

## Indigenous media programmes in foreign languages as strategy to enhance the globalisation of the Nigerian culture

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### Abstract

The growing globalisation of the Nigerian motion pictures (Nollywood) and the Nigerian hip-hop music production has caught the attention of many scholars, politicians and critics. These two sectors of popular culture production, so far represent the major vectors of Nigeria's contribution to the international communication flow. Despite this favourable situation, additional efforts are still necessary, to enhance Nigeria's contribution to the global information flow. Based on semi-structured interviews with experts and secondary data, this paper argues in defence of the use of indigenous media programmes in foreign languages as strategies to enhance the globalisation of the Nigerian culture. The paper contends that Nigerian news and cultural production strategies should perfectly emulate big international (Western) news agencies that broadcast in a diversity of foreign languages including European, Asian modern languages; and even some African vehicular languages. The paper explores a number of imperatives for such a project to effectively emerge and survive in the Nigerian media and cultural ecology. It equally analyses the prospects of such an initiative and identifies potential challenges to it. The paper finally provides ways of overcoming these challenges.

**Keywords:** Media programming, foreign languages, Nigerian culture, globalisation, cultural imperialism

### Introduction: Nigeria in international communication

African countries generally have a minute, nay insignificant contribution to the international communication flow (Endong 2014; Kerr 2011; Ekpang 2008, Salau 2006). Like the majority of

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under-developed countries of the globe, they immensely depend on particular western countries (precisely the USA and her capitalist European allies) for information and entertainment. In effect, the international communication flow is still immensely dominated by the West as the biggest and most influential media conglomerates as well as the major news agencies of the planet are based in the west (Endong 2014; Kerr 2011; Ekpang 2008, Iyorza 2008; Tanjon 2006, Watson 2006, Salawu 2006; Brandston and Stafford 2006). Hamelink (1996:362) corroborates this view when he notes that entertainment is heavily represented in the one-way traffic of the television programs circulated in the world and this leads to a global spreading of cultural values that pervades the soap opera and the crime series produced in the metropolitan (mostly third world) nations, notably African countries. Hamelink further contends that:

*The industrial corporations, however, provide more than just television programs, they also graciously entertain the world with films, records, cassettes, women's magazines, and children's comic [...] Although the international communication flows tends to consist mainly of entertainment products, the role of international news in transferring values should not be underestimated. The selection few large international news agencies undoubtedly reflects the values of the metropolitan countries.*

The international communication flow is therefore dominated by foreign media multinationals. These news agency and other media conglomerates are veritable channels of the Western cultures. They are vectors of the decried phenomenon of cultural/media imperialism and continue to thrive thanks to the accentuated westernisation of Nigerians (Endong 2014). Nevertheless, Kolbowe and Madu (2012:87) somehow contradict the thesis of media imperialism with respect to media (television) production in Nigerian. They insightfully opine that the indigenization of media - instituted by the Nigerian Broadcasting (NBC) code – has remarkably enable the resistance of cultural/media imperialism in Nigeria.

Television was Nigeria's foremost medium of cultural and media imperialism but the recent trend in programming presents a paradigm shift as it is now a transmitter of indigenous items that are packaged by people with traditional knowledge. This development is a product of the regulations of NBC, its monitoring role, the appreciation of Nigerian cultural heritage by broadcasters, among others. Such indigenous consciousness has

improved the sector and reduced the unidirectional flow of information from the West to developing nations.

Two important sectors of popular culture production namely Nigerian motion picture industry (Nollywood) and contemporary Nigerian urban music (hip-hop) constitute the major areas of Nigeria's contribution to the international communication (Kerr 2011; Ibok 2008; Iyorza 2008). Kerr (2011:18) concedes that informal channels of distribution of media products such as social networking sites, e-mail attachments, You Tube and the like, continually facilitate the increasing globalisation of African media production in general and the Nigerian film and music industries in particular, thereby facilitating a growing contribution to the international communication flow from Nigeria.

Informal distribution of audio and video clips through You Tube, social networking sites and e-mail attachments can build inter-regional tastes for local African productions that, to an extent, undermine formal distribution channels of Fox, Time Warner or Ster Kinekor. Innovative marketing processes partially account (along with the assiduous video piracy of Chinese retailers) for the phenomenal successes of Nigerian videos in many parts of the African continent and beyond.

In the same light, Kolbowe and Madu (2012:88) view the presence of Nigerian news in the international air space with very high optimism. They opine that the integration and movement of information from developing to developed nations is intensified by the trend in satellite broadcasting. Though these satellite broadcasting channels (dominated by the West) tend to emphasize the negative aspects of news from the developing nations, the nature of African cast in the international media would also change with time, with the increasing presence of African/Nigerian media in the satellite news diffusion. This presence is therefore viewed as a serious contribution to redressing the double phenomenon of international information imbalance and western media imperialism.

Thus, cultural and media imperialism, which was achieved through the influx of foreign contents affecting cultural, political and sociological ideas of the audience, has highly declined. [...] The presence of African news in the international air space has been a mixed blessing because western media highlight more negative than positive social realities of the developing world.

Such reportage is not holistic and can be linked to hard news craving, marketability of network and bias. There is need for balanced reporting of events from a holistic viewpoint (Kolbowe and Madu 2010:88).

It is easily noticeable that the major news agencies of the globe used foreign languages to intensify the globalisation of their news production and to reach as many audiences as possible in the world. News agencies such as BBC, VOA and RFI for instance are noted for their programmes in a variety of foreign languages. These stations have created broadcast services in languages such as Spanish, French, Arabic, Portuguese and even in some vehicular African languages such as Hausa, Swahili and the like, in a bid to diversify their audience and increase their contribution in the international communication flow (Tanjon 2006; Sajawu 2006). This indicates that the mobilisation/use of foreign languages in international broadcast have a great importance in this era of globalisation and serious competition in the sphere of international communication. It is a tool African states –notably Nigeria - may equally employ to sell their cultures in the international market through international broadcasting (satellite TV or radio).

This paper attempts to show the extent to which media programmes in foreign languages (French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic among others) may increase the globalisation of Nigerian culture and ultimately improve Nigeria's contribution to the international flow. It explores the major prospects and challenges to such a laudable project and offers some strategies adoptable to overcome obstacles to the project.

### **Foreign language broadcast in Nigeria**

A good number of critics view the creation of media programmes in foreign languages as one of the multiple imperatives for the development, promotion and globalisation of the Nigerian culture. According to these critics, such media programmes (in foreign languages) can serve as strong vectors of the exportation of Nigerian cultures around the world as they offer real opportunities for reaching diverse international audiences. Iyorza (2008:90-91) reports for instance that media imperatives for Nigeria's cultural development and globalisation demands the true function of the Nigerian mass media (radio, television, film industry, newspaper and magazines), to entertain, inform and

educate in both local (indigenous) and foreign languages. He recommends that more efforts be crystallized on international broadcast which entails programming in foreign languages.

Transmissions should be reviewed online, the federal government should put in place laws that would enhance longer hours of international broadcasts during which programmes content of radio and television relevant to Nigerian realities, history, culture, artefacts, values and national interest are featured. Media programmes should be broadcast in English language, Pidgin English and other foreign language for people in other parts of the world to listen, view and understand and all local stations within the country must hook up during such broadcast.

In the same line of argument, Nsan, Diana Mary –a media producer with Cross River Broadcasting Channel (CBRC) – observes that the relatively insignificant amount of international broadcast in foreign languages is partly responsible for the reduced promotion of the rich Nigerian culture in the international scene. Because of this reduced presence of media programmes in foreign languages, some of Nigeria's cultural potentials are unknown to many people in other places of the globe. She further contends that media programmes in foreign languages, notably in the French language, can help correct the negative reporting made by foreign international media organisations on African cultures in general and Nigerian cultures in particular.

Media programmes in foreign languages that showcase the Nigerian culture have potentials of presenting and projecting the real image of the Nigerian people and culture [...] This image is often wrongly painted by foreign media which are noted for their negative reporting about Africa and thus, about Nigeria. Programmes in foreign languages can therefore constitute a veritable tool of the promotion of Nigerian cultures and why not vectors of Nigerian propaganda.

Besides simply advertising Nigerian cultures, it may offer a forum for selling the Nigerian destination to tourists all over the world. By such a strategic channel, these tourists may be encouraged to attend cultural exhibitions taking place in Nigeria. Ako, Eyo, a producer with the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Calabar notes that such programmes "will draw expatriates' attention to Nigerian cultural heritage and cause them

to concentrate and know details about the Nigerian cultures. [...] they can even talk about these programmes and come and partake in our cultural exhibitions such as carnivals, festival and the like".

However, media initiatives in foreign languages by Nigerians are very rare. The few observable media initiatives in such languages include the French Village Community radio in Badagry (Lagos) and French and Spanish translations of/in some religious programmes over Emmanuel TV. To these two principal bodies one may also mention the Voice of Nigeria (VON) project which undoubtedly constitutes the major media initiative in foreign languages by Nigerians.

In effect, the *Voice of Nigeria* is the sole media outlet authorised by law to broadcast to the outside world. It was established basically for propaganda purposes with the vision "to become the International Radio Broadcast of first choice for anyone interested in Nigeria and Africa". Its creation is firmly associated with the growing influence and cardinal role Nigeria plays in the affairs of African continent. Its creation also follows the pressing need to have an external radio station through which authoritative information about Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, could be disseminated. Its mission is consequently: "[To reflect] Nigerian and African perspective in our broadcast, win and sustain the attention, respect and goodwill of listeners worldwide, particularly Nigerians and Africans in the Diaspora, making Nigeria's voice to be heard more positively in the shaping of our world" (Ndukwe 2013:18). The media organ very much functions as its western counterparts such as the Voice of America, as it broadcasts in over eight languages including English, Hausa, Arabic, Kiswahili, Ffulde, French, Yoruba, and Igbo. The authorities of the media house are presently working towards reintroducing the German language –which for some time was stopped as well as towards the introduction of some other foreign languages such as Chinese, Spanish and Portuguese.

The existence of the VON notwithstanding, international broadcast in foreign languages remains a minor feature of broadcasting in Nigeria. Mbanefo (2011:53-54) decries this situation with close reference to broadcast in the French language when he submits that "certainly, Nigeria is not lagging behind in the area of broadcast journalism when it comes to satisfying monolingual conception of English-based broadcast [...] However, there seems to be a serious lacuna in the area of French based

broadcast journalism". There is therefore a need to make a case for foreign language broadcast in Nigeria. Though such a project is visibly monumental, the country possesses valuable resources that can be harnessed. The following section of this paper attempts to analyse these potentials.

### **The prospects of foreign languages broadcast**

It goes without saying that foreign language broadcast may need a pool of local human resources possessing linguistic aptitude in foreign languages, to be able to conceive local programmes showcasing Nigerian rich culture. This brings to the fore the necessity to stabilize the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Nigerian educational institutions, especially in universities. So far, the Nigerian Government has particularly been supporting the teaching of the French language - Nigerian official second language (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004; Ministry of Education 2010) - as early as the primary level of education. Furthermore, the Government – through the appropriate agency – is encouraging the teaching of some other modern languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, German and recently Chinese (Mokwenye 2007) at university level.

The existence in the country's universities of Departments offering programmes in foreign languages and translation studies and producing cohorts of graduates in these fields is a valuable asset and factor working indirectly in favour of foreign language broadcast as products of such foreign language Departments can be absorbed, (after appropriate and well regulated recycle training by media houses) to conceive, direct or present indigenised programmes in foreign languages (Essoh and Endong 2014; Rasaq 2013; Mbanefo 2011; Mokwenye 2010).

Another factor working very much in favour of foreign language broadcast is the existence in Nigeria of linguistic programme for professional purpose (especially in French), being dispensed by specialised cultural bodies and institutions such as the network of *Alliances Françaises*, the Badagry French Village and the French Institute (*Institut Française*). Good examples of such programmes include the FOS (*Français sur Objectifs Spécifiques* [French for Specific Objectives]) and FLP (*Français Language Professionnel* [French as Professional Language]). These programmes are exploited by a good number of private and governmental enterprises and multinationals wishing to extend

their foot prints and reach to foreign countries, especially those within the ECOWAS sub-region. Such programme can, as well, be exploited by Nigerian media houses to enable their staffs acquire necessary linguistic aptitude in foreign languages for the conception and production of indigenised programmes in selected foreign languages. Rasdaq (2013:81) argues that such programmes (FOS and FLP) are suitable for the enhancement of professional communication, the transfer of human resources and the search for new professional perspectives by multinational enterprises and public international institutions. With particular respect to the FOS scheme, he insightfully notes that such programmes “*Jouent un rôle actif [...] permettant aux personnels mobiles de s’adapter aux nouveaux environnements professionnels. Au Nigeria, nous avons des exemples empiriques impliquant la formation en FOS des fonctionnaires, des diplomates, des personnels dans les sociétés multinationales visant à créer de nouvelles opportunités et porter le flambeau du pays dans les pays francophones*” play an active role [...] as they enable migrant personnel to adapt to new professional environments. In Nigeria, we have empirical examples attesting the fact that there is the training, through the FOS programme, of civil servants, diplomats and staffs from multinationals, wishing to create new opportunities and to be flag bearers of the country in francophone countries [Our translation].

Furthermore, the Nigerian universities have produced a number of foreign language educationists (for instance Tunde Fatunde) who have served as correspondents for some foreign media outlets using modern foreign languages as working languages. Some of these language educators are very well known and have worked or continue to work with Nigerian international media such as VON. These foreign language educationists include Akin Demeideros, Mr. N. Nwobasi (of the Foreign Service VOA), Mark Ekundayo Dada, Akin Kolade, Jacob Ukoyen, (of the University of Ibadan), Karl Mann (of the University of Ilorin), Lena Okon, among others. All these are clear evidences that local media houses may find potential broadcasters in some foreign languages even among Nigerian foreign language teachers (Pocher 2011). All these foreign language education experts are visible resources that both private and government media houses may harness to implement foreign language broadcast in Nigeria. Such resources (university graduates in foreign languages, foreign language pedagogues, training programmes such as the FOS and FLP) may be exploited for the conception and production of



indigenised programmes in foreign languages that will be vectors of the intensified globalisation of the Nigerian culture and that will help increase Nigeria's contribution to the international communication flow.

### **Challenges faced by foreign languages broadcast in Nigeria**

Foreign language broadcast in Nigeria is faced with a good number of challenges. The most serious of these challenges is perhaps the relatively high cost incurred for the production of such programmes. Producing classical radio and television programmes in English is often very demanding in terms of finance. This has most often caused many local media outlets to resort to infotainment or the importation of foreign media content - which visibly are perceived to be cheaper than locally produced programmes (Endong 2014; Hamelink 1996, Effiom 2006, Ekpang 2008, Tanjon 2008). Hamelink (1996: 357) opines that US television entertainment fills in larger proportions of the airtime in many countries. Moreover local programs are produced according to US formats, even small television networks in poor countries unquestioningly follow the western example of broadcasting as many hours as possible. Such a practice then pushed these networks into open arms of the Theo Kojak and the Starsky and Hutch, where the production of an authentic local program may cost \$1000, the local station owner may import North American culture for less than \$500.

If such difficulties are observed for classical programmes, what will be the case for the production of indigenised programmes in foreign languages which virtually entails the more or less 'extravagant' expertise of both special staffs (who are bilingual or polyglots) and eventually expatriates? Another challenge may be Nigerians' negative attitude towards the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Many Nigerian do not see the need to teach or learn these languages. They arguably view these foreign languages as threat to Nigerian indigenous languages (Mokwenye 2007). It would not be surprising that many Nigerians do not fervently see the need to conceive and air media programmes in these languages. According to Mokwenye (2010:7) many Nigerians are still to be sensitised on the need to positively change their attitude toward foreign languages and give them a place in sensitive professional fields such as the media profession,

diplomacy, tourism and the like. With particular reference to the teaching of French in Nigeria, he contends that:

*It is expected that attention should be directed towards a number of areas of demand for French language as tourism, diplomacy, conflict resolution, multilingualism, journalism and so on. For this reason, I believe that participants [Nigerian critics and language experts] would be thinking seriously about the need to address the issue of re-aligning our teaching programmes in such a way as to prepare our students to fit into these areas of activity among others. We must not function in such a manner as to create the impression in the minds of our students that French is only an academic course that does not have any practical relevance especially in the world of work outside the teaching profession.*

There is therefore still a need to make a case for the teaching of foreign languages and by extension, a case for foreign language broadcast in Nigeria. The benefits of such a broadcast though great and very perceptible are still not seen by many Nigerians. As noted by Mokwenye (2010) above, many have limited the teaching of foreign languages to the confines of academic courses meanwhile they can be used in the Nigerian media in the production of indigenised programmes that potentially will contribute in the globalisation of the rich and complex Nigerian culture.

Another challenge may be local criticism based on arguable incompatibility between the content of these programmes and the language of production. As notes by Ako, Some local critics may attack such programmes on ground that they are odd and not necessary. She posits that "I may look odd for our programmes on Nigerian cultures to be aired in foreign languages, (say in Chinese). Local audiences may not really appreciate them and so might see the rational of airing them".

### **Conclusion and suggestions**

This paper has presented indigenised media programmes in foreign languages as one of the multiple media imperatives for the increased globalisation of Nigerian cultures. It has argued that the conception of such programmes and their airing through international broadcast, coupled with Nigerian motion picture industry (nollywood) and Nigerian hip-hop, will naturally increase Nigeria's contribution to international communication flow. The paper has pointed the fact that foreign language broadcast (media initiatives in foreign languages) is rare and quasi-inexistent in Nigeria. The reflexion has gone further to

explore some of the prospects of this form of broadcast. The paper, in this respect, identified products of foreign language Department of Nigerian universities and language training programmes for professional purposes such as the FOS and FLP among other factors and resources creating prospects for foreign language broadcast in Nigeria. The paper equally mentioned a number of challenges to such a scheme, including the high cost of locally produced programmes, the progressive westernisation of local producers and Nigerians' negative attitude towards foreign language teaching and deductively towards foreign language media programmes.

Based on observations made in this study the paper suggests that the Nigerian government sit up financially and institutes a quota for foreign language broadcast in the broadcasting code which presently is in force in the country. Indigenised media programmes in foreign languages should be encouraged and given an equitable portion in the various Nigerian audio-visual media houses, especially those that are on cable.

Also, foreign language teaching programmes aimed at linguistic training for professional purpose should be harnessed to get a size if not the entire media personnel of respective Nigerian media houses, trained in foreign languages so as to be empowered to function and run indigenised programmes in foreign languages. Where financial resources permit, expatriates and Nigerian language experts be employed and circumstantially trained to run these programmes.

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