

THE MASS MEDIA AND THE PROSPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT FOR THE IGBO LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The media play vital roles in the development of any nation. It showcases the indigenous languages and cultures and thereby promotes its relevance in the country. The topic “The Mass Media and the Prospects of Development for the Igbo Language” looked at the opportunities or ways the Igbo Language could be developed through the media. It looked at the media as an agent of national development. It examined the role of the media in promoting indigenous cultures which language is part of. It also looked at the media as a tool for Igbo language development. The reason for this research is the need for Igbo language to take its rightful position in the media as one of the three predominant languages in Nigeria. This discourse adopted a qualitative research approach, as data were collected and analyzed through secondary sources and also anchored on Development Media Theory. In this study, it was discovered that the Igbo language has been lagging behind in the media, by that we conclude that the national media should include frequently, Igbo language programs in their daily programs as such may bring back the enthusiast of learning Igbo Language and also an opportunity for Igbo language to regain its lost glory.

Introduction

The mass media is a vehicle or means of communication that disseminates information from the source to the target audience. Any media intended for the larger audience is called mass media. It is a technology which is intended to communicate or reach a mass audience. Mass media is actually the primary means of communication for the general public to interact with each other as well as on higher level. The most popular types of mass media can be grouped into two: print and electronic media. Print media include newspapers, magazines, news bulletins and other while electronic media includes radio, television, internet, and more.

The mass media play vital role in the development of any nation, they provide information, education, entertainment, integration and social interaction in a country by giving insight into the happenings in the society and helping with the development of the nation. The media is also seen as an agent of change, instilling new values and behaviors in the society. The media is a major tool for language development.

The Igbo language is the language spoken by the Igbo people that occupy the Eastern part of Nigeria. It is one of the major languages of Nigeria. Language is a means of identification; therefore, Igbos are identified by their language.

This paper examines the mass media, national development and prospects of development for the Igbo language through the mass media. It examines the role of the media in promoting indigenous cultures which language is part of. In this paper, we shall be acquainted with different views of mass media and what it is all about. We shall also look at development, development media theory, the Igbo people and their language.

In the concluding part, this paper brings to light the benefits which the Igbo language will gain if it becomes the language of the media and ways to achieve that.

The Mass Media in Nigeria: A Historical Overview

Mass media in Nigeria started in 1859 when Reverend Henry Townsend published *iweiroyin fun Awon Ara Egba Ati Yoruba* (the newspaper for the Egba's and Yoruba). In 1926, the Nigerian Daily Times was started by the Nigerian Printing and Publishing Company. The West African Pilot of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe started in 1936 and The Nigerian Tribune of Chief Obafemi Awolowo started in 1940 (Igbeka & Ola, 2010). Today, there are so many newspapers in circulation, some of them are, The Punch, The Guardian, This Day, Vanguard, Leadership etc. The Newspaper was initially an agent of political propaganda and war, some of the newspapers had issues with the government which led to sanctioning and restriction from free press. Most of the Nigeria national dailies publish in the English language, only a few newspapers are written in indigenous language. (Nwaolikpe, 2018)

Television in Nigeria emerged in 1959 with the Western Nigerian Television (WNTV) taking off in Ibadan the then capital of Western Region and its Radio station also commenced (Akinfeleye, 2011). This was followed by stations in the Eastern Region, Northern Region and that of the Federal Government. State television stations emerged too, after the creation of the states and later in 1992, private organizations and individuals set up their own television stations.

Mass media in Nigeria has witnessed a huge progress in terms of expansion, coverage, technology, personal and managerial capability since its inception. The media houses have grown across the six geo-political zones of the country because of improved literacy level, political awareness and perceived economic advantage (Owolabi & O'neil, 2013)

Functions of the Mass Media

The mass media perform so many functions in the society. Daramola (2007) says that the libertarian theories put forward six major functions of the media, which are: public enlightenment, servicing the economic system, servicing the political system, safeguarding good liberties, profit-making and providing entertainment. These functions of the media are geared towards promoting national development. Other functions of the media according to Dominick (2002) are surveillance (the news and information role of the media), interpretation (making out meanings of facts and data), linkage (joining different elements of the society), transmission of values (socialization) and entertainment.

These functions of the media highlight the duties of the mass media and what is expected of them. Nnaemeka (1989) opines that the specific roles which can be delineated for the news media in our particular circumstance are those of decolonization of the mental and behavioral dispositions of our people, as well as the orientations of their institutions and attitude to social processes, the strengthening of the bases of the culture of the people towards world civilization, and above all, the construction, both in symbolic and in concrete operational terms, of a just humanitarian and purposeful social reality.

The mass media educate the masses, letting the masses know what is expected of them which help the masses to have the right behavioral dispositions. The mass media also strengthen the cultural heritage of a nation; transmitting those values from one generation to the next. The mass media play the role of the agenda-setter, gatekeeper and watchdog, contributing to democratic governance and accountability of a nation thereby aiming at developing a nation. The media could be a potent force for public enlightenment (McQuail, 2010).

The Media and National Development

Development of a nation is seen as the increase in the economic, human, political and socio-cultural security of that nation. Asemah, Anumand Edegoh (2013) in Asemah and Asogwa (2014) define development as a process of change in attitude, social structure and general acceleration of economic growth, through reduction of poverty and inequality. National development can be seen as the progressive increase in the economic, educational, and health status of the citizens encompassing all aspects of their welfare and offering them political freedom. Adekoya and Ajilore (2012) opine that national development is a term that refers to a sustainable growth and development of a nation to a more desirable one.

National Development is people oriented and its success is evaluated in terms of the impact it has had in improving the lot of the masses. Elugbe (2010) in Adekoya and Ajilore (2012) state that national development refers among other things, to the growth of the nation in terms of unity, education, economic well-being and mass participation in government. The media is seen as an agent of change and development, hence, the development of a nation is assured when the media are utilized for societal and human enlightenment, through sourcing and dissemination of information and educating the masses.

The Nigerian media as an agent of national development has constitutional rights to freedom of expression and therefore should be expected to educate the public, create public awareness and mobilize public support on societal issues. Okoro (2013) opines that Nigerian news sources must henceforth focus on collaborative, integrative, and strategic communication designed to provide constructive news and information that can shape citizens' attitudes and behaviors, cultivating a culture of oneness in an environment where all citizens are able to contribute their initiative, creativity and intellectual know-how equally.

The mass media play the role of raising public awareness and determining issues for public debates and discussions. They are effective channels of informing the public and sensitizing them on issues of national and societal importance and are expected to provide the public with credible and realistic information that will educate the citizens.

Development Media Theory

Development Media Theory was propounded by Dennis McQuail in the year 1987. The theory focuses on media support for an existing government and its efforts to bring about socio-economic development. It argues that the media must be supportive until a nation is well established rather than criticizing of government, and should also help them in implementing their policies. This theory relates to media in third world nations. Daramola (2003) made it clear that the third world countries are beset by problems that make development of mass communication system difficulty. This theory was put in place with emphasis on the right to communicate and the need to use communication to galvanize social change (Ate and Akintayo, 2017).

Folarin (1998) argues that development media theory seeks to explain the normative behavior of the press in countries that are conventionally classified as "developing countries" or "third world countries". Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010) affirm that media in developing countries are to promote their country's development goals such as social and economic development, political stability, cultural development, national integration and to direct a sense of national purpose.

Development media theory favours journalism that seeks out good news, requires that bad news stories are treated with caution, for such stories could be economically damaging to a nation in the delicate throes of growth and change. According to McQuail (2000), the press bears some tenets in mind as it performs its responsibility. They are:

- *Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks that are in line with the policies formulated by the political leadership and freedom of the press should not be a variance with economic priorities of the government and the development needs of the citizenry.*
- *Media should therefore give priorities to the coverage of those areas that touch on the lives of the people. In other words, content should be development-driven and should center on socio-economic and political lives of the people.*
- *In the overall interest of development, the state has the right to intervene in media operations by the use of censorship devices, especially when the activities of the press are not in consonance with the development objectives of the government. Mass media should accord priority to politically, geographically, and culturally contiguous developing countries in their coverage as part of the holistic strategy for less developed societies.*
- *Media should give priority in the content to the national culture and language.*
- *Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.*

The Igbo People and Their Language

One of the core indicators of the identity of a society is the language of such society. Language is a very fundamental part of a society's culture. It is the unique means through which members of the society communicate. It is utilized by speakers to exchange ideas or send messages. It facilitates communication and makes speakers unique in their interactions. The implication is that language is no doubt very relevant in any society.

The importance of language to human beings cannot be over emphasized. It is a means of communicating values, beliefs and customs (Ogwudile, 2014). Language is the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way. It is a system of communication used by a particular country or community to express one's mind, feelings and emotions. Language is generally defined as a system with which social groups co-operate and interact which helps in the formation of thoughts and feelings (Onwubie, 2016).

One crucial kind of language is the indigenous language. It is the kind of language that originated in a specific place and was not brought to the place from elsewhere. It is an autochthonous language that is native to a region and spoken by natives of the area in question (Ogwudile, 2014). Indigenous language is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people. The language will be from a linguistically distinct community that has been settled in the area for many generations. It is the language a particular group of people occupying an area utilize to communicate within themselves which is passed from generation to another. They are famously known of such language by other communities around them (Onwubie, 2016).

Indigenous language is synonymous with native language, mother tongue and first language, a language that is original to a people, native to a locality and part of its culture is considered to be an indigenous language (Chukwuma and Agbim, 2020).

In Nigeria numerous indigenous languages are in existence. One of such is the Igbo language. There are over 300 indigenous languages in Nigeria, Igbo language is one of the three predominant ones. The language is spoken by the natives of the South-East Nigeria (Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi states) as well as some parts of Rivers and Delta states in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The Igbo language is expressed in virtually all aspects of the Igbo land.

The Igbo language has evolved since some thousands of years ago. It is the main language spoken by the estimated 20 million Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria. The Igbo people of Nigeria are the

indigenous people of the five states of the South Eastern Nigeria. The Igbo are by nature mercantilistic, migratory, adaptive and inventive. Because of these, there is a huge population of Igbo in all the 36 states of Nigeria. There is also a good presence of the Igbo in most parts of the world where they are engaged in academics, business or a combination of the two. The language permeates all aspects of their culture: music, marriage, religion, craft, education and social interactions especially in conversation. The beauty of the language is often expressed when elders are locked in hearty discussion, debate and music. In such occasions, linguistic devices such as proverbs, idioms, anecdotes, and folktales are freely used to the enjoyment of listeners. The mastery and use of these linguistic devices by speakers manifest their oratorical prowess and in the Igbo society, people with such soapbox erudition in the use of the language are held in high esteem. In inter-village engagements like marriage, land disputes, such orators often represent their villages (Ekwueme, 2011).

Nwadike (2008) makes an exposition of how the Igbo language in a kind of written form emanated from the plantations of West Indies to the Forestlands of West Africa (1766-1777). This is the credit to G. C. A. Oldenorp, a German who made contact with the ex-Igbo slaves and published in 1777 a book titled *Geschichte der Mission Evangelischem Bruder auf den Carabischem*. Here, mention must be made of Olaudah Equiano or *Gustavus Nassa, The African*. Written by himself – a classic bestseller since 1789. The efforts of the ex-slaves that eventually settled in Sierra Leone and Liberia were institutionalized in the works of Mrs. Hannah Kilham with the title *Specimens of African Languages spoken in Sierra Leone in 1828* where the Isuama Igbo was prominent.

The arrival of the missionaries along the Niger in 1832 beginning with MacGregor Laird (1832-1834), to the contributions of J. F. Schon, S. W. Koele, Lepsius, William Baikie, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, and Ganot gave impetus for a new inroad into the development of the Igbo language; hence, their efforts were categorized under the early collections. The name of Lepsius rings bell when we recall the famous Lepsius Orthography (1854) that gave material for the letters of alphabet of most of the African languages including Igbo that was used for publications then. The *Igbo Primer* and development of word list and other works by early missionaries gave impetus with regard to the development of the Igbo language.

Ward (1941) which was a product of a long period of investigative scholarship by Caroline Ida Ward (1920s-1940s), under the supervision of R. Adams, the British Administrator, in the then Eastern Region, also gave Igbo language a new phase. Hence, the effort introduced the age of Central Igbo with an Orthography popularly known as Ida Ward Orthography. This ushered in a background for standardization race in the Igbo language. Though the effort did not receive applause from the Anglicans (C. M. S), this was not as a result of professional deficiency since she was an acclaimed phonetician but because the Anglicans claimed that they have gone far in the use of the then Lepsius Orthography. The Roman Catholics and the Methodists accepted it. However, this division did not go well with the history of the Igbo language development because it introduced the orthography controversy in the Igbo language that led to a setback in Igbo language development.

The efforts of Fredrick Ogbalu with the formation of the Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC, 1949), to ameliorate the crisis led to the fabrication of an ad hoc compromise orthography, which did not go well also but included “or” in order to pacify the problematic representation of “o” sound in the Igbo language. The problem continued while Igbo language continued to witness alarming setback until 1961 when the government of Eastern Nigeria intervened and called a meeting at Enugu headed by, Dr. S. E. Onwu. That intervention eventually gave rise to Onwu Orthography. The committee resolved back with authority of the government to



adopt the content of that orthography committee. They made it mandatory for all levels of study of the Igbo Language and this, ushered in the period of standard Igbo.

The letters of the alphabet with the total number of 36 phonemes contained 8 vowels, 28 consonants among them, 9 diagraphic sounds. These letters of alphabet continued to receive attention though the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970) obstructed the much needed attention that would have been paid to the development of the Igbo Language. The final arrangement of the letters of the alphabet was concluded in 1976 (Chukwuma and Agbim, 2020).

Looking at this journey so far, the Igbo Language could be said to be a Proto-language which was the substratum of giving a better background for linguistic studies and favorable approach to language acquisition. Although the language may appear complicated for some people, the structures and composition of the language have a lot to offer with regard to linguistic studies (Nwachukwu, 2006).

Mass Media as a Means of Development for the Igbo Language

In previous pages, mass media, development and Igbo Language were discussed. Going further, mass media being a means or channel for National Development shows that the Igbo language has a lot to benefit from the media.

The Igbo language being a language that has gained international recognition should be used in mass communication. Though in the olden days, Igbo people communicated through different ways but as the world evolved, Igbo language has as well evolved and should be used as language of the media. Igbo language is spoken in the Eastern part of Nigeria and also one of the three major indigenous languages. By virtue of this, National media should include Igbo language programs in their daily programs and it should also be frequent like those of the other languages. Through this means, the Igbo language will become more popular among the Igbo speakers and other tribes.

The Igbo language suffered a great loss during the orthography controversy and the Civil war which drove the whites who had interest in Igbo language back to their country. The native speakers of Igbo language should by all means uphold their language and never be ashamed to communicate with it like other native speakers of other Nigeria indigenous languages.

In the print media, newspapers, magazines and journals should have Igbo editions. If there could be an Igbo publishing company that publishes newspapers and magazines in Igbo, that also can help the Igbo language not to go into extinction rather, become a greener field for researchers and linguists. It will be a wide spread of awareness that the Igbo language is still very much alive and need more attention to be stronger. Publishing on social media or on the internet, we are in the digital world; Igbo language should be used in publishing too. There should be research topics in Igbo language published on the internet and it will be more accessible for language scholars. It might also awaken the whites' interest to study Igbo language again.

In conclusion, Igbo native speakers should be proud of their language and be ready as well to help it grow. They can achieve this by:

- Listening to Igbo programs on radio and participating in audience-response programs.
- They should also watch Igbo programs on Television. As the media makes effort to bring it more often, they also should watch and encourage the media.
- There should also be a room for Igbo Printing Press where Igbo newspapers and magazines can be published. Igbo people should help the media in achieving that.

If all these are put in place, Google can grant access to publishing of online Igbo journals and articles that can be useful to all Igbo language scholars across the globe. The Mass media on the

other hand should employ the services of Igbo scholars to help arrange Igbo programs. Since the mass media is a channel through which information get to a wide range of people, Igbo scholars should anchor Igbo programs to avoid communicating in error which may cause some disagreement and confusion among the Igbo native speakers and more especially, the English-Igbo bilinguals.

Conclusion

Having looked at mass media, its history in Nigeria, Igbo language and its evolution; it will be good to conclude that Igbo people should pay more attention to their language than other languages. Igbo language is still a fertile land to cultivate, but the laborers are few. The media, on the other hand is a stepping stone to language development. Igbo scholars, On-Air personalities and presenters, should also be encouraged.

In conclusion, the media has a vital role to play in the development of Igbo language since they have access to a wide range of people.

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