

**Language Decolonization and Indigenous
Language Broadcast Media: A Case of
Orisun 89.5 FM Ile-Ife, Osun State**

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Abstract

Language is not just a tool for communication, it is a repository of culture. The totality of the culture of a particular people is expressed in language. Hence, it is a reflection and expression of peoples' culture. Meanwhile, the continued dominance of English language in the mainstream media has marginalized the indigenous languages. This has sparked debates and call for language decolonization among language theorists, and researchers as well as people who would not want to see that indigenous languages come to extinction. Premised on this, this paper therefore addresses the inevitable role of the indigenous broadcast media in the scheme of events in a way to decolonize Africa from colonial entanglements with a special focus on radio as a tool for language decolonisation. The study explored how Orisun 89.5 FM is challenging the linguistic hegemony by prioritizing Yoruba language content, cultural programming and community engagements. Drawing on a blend of desk review and qualitative data, the study draws from secondary literature on decolonization and the media and primary data from in-depth interview from two listeners of Orisun 89.5 FM, a traditional worshipper, a language expert and two management staff of Orisun 89.5 FM. The findings reveal that Orisun 89.5 FM plays a critical role in decolonizing the airwaves by using Yoruba language only for broadcast and with no consideration to use English language since inception to date. Also, it is to promote the culture, tradition and beauty and behaviours of Yoruba people as well preserve the language from extinction. Moreover, in order to achieve this, the establishing policy emphasized that the language of broadcast must be Yoruba. The study concludes that indigenous language media like Orisun 89.5 FM are vital instruments for language decolonization and cultural preservation. The study

recommends that government at all levels should provide policy support for indigenous language media and as well establish more of them to further accelerate foreign language decolonization in Africa.

Key Words: Broadcast Media, Colonial Rule, Decolonization, Foreign Languages (FL), Indigenous Languages (ILs)

Introduction

The colonial rule was nothing but a total suppression of our culture and a game of exploitation. These were obvious to the Europeans and they conquered all aspects of our lives. For instance, this was expressly captured in the French Policy of Assimilation. The need for decolonization of Africa politically and economically was the need for self-determination and self-identity. The idea that colonialism is dead and buried is far from the reality. Colonialism is still with us today as we navigate through the twenty first century politics. Hence, the agitations, campaigns and crusades to decolonize African states are not a shadow fighting.

It is no longer news that indigenous languages are under serious threat. According to UNESCO (2021, p. 1), almost 40% of 7000 languages around the world is endangered in the sense that they are at the edge of extinction. Hence, the advocacy for

their revival and resurrection especially in Africa is a welcome idea that needs to be supported by all and in all ways as well as using all available machineries.

Needless to say that indigenous languages help to preserve and protect indigenous people, their cultures and their identities. It

helps in the formation of social belongingness between and among indigenous communities. This is why there is a renewed call for the use of indigenous languages in most African nations to promote learning in formal school settings (Nwammuo & Salawu, 2018, p. 7).

Moreover, there are diverse areas in which decolonization needs to take place and this presents to us an herculean task which is not impossible to overcome. This includes linguistic imperialism decolonisation, decolonizing African heritages, curriculum decolonization, cultural decolonization, to mention few.

The debate around decolonization reached its peak in 2015 with the *#RhodesMustFall* which took center stage in South Africa (Shanade, 2015). The protest aimed at removing all the vestiges and colonialism from the university campuses. Many books have also been written by different authors to further the debates on decolonization and making Africans to realize the need for it. Amongst the authors is Ngugi Wa Thiong'o who specifically dealt with the politics of language in African literature in a way to decolonize the mind. According to Shanade(2015), Ngugi argues that African intellectuals bear the responsibility for

popularizing the decolonization struggle and liberation of African minds. Shanade (2015) equally notes that many of the works published on decolonization sprung from the Ngugi's idea of decolonizing African minds. Furthermore, decolonisation debates have also taken roots in the academia with so much interest in decolonizing the curriculum and especially the African higher education. Woldegiorgis (2020) avers that decolonizing African higher education evolved over time from various socio-economic and political imperatives. There are advocacies and crusades for indigenous language in Africa which is mainly a contention in battle for the souls of our indigenous languages and cultural survival.

Consequently, this paper therefore explores the inevitable role of the indigenous broadcast media in the scheme of events in a way to decolonize Africa from colonial entanglements with a special focus on radio as a tool for language decolonisation. Now, it has been a consensus among communication theorists that the print media is a major culprit of the backwardness in the use of indigenous languages, and indigenous people are more inclined towards electronic media, especially radio (Hoque, 2006, p. 9 & Salawu, 2016, p. 6). That is, the electronic media use more of indigenous languages in

their programmes than the print media. This has provided a good avenue to promote and project the indigenous languages.

Mass Media in Nigeria and Indigenous Languages

The mass media in Nigeria started in indigenous language and particularly Yoruba language with the establishment of a Yoruba newspaper known as "Iwe Irohin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba" (A Newspaper for Egba and other Yoruba people). To an extent, the newspaper was target at Yoruba people and possibly with an assumption to facilitate effective communication for the British agenda. This was put straight by Coker (as cited in Oso, 2006) that the publication of *Iwe Iroyin* helped to prepare the Yorubas for the publication of the first Yoruba Bible in 1862. This simply suggests that the indigenous languages are tools for effective communication for any given project or programme. This is to say that the history of media studies and media development in Nigeria cannot be dis-associated from the indigenous language media.

Consequently, the establishment of a Yoruba newspaper was a good starting point for indigenous language press to really impact the local people who would be able to

comprehend and understand the happenings around them as well as to enhance participation because of the use of their local dialects. Salawu (2016, p. 13) also vividly illustrates this beyond doubt thus:

The missionaries knew that the only way they could, effectively, diffuse the beliefs and tenets of their religions among the natives was to communicate with them in the indigenous languages. For instance, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) did this in the Yoruba language; the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM), later known as the Church of Christ among the Tiv or the Nongo UKristu Ken Sudan Hen Tiv (NKST), in the Tiv and Chiyanja languages; the United Mission for Central Africa (UMCA) in Chiyanja; the Catholic Church in isiZulu, Chichewa and Ewondo; the Overtoun Institute of the Free Church of Scotland in Chiyanja; the Wesleyans and Presbyterians in isiXhosa; the Church of Scotland Mission in Efik; the former Qua Iboe Mission, now the United Evangelical Mission, in Igala, etc.

However, it is quite unfortunate that the tradition that Henry Townsend started to pioneer the establishment of indigenous language newspaper which could have helped in language development was not sustained. Salawu (2018, p. 305) asserts that the problems facing indigenous language press in Africa are a reflection of what problem is facing the survival of indigenous languages. According to Salawu (2006a), the story of indigenous language media is rising and dying across Africa. That is, the indigenous print media rise and fall at will without any sustainability. For example, in 1930, there were 19 registered African language newspapers in South Africa; in Ghana, as recent as 1990s, there were 15 newspapers in Ghanaian languages and today there are none; in the colonial Democratic Republic of Congo, there were more than 150 periodicals in indigenous languages but they have gone to oblivion.

Reasons for the Imperium of English Language usage in Nigeria

The hegemony of English language in Nigeria and by extension in Africa is not far-fetched. There are a number of factors that are responsible for entrenching the stronghold of English and other foreign languages in Africa. Akere cited in Ayodabo (2014,p. 78) alluded some reasons for the

hegemony of English in Africa. From Akere's submission, we have classified and identified two major factors which are primary and secondary factors. The primary factors include: Contact with the Europeans in the 19th Century, colonialism in Africa and linguistic diversity while the secondary factors include introduction of English language as a subject of study, our certification system, working knowledge of English language as a prerequisite for securing government jobs, lack of linguistic policy, medium of instruction in schools and media use.

The primary factors ranging from our contact with the British provided a strong force for the diffusion of language by the way the British presented their culture particularly their language. Colonialism was an attempt by a stronger nation to subjugate the weaker ones in all spheres. Oyeleye, Nwosu, Takaya, Anifowoshe, Badejo, Oghoghodo, & Agbaje (2011, p. 139) submit that one of the reasons for the introduction of colonialism in West Africa was for imposition of foreign culture as a means to replace African culture which was perceived inferior to European culture. For that reason, the French colonial masters introduced what is known as Policy of Assimilation which was meant to execute the agenda of culture replacement.

Assimilation Policy was premised on the notion that citizens of the French colonies were expected to adopt the language, customs, and values of the national majorities, and abandon their own cultural heritage. It was a move to impose the French culture and civilisation on African citizens. Oyeleye, et. al. (2011) add that the assimilation policy was to turn the colonial people into French men in speaking, dressing, thinking, music, dancing, behavior, etc.

Linguistic diversity is another primary cause for which English language and other foreign languages dominate our linguistic space in Africa. The multilingual context of Africa created a vacuum for English language to dominate because no one particular local language could be picked as our official language. Local people and visitors flow well with English and other foreign languages as a result of other factor mentioned earlier.

Moreover, the secondary factors that include English language as a subject of study has contributed to the superior position that the language takes in Nigeria. What about our certification system, without credit pass in O' level English Language, a student's adequacy for higher education is not confirmed. Even to read any of our indigenous languages,

without a credit pass in English Language, the admission of such student is not certain. According to Ajadi (2014, p. 91), millions of language learners all over the world strive to improve their language proficiency. Also, a good working knowledge of English Language is a prerequisite for securing government jobs. In addition to all these, lack of linguistic policy is evident in the way African governments handle language policies (Nwammuo and Salawu, 2018, p. 1 & Obukadeta, 2019, p. 174). The colonial legacies that manifest in the language of education in Africa Obukadeta (2019, p. 12). The aforementioned factors and many other ones have greatly contributed to the dominance of foreign languages in almost all the spheres of our operations in Africa.

Importance of Broadcast Media in Advocacy for Indigenous Language Usage and Policy Formulation

According to Nwammuo and Salawu (2018, p. 8) there are ways to rescue the indigenous language from extinction. Firstly, appropriate awareness should be created using media tools. These tools can be in form of news, commentaries, editorials, features. The production and airing of programmes using indigenous languages, would make the media to succeed in performing the function

of status conferral on these languages. In view of this, indigenous people would be proud and encouraged to communicate in their indigenous languages. Secondly, phone-in programmes can also be used to seek people's suggestions towards burning issues at hand. Thirdly, through media programmes, people with philanthropic spirits can be called upon to partner with Government in establishing training centres in some communities. The media can equally call on corporate organizations to donate resource materials needed in the teaching and learning of indigenous languages. According to them, this strategy is already working in Nigeria where Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and other media organizations which air educational programmes in indigenous languages that are available in their areas of location.

In addition, ample strategies do exist for language decolonization in respect to foreign languages. According to Agyekum (2018), language decolonisers engage documentary approaches, sociological, ideological and pragmatic concepts to combat language shift, endangerment, extinction, and death. He goes further to allude the fact that states and societies take national intervention, efforts and action plans to legitimate their languages

and identities from the claw of linguistic imperialism. The available multifaceted tools for language revitalization and maintenance include literacy and awareness of language extinction, manipulations and cultural oppression, functional educational curriculum, media use and campaign, language documentation and preservation.

The media especially radio can be very useful and provide a strong base for language decolonization and a veritable avenue to use, document and develop the endangered languages. Agyekum (2018) stresses that the Ghana mass media especially radio takes the fore front in recording and disseminating their programmes in Ghanaian languages. This is why Ayodabo (2013, p. 130) says that one of the major organs of spreading and technicalizing a language is through the mass media. In addition, Akpojivi and Fosu (2016, pp. 126-127) confirm that language attitude is basically formed through communication and educational system. The mass media serve as a mechanism for the storage of expression, reservoir and reference points for the circulation of words, phrases, discourse, proverbs and other aspects of languages as well as our culture (Agyekum, 2018).

Media and Language Shift

Interestingly, there are some recent developments in this direction to show that

revitalisation of indigenous language in Africa, our culture, and the media system have become the priority of scholars especially the pioneering work of Salawu on indigenous language media and development communication. A lot of advocacy programmes and crusades for decolonization of foreign languages and revitalization of our indigenous languages and how this can bring about development at the grassroots are becoming loud. As of today, majority of the TV and radio stations mainly use English language with a mixture of indigenous languages around the country.

More importantly, we now have a few radio stations that go solo or that use a larger percentage of their air time for broadcasting in indigenous language. Stations like Lagelu 96.7 FM in Ibadan Oyo State, Radio Lagos 107. 5 FM, Orisun 89.5 FM in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Rave 91.7 FM Osogbo in Osun State, Faaji 106.5 FM in Lagos State, Freedom 99.5 FM in Kano to mention a few for lack of database. Particularly, Orisun FM, Ile-Ife is an indigenous language broadcast medium which is one of such projects on indigenous language media as mentioned above. Orisun 89.5 FM was established by the Osun state government in 2005. In 2005, Osun State Broadcasting Corporation station at Ile-Ife,

which was re-christened ORISUN 89.5FM in 2003, came on air. Orisun 89.5 FM is so named because of its location, Ile-Ife, which is the cradle of the Yoruba race. It is a specialized 100% Yoruba transmitting station. The entire programme line-up is set out to promote norms and cultural antecedents of the Yoruba people.

Researchers have found out how broadcast media can be so useful for foreign language decolonization. In a study carried out by Akanbi and Aladesanmi (2014, p. 564) titled “The Use of Indigenous Language in Radio Broadcasting: A Platform for Language Engineering” as part of the input identified in Orisun 89.5 FM in the process to strive towards the achievement of its objectives establishing it, they noted by citing Opeyemi (2013) that Orisun 89.5 FM “ broadcasts in rich Standard Yorùbá language as it beams out rich cultural programme laced with innovations. The radio station teaches both the language and the culture of the Yorùbá nation and this endears the radio station to quite a major chunk of the South Westerners and many listeners in other neighbouring states”. This testimony in a way means that indigenous language media or those that broadcast in a mixture style are also contributing to indigenous language development (Npofu & Salawu, 2018, p. 3).

Orisun 89.5 FM as an Indigenous Language Radio Station and Foreign Language Decolonisation.

In a way to establish the place of indigenous language broadcast media in foreign language decolonization, an attempt was made to conduct an in depth interview with some stakeholders of an indigenous language radio station known as Orisun 89.5 FM, a radio broadcast station that airs all its programmes in Yoruba language.

Two research questions were raised to gather qualitative data to direct the research. The first question was targeted at three categories of people namely: Audiences of Orisun 89.5 FM, a traditional chiefs and a Linguistic expert. The other question was directed at two management staff of Orisun 89.5 FM. The researchers also made use of feedback from research assistants that were engaged for the interview.

Question One: What can you say about Orisun 89.5 FM as an indigenous language radio station?

(i) Audience I: *“Ha ah, it is a station I like very well because it promotes Yoruba language, culture, traditions and customs.”*

“All that Yoruba is, is what the station projects there. It is a station that is majorly established to revive our love for our

indigenous languages that many people are not interested in again”

“It gives people who would not have loved to speak our languages opportunity and encourages us to learn and speak our languages”

(ii) Audience II: *I love to hear Orisun FM because their programmes teach experiences of life and they teach Yoruba culture and tradition.*

(iii) Traditional Chief: *Orisun FM promotes traditional worship*

(iv) Linguistic Expert: *“I listen to Orisun FM because of the preference given to our local languages especially Yoruba language. To me I see it as a way to rescue our indigenous language from going into extinction”.*

“I listen to some of the station’s programmes and I can confirm that to a greater extent the station uses standard Yoruba for the programmes I love to listen to”.

Analysis: It is obvious that Orisun FM being an indigenous language radio is beginning to create awareness about the need to revive our indigenous languages which are at the verge of extinction. Going by the available data above, the interest of listeners is being awoken to indigenous languages.

Question Two: What are the objectives establishing Orisun 89.5 FM and why is it a Yoruba language station?

Management Staff I: Firstly, a Yoruba adage says “If you want to destroy a country try to ruin their language. When their language is ruined you have destroyed them”

“The main reason for the establishment of Orisun radio station and why it is a Yoruba language station is to preserve our mother’s tongue and to rescue it from extinction”

“So that it won’t result to going to foreign countries to learn our mother’s language. Orisun FM’s establishment is also about our children, students to have knowledge about their native language so that Yoruba language will not go into extinction”

Management Staff II: “The important reason they established Orisun FM is to promote culture, tradition and beauty and behaviours of Yoruba land”

“We made it a point of duty therefore that Orisun FM programmes must be about culture and tradition of Yorubaland and how to move Yoruba beliefs forward as well as things that can bring peace to our community”

“Since the establishment of Orisun till date, we haven’t entertained the use of English

language. All our programmes have been aired in Yoruba language based on the policy statement that established Orisun FM”

Analysis: The objective for establishing Orisun 89.5 FM is to preserve Yoruba language with a consciousness that coming generations must not lose touch on the language. Also, it is to promote culture, tradition and beauty and behaviours of Yoruba people. Moreover, in order to achieve this, the establishing policy emphasized that the language of broadcast must be Yoruba and English language usage has not been entertained as well as airing the station’s programme in Yoruba language.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that indigenous language media like Orisun 89.5 FM are vital instruments for language decolonization and cultural preservation. The need for decolonization of foreign languages with the help of the radio broadcast medium is evident from the discussion above for self-determination and self-identity. The indigenous language broadcast media therefore especially the radio provides a veritable avenue for promoting and rescuing our indigenous language as well as revitalizing our cultural heritage. It is argued that the mass media serve as a mechanism for the storage of

expression, reservoir and reference points for the circulation of words, phrases, discourses, proverbs and other aspects of languages as well as our culture. Also, broadcast media could be used to facilitate the use, documentation and development of our languages. While the proliferation of radio stations which are domiciled within different ethnic groups would also be avenues for language promotion and development. Hence, it is recommended that governments across Africa should come up with policies that give more rooms to Indigenous Language stations in the media space and the establishment of ILs as part of efforts to revitalize Indigenous Languages and decolonize Foreign Languages in Africa.

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