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BILINGUAL JOURNALISM EDUCATION IN CHINA AND NIGERIA: A CASE OF TWO OPPOSITES

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Abstract

While bilingual journalism education in China aims at training students to be professionals with the ability of communicating in a foreign language, English, a similar kind of training in Nigeria purposes to train students to be professionals in the media with the ability of using an indigenous language, Yoruba. Acquiring a foreign language to reach a wider audience is not a problem in Nigeria; English is already dominant in the media of the country. The struggle is to ensure the survival of the indigenous language, and to make attractive its learning, especially at the University level. In China, the indigenous languages are dominant; the purpose of the BJE therefore is to reach an international audience. While BJE in China has been in existence for decades, it is just about ten years old in Nigeria. This paper examines the two BJE models in China and Nigeria, and draws out their similarities and differences as well as implications for journalism education.

Keywords: Bilingual Journalism Education, Indigenous Language, Journalism Education, China, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Language, either spoken or unspoken, is essential to communication; it is the vehicle on which communication moves. The choice of what language to use depends on a number of factors, among which are: the ability of the Source, the nature and ability of the Receiver, and the purpose for which the communication is made. The essence of language in communication is to create meanings, without which communication is meaningless. The purpose of communication is very important in the choice of language use because it would determine the kind of audience we direct our messages to. Therefore, the nature and linguistic ability of the audience would determine the choice of language used by the Source.

Bilingual Journalism Education is given in two languages. This kind of journalism education is necessary in a situation where at least two languages are in use for socio-politico-economic activities. This happens in cases where there is an interference or dominance of a foreign language in the life of a community, and where there is a need to interact with external communities with different languages. In China, Bilingual Journalism Education is given in both Chinese and English. The purpose of the training in English language is to be able to communicate with the wider world community because of “English dominance in the area of international communication” (Chen and Guo, 2004). Conversely, the bilingual journalism education in Nigeria exists to bridge the gap created by “existing

courses in mass communication, language and theatre arts (which) cater mainly for English language” (ALLCA, 2000, p. 1). ALLCA (2000, p. 1) further notes that the existing courses “are of little relevance to the expectations (sic) of Nigerian languages in modern society”.

This paper considers the bilingual journalism education in China and Nigeria. The paper relies on the information provided in a paper made available on the website – http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=19067&URL - of the Global Network for Professional Education in Journalism and Media (Journet) (Chen and Guo, 2004) for information about BJE in China. In the paper, Shanghai International Studies University (SISU) is used as a case study for the Chinese BJE. A number of other universities in China run similar programmes. For the Nigerian case, the B.A. Yoruba and Communication Arts programme of the Lagos State University, Ojo was examined. This paper would therefore consider the points of convergence and divergence of the programmes in the two countries and draws their implications for Journalism training.

BILINGUAL JOURNALISM EDUCATION AT LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY (LASU)

The Bachelor of Arts Yoruba and Communication Arts degree programme of the Lagos State University (LASU) took off in the year 2000 for equipping “students with communication arts techniques of African languages in the Theatre, Teaching, Broadcast and Print Media, Religious and other Social Ceremonies” (ALLCA, 2000, p. 2). The following are among the rationale for the programme mounted by the University’s Department of African Languages, Literatures and Communication Arts (ALLCA):

1. Existing courses in Mass Communication, Language and Theatre Arts cater mainly for English Language; they are of little relevance to the expectations of (sic) Nigerian Languages in modern society.
2. Due mainly to the defects of existing programmes in African languages, students wishing to pursue courses in indigenous Nigerian Languages, as currently handled, have been declining. Lagos State University graduated 7 students in Yoruba in 1995/96 and 3 students in 1996/97. While 11 students registered for 100 level Yoruba in 1996/97, no single student registered for the course in 1997/98. The situation is similar in other universities. There is therefore an urgent need to fashion out disciplines in Nigerian languages to meet the needs of the society (ALLCA, 2000, pp. 1 - 2).

By inference from the second point above, the B.A. Yoruba and Communication Arts programme was mounted because of the problems associated with learning and attitude to African languages (Salawu, p. 2006). The fact of the matter is that the department which until the addition of Communication Arts was only running a programme and awarding degrees in Yoruba found out that it was being under-subscribed as fewer candidates, by the year, were only seeking admission into the programme. An important point to also note here is that those who were admitted into the programme could not have originally shown preference for it. They probably went into the programme as a last option when they could not gain admission into the programmes of their choice.

The department tested the viability of the Yoruba and Communication Arts by first starting with a Diploma programme. This

programme proved successful, thus necessitating the introduction of the B.A. programme in 1997. A senior academic and former acting Head of the Department attested, in an interview with the author, to the fact that the Communication Arts component was introduced to make the Yoruba course attractive to prospective university admission seekers.

It is actually true that journalism/mass communication programmes in Nigeria have not been catering for indigenous language media (Salawu, 2003). The indigenous language programmes at LASU and University of Uyo have sought to fill this gap by adding Communication Arts, including journalism courses, to their curriculum (Salawu, 2003). University of Uyo has a degree programme in Efik-Ibibio with Communication Arts. These are the only two programmes in the country where media training can be said to be based on indigenous language teaching. The fact of the matter, however, is that the two programmes are not essentially journalism/communication programmes; they are, first and foremost, programmes in Nigerian languages which only bring in media training to enhance communication in indigenous languages and to make the 'original' disciplines attractive to prospective university admission seekers.

The case is, however, the opposite in China where Chinese, the national language, is equally the predominant language. The issue in China is to create space for English language, being an international language, because China strives for a better national image in the international arena. Hence, there is the need to train bilingual journalists who can work in both English and Chinese (Chen and Guo, 2004).

There is, however, some kind of similarity in the reason why BJE arose in both China and

Nigeria. The Journet document notes that the "fast development of China's media industry surely calls for more international (namely BJE) reporting and editing staff members" (p. 2). A similar development probably played itself out in Nigeria, but with some variation. It was not just the Nigerian media that was experiencing a boom when BJE was introduced in LASU, for instance. In particular, it was the upsurge in the Yoruba press of Nigeria that began in 1996 (Salawu, 2004) that probably triggered the mounting of a Diploma programme in Yoruba and Communication Arts in LASU in 1997. The beginning of BJE in China is traced to the 1920s, while it actually started booming in 1983.

THE LASU CURRICULUM

The LASU B.A. Yoruba and Communication Arts curriculum makes no pretension about the fact that the programme is essentially Yoruba Studies. Out of the 75 courses on offer, only 13 of them are on Communication. Of these 13, five are journalism courses.

The following are the thirteen Communication courses:

YOR108: Elements of Communication

YOR112: Introductions to the History of Nigerian Mass Media

YOR113: Basic Reporting Techniques in Yoruba Society

YOR214: Newsgathering, Writing and Reporting in Yoruba

YOR216: Theories of Communication

YOR316: Graphics of Yoruba Communication Arts

YOR317: Functional Yoruba in Advertising

YOR318: Corporate Communication

YOR319: Functional Yoruba in PR and Diplomacy

YOR320: Functional Yoruba in Print and Broadcast Media

YOR415: Newsgathering for Print and Broadcast Media in Yoruba

YOR416: Legal Aspects of Communication

YOR417: Marketing and sales Promotion in Yoruba

YOR420: Photojournalism in Yoruba (ALLCA, 2000, pp. 12 – 15).

Courses that this study regards as journalistic are YOR113, 214, 316, 320, 415 and 420. However, YOR214 and 415 seem to be a repetition of each other. One noticeable feature of the Course content is that all the journalism courses are tailored, specifically, to meet the needs of journalism in Yoruba language, at least as indicated in the course titles. One other reason for the observation that the study of journalism/communication in the programme is an appendage is that of the 13 courses, only four are clearly of the ‘core’/ ‘compulsory’ status. We notice some kind of ambivalence in the status of some other courses in that the courses are tagged both ‘Core’ and ‘Elective’. This may probably be due to typographical error.

While it is also true that the BJE in China is also based on language study, two languages, contrary to what obtains in LASU programme, are studied. These are Chinese and English. In the Shanghai University (SISU) model, separate journalism courses are taught separately in Chinese and English to the same set of students. In proportion to the language courses, SISU teaches more journalism courses than LASU. Whereas 59 (36%) of the 165 courses offered by SISU are in journalism, 13 (17%) of the 75 courses listed in the LASU programme are in journalism.

Another important observation in the LASU curriculum is that some of the journalism /communication courses are rooted in Yoruba culture and tradition. The courses so treated are YOR 317: Functional Yoruba in

Advertising, YOR 319: Functional Yoruba in Public Relations and Diplomacy, and YOR 320: Functional Yoruba in Print and Broadcast Media. YOR 317 is described thus:

The aim of the course is to give students indepth knowledge of the use of Yoruba advertisement – traditional system of goods-display among the Yoruba, hawking slogans among the Yoruba; use of oriki, Ifa etc. for sales promotion; advertisement in Yoruba on the radio and television, billboards as a medium of advertising in Yoruba; advertising in Yoruba in newspapers, magazines etc, obituaries in Yoruba (ALLCA, 2000, p. 22).

YOR 319 has the following description:

Students would have been imbibed (sic) with the traditional and modern modes of diplomacy and effective public relations among the Yoruba – diplomatic processes in traditional Yoruba society, idioms etc. associated with Yoruba diplomacy; modern aspects of Public Relations in Yoruba social and business life (ALLCA, 2000, p. 23).

For YOR 320, the description goes thus:

The course aims at equipping students with working knowledge of Yoruba language in various media houses – news reading in Yoruba on the radio and television; programmes presentation in Yoruba on radio and television; oral and spoken Yoruba; journalistic writings in Yoruba; aspects of audio/visual Yoruba in print and broadcast media (ALLCA, 2000, pp. 23 - 24).

PEDAGOGY

The language of instruction in the LASU programme is Yoruba. However, because of difficulty in one-to-one translation of communication and media concepts from English to Yoruba, instructions are given, especially at the lower level, in bilingual form (English and Yoruba). The instructors/lecturers are bilingual; they therefore teach in both English and Yoruba, as the situation demands. In order to render some concepts in Yoruba, some meta-languages have been developed. A senior academic of the department who spoke to this author revealed that at the higher level, when students are adjudged to have been properly grounded in the concepts (as taught in English), the instructions come exclusively in Yoruba. The case is however different in China as most professors in the BJE programmes are not bilingual. Some are only proficient in English, while some others are only proficient in Chinese. The students are also not bilingual (they are only proficient in Chinese) and there is usually a problem when they have to be taught and examined by professors who are only proficient in English.

The Yoruba/Communication students in LASU have an advantage in this area because English is the principal mode of instruction in Nigeria, from the upper primary school right through secondary and into the university (FRN, 1981). Again, for all the courses in the university, including the indigenous languages, a credit pass in English Language in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination is compulsory for admission. In addition, Use of English is a compulsory subject for all Universities Matriculation Examination candidates in Nigeria (See the brochures of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board for the UME). So, the students in the LASU can be said to be effectively bilingual and therefore are not expected to have any problem with either of

English and Yoruba used in the bilingual pedagogy.

Similarly, since the lecturers are also products of the same system described above, they are also bilingual. One other merit of the LASU programme is that the lecturers (either full-time or part-time) have competence, though to varying degrees, in both Yoruba Studies and Journalism/Communication Arts. All of them have first and, in some cases, higher degrees in Yoruba. They later went ahead to do either a Master's degree in Communication Arts or a Post-Graduate Diploma in Journalism. One of them who did a PhD in Yoruba actually gave some attention to the study of Yoruba newspapers in his thesis. The scenario painted here for LASU is not quite the same in some universities running BJE in China. Some of these universities are said to have oversimplified the programmes by simply inviting "Chinese professors to teach Chinese journalism courses and English teachers to teach English classes" (Chen and Guo, 2004). The Journet document notes: "This is more translation than BJE, instead of a nice combination between linguistic and journalistic skills".

Another area to consider is the nature of instructional materials used in BJE. In the LASU programme, the texts used are the same as those used in English language Journalism/Communication Schools. The senior academic who spoke to this author however said there are plans to develop instructional materials for the programme in Yoruba language. Chen and Guo (2004) say this of the BJE teaching materials in China:

Teaching materials for BJE always have to be updated for effective teaching, however, (sic) most BJE programs in China lack effective access to update their teaching materials from English-speaking

countries. Students could hardly afford to buy textbooks and new textbooks are often not available. Moreover, few English periodicals, newspapers and academic journals are available on most Chinese campuses. Therefore, BJE professors are often restrained from finding latest materials and research, which hinders their teaching quality and their research activities (sic) (Chen and Guo, 2004).

The picture painted of BJE teaching materials in China is not quite different from what obtains in Nigeria, not only for the BJE programme, but also most parts of the system.

MARKET VALUE OF BJE PRODUCTS

The Journet paper gave a cheering picture of the acceptance of BJE graduates for job placement in China. They are in high demand because of their ability to communicate in English language. They are not only sought after in media establishments, they are also in high demand for corporate affairs jobs in banks and foreign firms. Similarly, the LASU senior academic staff interviewed remarked that the graduates of the LASU programme are generously absorbed in Yoruba language newspaper establishments and in the Yoruba section of broadcast stations. A senior manager in one of the Yoruba language newspaper establishments corroborated this and added that the products of the programme do perform well on the job. He also added that many of the products of the programme used to be staff of radio stations before they enrolled in the programme. The LASU academic further claimed that the graduates of the programme have a dual advantage of being able to work in both English and Yoruba media.

CHALLENGES

A major challenge facing the LASU programme is that students would want to receive their journalism/communication instructions in English language as against the indigenous language policy of the department. Another one is that students would prefer to focus just on the Yoruba Studies in the programme of the department, and after graduation, enter for graduate programmes in Journalism and Mass Communication. A conjecture from this is that the students probably feel they cannot receive proper or standard journalism/mass communication training in the Yoruba and Communication Arts programme. Rather, they would prefer to just study Yoruba without interference or distraction at the undergraduate and then after graduation go ahead to enroll in journalism/mass communication school or department for a graduate training.

The challenges for BJE in China include those that have already been mentioned, such as: lack of bilingual professors, oversimplification of BJE programmes, and lack of updated teaching materials and resources.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Because of Nigeria's historical fact which has made English to be the official language and the language of the media; it is not possible for Nigeria to wish away English language, more so because it is a major linguistic mode that connects the diverse ethnic groups within the country. It is also a major vehicle of interactions with the rest of the world. Nevertheless, our languages cannot be allowed to die. People who appreciate culture still relish having communication in their language. For this, the paper advocates that every Nigerian journalist and every other journalist whose social reality is similar to what obtains should

at least be bilingual, that is being able to effectively operate in his own native language and a language of wider communication. While it is not out of place for a journalist to be global in orientation and application, thereby equipping himself with proficiency in a very international language like English, it will, however, be out of place for him if he is not able to, effectively, communicate with his own very people in their own language. Hence, there is a need for Bilingual Journalism Education.

Rather than having (indigenous) language curriculum creating room for journalism (as the case is with the LASU model), this paper would advocate journalism curriculum creating room for indigenous languages and the media using them. If the goal of such a programme is to produce graduates who can function as graduates, then it should be the concern of Journalism programmes, emphasizing the learning of target languages, to train such journalists. A way to do this is for our journalism curriculum and admission requirements to give premium to our indigenous languages. As at present, no mainstream journalism/mass communication programme in Nigerian universities is doing this. The only language that is required for admission is English (Salawu, 2003).

Journalism/Mass Communication programmes should also design special courses on indigenous language media covering their history, developments, contents, graphics and designs, writing styles, management, developmental purpose (for health, education, agriculture, democracy

etc.) etc. Practical work should also be involved in such courses. This would enable students gather, write and edit stories as well as canvass and collect adverts for an indigenous language newspaper or magazine, which they would produce. Broadcast programmes can also be produced in such courses (Salawu, 2003).

Despite all said, this paper commends the efforts of the LASU Department of ALLCA in combining Communication Arts with Yoruba Studies. We believe mainstream journalism/mass communication programmes will have a lot to learn from the LASU programme. There is no gainsaying in the fact that BJE is very desirable especially in the African context. One of the points considered in a recent effort of the UNESCO in defining 'potential centres' of excellence in African journalism training has to do with whether the institution's training promotes fluency in national language as well as multi-lingual journalistic competency, given the rich diversity of languages on the continent.

While BJE in China has started with a good step by being rightly located in Journalism programmes, lapses already identified need to be plugged. Some of the lapses are fundamental and could ruin the essence of the programmes. Again, China has to be very careful with the spread of a foreign language. While it is desirable to be able to work in an international language, proper language planning would do well to ensure that the national language is not emasculated, as it is the case on the African continent.

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