

**GSP2204 FOUNDATION OF NIGERIAN CULTURE, GOVERNMENT AND  
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**Mass Media, Language and Culture in Multicultural Society**

**By**

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**Introduction**

Mass media as vehicles for information dissemination use language to communicate to their teaming audiences within and beyond their immediate vicinity. On the other hand, the development of language or otherwise is facilitated by the media. As such, the relationship between the two is a complimentary one. Culture on its part is promoted and sustained through the media. This chapter therefore, discusses the relationship between mass media, language and culture. It looks at the concept and stages of human communication, mass media, culture/cultural values in diverse society such as Nigeria as well as the question for national languages among others.

**The Concept of Human Communication**

No specific date can be attributed to the origin of human communication because it has been in existence from the time Adam and Eve were created. In an attempt to trace its origin, it can be claimed that human communication is as old as the creation of humanity.

Wilson (2006, p. 5) defines human communication as “that in which the interdependent participants are engaged in information dissemination, reception and processing and meaning exchange.” This means that in human communication, there should be a sender and receiver who sends and receives the communication content. They at the same time process and attach meaning(s) to the content based on individual perception. In communication process for instance, the sender, message, medium, receiver and sometimes feedback are fundamental for effective communication.

## **Types of human Communication**

Due to the dynamic nature of human beings, the way and manner in which we communicate with one another is diverse, unique and in different forms. Some of the types of human communication as explained by Wilson, (2006, pp. 6-18) are as follows:

- **Speech** – this is the first form of human communication. It is a communication in oral or sound form. E.g. cries of nature (cry of a new born child) the very time he or she is born. Speech could take place at intrapersonal, interpersonal or at mass communication levels.
- **Sign** – this is used to represent transmission, construct a phenomenon which possesses an ‘audio image’. For example, moon represents Islam, cross refers to Christianity. There are mathematical signs such as (+) – addition, (-) – subtraction and (x) – multiplication etc. Traffic signs – red (stop), green (go) etc.
- **Signal** – this is a physical manifestation of a message which allows it to be conveyed. In other words, in this form of communication, some objects are used to communicate among different cultures. For example use of drums, flute, flags to communicate messages to members of a particular community. Presently, some communities still used these objects. There are also car light signals where right manifests right turn, while, left signal means left turn.
- **Symbols** – this represents something other than itself which could be an object, person or event whose meaning is generally shared among people in a community. For instance, white represents (unity, purity, spirituality); black (spirit, ghosts or dead); red (danger, secret society); green (nature); yellow (deadly disease – HIV, Lass fever, tuberculosis etc). Livingstone, (2001, p. 2) contends that “the modern media possess a hitherto unprecedented power to encode and circulate symbolic representations”
- **Scribing/writing** – this gives birth to writing as it was ascribed to bad writing. It is a writing which represents thoughts. Scribing is considered as the early form of writing before the creation or formation of alphabets. People used scribing on clay tablets, on the walls or animal leather to communicate among them as well as send messages from one community to another.

## **Functions of Human Communication**

Human communication serves variety of functions depending on the objectives in which one engage in communication process. The following are some of its functions as explained by Okunna (1994):

- *Courtship and maintenance of relations* – it is through communication that courtship and relationships are maintained. People used it to express their feelings to their friends, family members and well wishers.
- *Socialization* – one of the fundamental functions of communication is socialization as stated by Harold Lasswell that apart from information, education and enlightenment functions, mass media serve as agents of socialization. For instance, social media platforms such as facebook, twitter, whatsapps and instagram are used for socialization.
- *Dissemination of Information* – information dissemination is one of the important functions of communication. People are always curious to know what is happening around them. As such, they communicate with a view to keep themselves up-to-date.
- *Self-defense* – human communicate to depend themselves when the need arises. Before the invention of radio and television as mediums of communication, drums, gun shots and fire smokes were used to inform people on the impending danger approaching the community.
- *Acquisition of knowledge* – humans communicate in an attempt to acquire knowledge. In fact, the process of imparting and acquisition of knowledge is done through communication. This is the reason why one has to be conversant with the language of communication.
- *Self-actualization* – human communication helps immensely in self actualization. People communicate to inform others about their values, norms and traditions so that they can be appreciated.
- *Promotion* – communication is used to promote government policies, economic programmes, cultural values, educational issues and language among others.
- *Publicity and advertising* – advertisers used communication to publicise and advertise their products, services and ideas to the prospective buyers.
- *Domination of others* – communication is used to dominate others particularly if the communication process is one-way where only one side is heard. While the other side is always at the receiving end.

- *Development* – human communication helps in developing various communities. It portrays what the community has for others and how linkages can be established for mutual understanding and collaborations in many sectors.

## **Stages of Human Communication Evolution**

Kalyani (2003) outlined six stages of human communication as listed below:

*The Age of Signs and Signals* - pre-historic humans were physically unable to talk. Communication was limited and determined by instincts. It was the age of signs and signals - drum messages, smoke signals, music, dance etc.

*The Age of Speech and Language* – this is the beginning of communication through language. This paved way for the development of different languages and people can express their feelings, thoughts and experiences through the different languages.

*The Age of Writing* - About 5,000 years ago, writing symbol was developed by the Mayans and the Chinese. They used pictures with a standardized meaning. Later, different form of writing that represented sounds by symbols was developed. Then, clay tablet, stone and later papyrus was developed and used as portable media.

*The Age of Printing* - In the 19th century, printing press was developed by Gutenberg which gave rise to print media – newspapers, books, letters and magazines.

*The Mass Communication Age* - In the 19th century, communication was determined by several media forms. Print media, especially newspapers, were supplemented by telegraph and telephone. The introduction of radio, film and television in the 20th century saw the emergence of the Mass Communication era.

*The Age of Information Revolution* – The era of information revolution. Media convergence due to networks established from the development of digital communication technology (super highway).

## **The Concept of Mass Media**

Mass media are channels through which messages flow. They are vehicles that transport information from one destination to another. Medium refers to a single medium of communication such as radio, television set or cell phone, while, media is the plural term of medium. Mass media are important instruments for information dissemination. They have the capacity to reach large number of audiences within a shortest time.

As the messages go through the channels, they are distorted. Initially, when people receive media messages they have no opportunity for immediate feedback to the producers of the message. Now, as a result of evolution of social media which communicate to a large number of people simultaneously and interactive in nature paves way for immediate feedback.

## **Classifications of Mass Media**

Broadly speaking, mass media can be categorized into the following:

- *Print media* – any form of communication that can be read is under print media. Examples are books, newspapers, magazines, billboard, stickers, posters, handbills, pamphlets etc. some of the importance of print media include – record keeping for reference purposes.
- 2. *Broadcast media* – any medium that has sound and vision or combination of both is regarded as broadcast media. Examples include radio, television, film, recording, tape, compact disc, MP3 etc.

However, mass media as traditional media and new or social media. Traditional media are print and broadcast media. The new or social media is the internet which has interactive platforms such as facebook, twitter, intagram, whatsapps, Badoo, imo, google+, 2go, youtube.

## **Functions of the Mass Media**

Harold Lasswell (1948) cited in Everett (1994), a political scientist provided the functions of the mass media as:

- Surveillance of the environment
- Correlation of the different parts of the society
- Transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next.

Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton, sociologists suggested two other functions, thus:

- Status conferral
- Ethnicizing (enforcement of social norms)

The above functions of the mass media are simplified by Okunna (1994, p. 107 - 119) as:

- Information function
- Education function
- Enlightenment function
- Entertainment function
- Advertising function

- Public debate and discussions functions
- Promotion of culture function
- Socialization function
- Motivation and Mobilization function
- Integration functions

### **Culture and Cultural Values in Nigeria Ethnic Diversities**

UNESCO (1994) defines culture as “the whole complex of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. It includes modes of life, human rights, values, norms, systems, traditions and beliefs.” From this definition, it is clear that culture is an established pattern of behavior among people, an all embracing and heterogeneous concept that encompasses every aspect of a man’s life and experiences ranging from man’s ideas, behavior or anything relating to his needs as a social being.

In view of the above, it could therefore be said that culture and cultural values in Nigerian ethnic diversity is an important aspect of cultural preservation and development. Because each ethnic group has its own cultural values, thus, tries to portray it to appreciate its uniqueness and values. If a society must function effectively by providing meaningful developments for its citizens, it must develop a set of common values, traditions and a sense of unity that are equivalent to national identity, irrespective of the people’s originally held diverse ethnic and cultural identifications. Any society that fails to appreciate and portray its cultural values, that society may find itself in cultural dependency. Boyd-Barrett (1982, p. 173) writes that: “cultural dependency can also reflect, and may reinforce, imbalances of socioeconomic power among the affluent nations or among cultures within nations. Nor must it be assumed that the mass media are necessarily the most significant to cultural dependency, let alone to other forms of dependency.

Nigeria being diverse and multicultural society has more than 250 ethnic groups each with its respective cultural values. In Adamawa State alone, there are over 80 different ethnic groups. As part of its functions, mass media correlates the different parts of the society and transmits social heritage from one generation to another. The idea is to promote and appreciate the different cultures of various ethnic groups in the country. Likewise, carnivals, trade fairs and other

festivities are organized from time to time to showcase traditions, norms and values. These programmes are announced, covered and transmitted through mass media.

### **The Question of National Language**

Language as a means of communication is used to express ideas, views, opinions, feelings, motivations and experiences. It is a very powerful instrument for development and unification especially in multicultural society such as Nigeria where culture and religion play a critical role in decision making process. Nigeria has more than 250 different languages spread across the 36 states of the federation with over 70 ethnic groups in Adamawa State alone. Each of these ethnic groups has its own language and culture entirely different from others. However, it is generally believed that there are three major languages – Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Apart from these three major languages, there are emerging ones such as: Fulfulde, Kanuri, Igala, Idoma and Ijaw among others.

Language plays a vital role in national development because it strengthens unity, peaceful coexistence, understanding and respect for one another. Wilson (2006, pp.47-48) listed the following as characteristics of language, thus: language is a system; language is vocal; language is arbitrary; language is unique; language is made up of habit; language is for communication; language is mutable and language is culture-related.

Considering the high number of the different languages in Nigeria, how do we compromise the question of national language? What is the possibility of adapting a national language in Nigeria? What is the possibility of Yoruba and Igbo people accepting Hausa as a national language or vice versa?

Mass media should focus more on programme of the ‘Wazobia’ style since it is difficult to adopt an indigenous language as an official language in Nigeria. Taking that into consideration, the Federal Government of Nigeria established FM radio and television stations in almost all the 36 states using local languages to transmit programs. These stations are used to promote local languages, preach peace, unity and respect for the different ethnic and religious groups in the country.

## Conclusion

A number of studies for the past three decades have established that mass media are integral part of our everyday lives which directly or indirectly influence our domestic practices, our social relationships and our very identity. We should therefore note that mass media play a key role in how, in our everyday lives, we understand the world around us and our place within it, while that very 'we' is becoming more culturally dispersed as a result of those same media processes (Lunt and Livingstone (2001). This chapter tried to explain the relationship between mass media, language and culture in Nigeria's multicultural society. It traced the origin of human communication by explaining the step by step stages of its development, the concept, types and functions of mass media. Also, the importance of language in human communication was discussed. The chapter concludes that the relationship between media, culture and language is a complimentary one. While mass media use language to communicate programmes to their heterogeneous audiences, languages requires mass media to disseminate and develop it.

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