adding titles to it. They relish real identity and naturalness. They are fond of mentioning the name of persons in the news and endeavor to explain what they are in the society. (Osiochrus, S. 2000) . Their Newspaper titles are carefully crafted with simple and descriptive analogy. The titles are stringently regulated by the statutory authorities against any form of obscenity or vulgarity.

Some Nigerian Newspapers clumsily use titles either honorary or professionally acquired. For Nigerians, attachments to titles are more profound and these cultural traits are being respected by the Nigerian newspapers. The only exception is the Guardian newspaper at its inception but it later succumbs to this pressure. Vulgarity and obscenity are noticed in the contents of Nigerian print media titles especially in their weekend edition. For instance, The “Sunday Sun” is notorious for this. Also, sensationalism is noted in the “Sunday Sun” newspaper and “P.M. News” with emphasis on human interest in their stories.

Length Of Paragraphs And Choice Of Words

Length of paragraphs as examined in the British media depends on the form of stories reporting. If the story is an international one, it usually has 6 to 8 paragraphs for specialized or interpretative reporting. Feature stories enjoy lengthy paragraphs depending on the side of the news event. Good choice of words and adequate contextualization of vocabularies fixed at the right place is paramount to the British Media. Also, simple words and short sentences are their media vogue. Their stories are expressive, descriptive and easily comprehended. Both the broadcast and print media news reporting enjoys differentiated output.

Moreover, British newspapers choice of word rules are strictly adhered with in order to prevent certain type of material from being distributed via the media which a market oriented system might omit or marginalized. (Gamham, N., 1998) .

Regarding paragraph use, Nigeria print media have no minimal approach as some have between twenty to thirty words in their paragraph. Others have between thirty five to forty words in a paragraph. Most of them focus on politics and economics issues with sport stories. All these areas are given prominence and they usually have as many as five pages for their sport stories.

Language Of Advertising

Academic studies carried out in Britain by Advertising experts showed that advertising language positively affect the production of news in two distinct ways; first, at the systemic level, that is, it may reduce diversity by squeezing out some news to be original. Second, there may be instances where advertisers attempt directly influence editorial contents. (Campell, 2004).

There is no denying that advertising language in contemporary Britain is produced in a media environment characterized by a high degree of competition for audiences and advertising subscription revenue. Even, the BBC whose domestic services are not dependent on commercial income is still obliged to compete using appropriate advertising language in the market and strive

to develop and secure audiences to justify its call on the license fee. This is to say that advertising language plays a vital role in the British media companies especially in overall commercial strategies.

This is particularly true in the case of the broadcasting media whose primary function is to provide entertainment rather than information. Television advertising in Britain is used by a media organization to furnish itself with a particular brand image so that it can stand out in the sea of competing channels and services.

Language of advertising in the Nigeria Newspapers is strictly the coinage of the advertisers. Adverts sponsor determines the tone and style of the language use. Almost all Nigerian newspapers do wrap around advertising which takes the entire front and back cover pages. For instance, this was pronounced during banks recapitalisation and as occasion demands. The Daily Mirror Newspaper recently had in its front cover an advert by the Global Group, (The Sun, 4/05/2013) which is owned by businessman and lawyer, Jimoh Ibrahim of which the newspaper is one of the conglomerates.

Disaster Coverage

When the Umaru Dikko incident occurred in July, 1984, some Nigerian newspapers in their coverage of the kidnap attempt failed to condemn such an act even though it received knocks globally. Instead they regretted the failure of a mission that would have been applauded. Generally, Nigerian media abused Britain for not co-operating using wrong media language to drive home their points.

On the other hand, British media were quite unbiased, and emotional in their condemnation of the kidnap attempt saddled with the right media language and vocabulary networks. Nigeria media became an object of hostility and ridicule within the British media in their coverage of the scenario. (Ugbojah, F. O., 1984)

Most of Nigerian Media use simple language in their publication. Disaster coverage is given prominence especially issues relating to insecurity, flooding, robbery incidences, collapsed buildings and a host of others. The reporting style of Nigeria media coverage of such events needs to be given more professional touch in terms of technical approach and applications.

The Media Language Differences

Britain media have good knowledge of the language in terms of expressions, pronunciation and professional vocabularies but Nigeria media language is inconsequential and prone to corrections on a daily basis. For instance, Ebere Wabara regular column in "The Nation" newspaper on Sundays, always correct these inadequacies.

Aside from this, Nigeria print media are riddled with malapropism, tautology and use of archaic expressions. A media critic, Dr. Farooq Kperogi once described contemporary Nigeria media as derived from a fetid repertoire of aggravatingly stereotyped and error-ridden phraseology (www.farooqkperogi.blogspot.com)

In Britain, use of media language is adequately monitored at intervals and strictly regulated but the regulatory and professional bodies in Nigeria are yet to take stiffer measures on these ethical irregularities.

Moreover, British media always do follow-up stories and making sure that their practitioners pass through sufficient journalistic training before allowed to practice. In contrary, Nigeria media have no culture of stories follow-up and the would be practitioners may not even have formal training on the job, that is , it is a free world for all. It is also disheartening that the bold efforts of the Nigerian Union of Journalists, NUJ, to enforce a minimum standard of “Diploma in Journalism” at entry level, is been rebuffed by the practitioners themselves.

In Britain language development facilities are readily available in virtually all Media institutions and firms, for language skill acquisition. In Nigeria, the facilities are not feasible and the few that are available are in a sorry case.

Finally, English Language is the British mother tongue and they are liable to be more perfect on it than Nigerians who are learning the language for perfection. The Nigerian newspapers used vernacular and slangs to convey their messages to the readers. These vernacular and slangs are other category of words or language that are common in the media but which are frowned at by media regulatory agencies. They are called Informal Vocabulary. Slang terms are specialised jargon used by particular groups (mainly children and young people) e.g. ‘check out’. As Holmes (1992) stated; “Slang is another area of vocabulary which reflects a person’s age. Current slang is the linguistic prerogative of young people and generally sounds odd in the mouth of an older person. It signals membership of a particular group – the young”.

Similarities

The two countries professionally subscribed to adequate use of media language and vocabularies. The countries media languages are subject to be regulated though Nigeria regulatory bodies are yet to bridge the vacuum.

Finally, both Nigeria and Britain use English language as their official language of communication .

Conclusion And Recommendation

Contemporary Britain and Nigeria have a highly developed media economy. Various media and communications companies make important contribution to the national balance sheet either directly or indirectly as a source to stimulate the market for goods and services through an appropriate media language. Though, sharing the same professional objectives, their media language differs in approach, usage and application. It is important, therefore, that we should understand as much as possible the multi-faceted interrelationship between the appropriate use of Britain media language and their effectiveness on their target audience or audiences’.

Nigerian media professionals should borrow leaf from the Britain media system. Language laboratories and facilities should be put in place at both the media institutions and companies.

Academics curriculum of media schools should be channeled towards correct use of media language and vocabularies by the practitioners. Regulatory and professional bodies should be strict in their surveillance and bid to nib wrong use of media language in the bud. Government should invest on media institutions by employing media scholars and strive to provide basic facilities and relevant books.

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