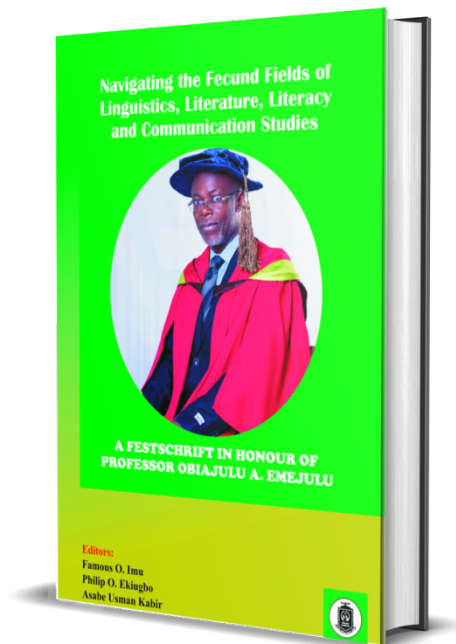


## **Navigating the Fecund Fields of Linguistics, Literature, Literacy and Communication Studies: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Obiajulu A. Emejulu**



### **Editors:**

Famous O. Imu, Philip O. Ekiugbo and Asabe Usman Kabir

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## Chapter Twenty-One

### Assessing the Role of Indigenous Language Advertisement in the Promotion of Nigerian Languages

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to argue that using the indigenous Nigerian languages in advertising is part of the avenues to promote them. Nigerian languages are in urgent need of promotion both to the speakers and non-speakers, as it can create language awareness. This also has implications for reversing or reducing the endangerment status of the languages. Accordingly, this paper aims to identify how advertising in indigenous Nigerian languages can be used to promote both the minor and major Nigerian languages. The objectives of the study include identifying the need for advertising in the indigenous Nigerian languages and the challenges faced by advertisers using indigenous languages. The study employs historical and case study designs where reports on advertising in Indigenous languages were randomly examined. The findings show that although advertising using Indigenous languages has some challenges, which include the fact that some of the consumers may not understand the message, there is still the need to continue to advertise products in Indigenous languages.

#### Background to the study

The language used in an advertisement can significantly impact how the audience perceives the message, engages with the content, and ultimately responds to the call to action. This impact can be attributed to several factors such as the use of local idioms, slang, or cultural references that can make the advertisement more relatable to the target audience. The choice of language in advertisements is also crucial as it shapes the audience's perception, emotional response, and willingness to engage with the product. Thus, understanding the audience's cultural context, demographic specifics, and psychological triggers allows advertisers to craft messages that resonate more deeply and effectively, ultimately driving the desired outcomes.

Human language is unique as a means of communication (Bonvillain 2000). This is because it is an effective means of passing Information. However, it is only when the information expressed by the speaker is understood by the hearer, that communication is said to have taken place. This underscores the essence of choosing a more relatable language in advertising.

Advertisement is an important aspect of a product. It is the public promotion of a product, service, or brand through various media channels with the intent to inform, persuade, and remind consumers to take some form of action, usually purchasing or engaging with the promoted item. Production (of goods and services) can be said to be complete only when such goods or services are made known to the public and consumed. Thus, likely consumers must be communicated about the product. However, for communication to have taken place, the communicator must use appropriate language that should be understood by the entire society. Every society uses an indigenous language which forms part of their culture. This indigenous language is used to convey messages by the Indigenes amongst themselves. The indigenous languages are a means of interaction and form the basics for socialization (Nwuneli 1986).

Nigeria is one of the highly multi-lingual nations of the world with over five hundred indigenous languages. These languages have been classified into minor and major (Ekiugbo and Darah, 2022). The major languages are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages, while the other languages are considered minor languages (Ufomata, 1999). As noted by Ajepe and Ademowo (2016), the English language continues to outweigh Nigerian languages in the majority of linguistic domains in Nigeria (see also Ehiemere, Imu and Onanwa, 2023). Even though the degree of domination differs throughout Nigerian languages, it affects how vital these languages are (Ekiugbo and Darah, 2022). Thus, it is necessary to promote the languages. One position assumed in this study is that indigenous language advertisement is part of the avenues to promote Nigerian languages.

Indigenous language advertisement is defined as the non-personal communication of information, usually paid for and identified with a sponsor, through various media about products, services, and ideas using the language of the immediate environment (Udemadu, 2013). Advertising itself is the activity of drawing attention to goods and services to attract patronage. The basic aim of the advertiser is to sell, and its effectiveness is measured in terms of the volume of sales it can attract or record. To be effective, the language used in communication should be able to attract attention, arouse interest, create desire, and motivate action. Above

all, it should be able to enjoy a large patronage of the products or services. Indigenous language advertisement helps to expose, publicize, and promote sales of products, create awareness, and enlighten the populace to keep up with the government's new programs and policies of the government.

On the contrary, most advertisements in Nigeria are typically made in foreign languages such as English, which makes them unfamiliar and unintelligible to the majority of the target audience. This renders the message useless, as the value and essence of the advertisements are hidden from the eyes of most consumers (Goddard, 2002). Since advertisements rely almost entirely on language, it is critical to consider the target audience when selecting the language for an advertisement. Even if the language can reach the target audience, the level of literacy notwithstanding, the language of the indigenes is deeply ingrained in their values and, therefore, acceptable to the general population. Additionally, advertisements can align with the objectives of the populace by being delivered in an indigenous language.

For this reason, there is a pragmatic approach to advertising all products and services in the indigenous languages of the people. This is due to the evolving circumstances surrounding the literary marketing of English words and construction patterns, which have hampered the sales of products and services. Furthermore, the neglect of Indigenous languages in all spheres of human life is the focus of the study, which seeks to establish that there is a pressing need for indigenous language advertising that goes beyond teaching such languages in schools to finding ways to transmit government programs and publicizing all government activities and advertising all products in Indigenous languages which may have the potential of encouraging the use of these languages.

### **Statement of the problem**

The study seeks to provide answers to pertinent questions related to indigenous language publishing in Nigeria, such as: (i) Can we use advertisements to promote Nigerian languages? (ii) would advertising in Indigenous languages help to increase the literacy level of Nigerian languages? Etc. This is because the use of language as a medium of communication would aid the revival of the indigenous languages going into extinction. There is also the problem of dialectical differences and inconsistencies in Nigerian languages which need to be harmonized. Indigenous language advertisements could remedy this. Also, there is apathy or ignorance on the role of advertisement in the promotion of indigenous languages, even among linguists. Advertisement, with our local languages, could afford boldness in one's

challenger. However, there have been attempts in the past to use indigenous languages in advertisements, but it did not achieve its lofty objective hence the frequent resort to advertising in foreign languages. However, the reason might be a result of the low attention given to indigenous languages, especially at the levels of our educational systems, viz: primary, secondary, and tertiary body of education.

With the boost indigenous languages have received so far, especially the approval of the National Language policy by the federal government, the need to advertise in our local languages now would receive every necessary attention. In light of the above, the researchers pose the following questions: Is there any need to advertise in indigenous languages? What impact does advertising in languages have on the promotion of Nigerian languages? Why did early advertisers prefer advertising in foreign languages? What are the challenges encountered in advertising in foreign languages? All these questions are the course of this study. Thus, this study aims to assess the role of indigenous language advertisement in the promotion of Nigerian languages. Hence, the other objectives of the study include the following:

1. Establishing the importance of using indigenous language advertisements in promoting Nigerian languages.
2. Identifying attempts made in the past on indigenous language advertisement.
3. Identifying which Nigerian language is promoted in indigenous language advertisements.
4. Identifying the challenges affecting indigenous language advertisement in Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

The amalgamation of the Northern Protectorate and the Southern Protectorate gave birth to the Nigerian state in 1914 (Adediji, 1987). Nigeria is said to be one of the most multilingual countries in the world (Onanwa, 2017). The population of the people is estimated to be more than two hundred million, with minor and major indigenous languages spoken across the country. There are about four hundred and fifty indigenous languages in Nigeria (Elewa, Ukagwu, Nwachukwu, & Nwaubani, 1996). The major languages spoken include Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba languages. Some minor Nigerian languages include Idoma, Fulfulde, Efik, Kanuri, and Tiv, among others. There are also dialectical differences in both the major and minor languages across the country.

The use of indigenous languages in advertising has been prevalent in Nigeria

for a long time. Politicians, multinational companies, organizations, and religious bodies have consistently utilized the media in advertising their programs, products, and services (Chieka, 1982). Advertising in indigenous languages has promoted these organizations and facilitated increased participation in political activities of the country, primarily due to language familiarity. Advertisement could be done in print and electronic media in Nigerian languages (Daniel, 2022). The print media includes newspapers, journals, pamphlets, and magazines, among others, while the electronic includes television, radio, and social media.

The mass media has occupied a predominant place in indigenous language advertisement. Some scholars maintained that indigenous language newspapers cater to the culture and language promotion among the people of Nigeria. According to them, the mass media is a catalyst in both the political and social life of any country. Thus, local newspapers should be printed and published to cater to the needs of indigenous language promotion. Indigenous language advertisement will make the publication of local newspapers profitable and beneficial to the local and rural dwellers who are mostly illiterates. They will get to know the activities of the government and corporate organizations.

### **Indigenous Languages**

Indigenous language refers to a person's first language or native language, also known as their father/mother tongue. It is the language a person has been exposed to from birth or within their communities. It is the language that is acquired during early childhood because it is spoken in the family and it is the language of the community where the child is born. Indigenous languages are indispensable cultural legacies without which all forms of human interactions cannot be carried out in Nigeria. Nigeria has over four hundred indigenous languages, although some have gone into extinction while others are being preserved to date (Bonvillian 2000). With indigenous languages, children learn fast and continue in education. When a child is exposed to other indigenous languages, the child is more likely to succeed in school and perform better. It makes the child contribute during teaching and learning processes in the classroom. Indigenous language also helps in the development of basic literacy skills like reading, writing, and even mathematics. It helps people to improve their reading and learning tasks. Indigenous language fosters cooperation and good relationships. It makes people establish relationships needed for peace, harmony and good neighbourliness.

Language and Advertising Language and advertising are closely correlated.

Umeogu (2013) noted that language provides information to individuals in their daily activities, serving as a guide. Advertising is about informing people about the existence of a product or service. Communicating a message in a language familiar to consumers or the public emphasizes the importance of the message and reinforces cultural values. Udamazu (2013) stressed that effective communication requires addressing the audience, making it essential to use the listener's native language. Adekunle (1990) agreed, stating that language is integral to social interactions, adapting to the socio-cultural context to serve the community. Similarly, this notion, that advertising language influences behavior in various domains, including politics, business, and consumption. Udemadu (2013) observed that consumers readily recognize advertising language, which often innovates by forming new words and facilitates communication between language groups. Cook (2001) emphasized the significance of indigenous language in advertising, as it helps people easily comprehend the details and messages conveyed in advertisements.

### **Methodology**

The study's design incorporated descriptive and case study methodologies. The authors outlined the various roles and methods of disseminating messages to the public. Such methods included newspapers, radio broadcasts, television sets, and journals. The population and sample for the study were selected from these indigenous mass media sources. The study employed qualitative analysis, utilizing library sources, with the findings presented through simple descriptions.

### **Results**

#### **1. What are the needs of indigenous language advertisements in Nigeria?**

Based on our literature review, experts and authors emphasized the necessity of advertising in indigenous languages due to their immediate relevance to the community. For instance, they highlighted the importance of using the community's indigenous language for disseminating development messages. They argued that the indigenous language of any community is most suitable for conveying messages to that community. Additionally, Chieka (1982), and Daniel (2022) suggested that messages reach communities more effectively when communicated in their indigenous languages rather than foreign languages.

#### **2. What are the previous attempts at indigenous language advertising in Nigeria?**

The attempt to advertise goods and services commenced with the establishment of



radio stations, television networks, newspapers, and forums in Nigeria, during the struggle for independence led by nationalists seeking support for the cause. For instance, the establishment of the West African Pilot by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe contributed to the political independence movement. Similarly, the establishment of a television station by the Western Region government in Ibadan also played a significant role, adding colour to political awareness. The establishment of newspapers in Nigeria during this period significantly contributed to political awareness. There is no denying that the establishment of newspapers in Nigeria during this period facilitated indigenous language advertisement in Nigeria. It helped to transform the political and social landscape of Nigeria at that moment in our political history. To date, the mass media continues to have a positive impact on the socio-economic lives of the Nigerian people.

3. What are the Nigerian languages that were promoted using indigenous language advertisements?

According to some sources, the Hausa language has had the highest number of publications in any language for over fifty years. These publications comprised indigenous language advertisements, also in the Hausa language. Yoruba an indigenous language was second, with a total of forty-eight publications including advertisements, while Igbo had eight publications in 1960.

4. What are the challenges facing indigenous language advertisement in Nigeria?

The people of Nigeria inherited English as an official language at Independence. This adoption of the English language negatively affected the use of indigenous languages in advertising products and services. However, the following factors have posed serious challenges to indigenous language advertisements:

1. Low patronage. Since the English language is used to print newspapers and forums, many advertisements are made in English (Nwachukwu, 2005).
2. Additionally, the elites do not encourage their children to read and write in their mother tongue. The educated class encourages their children to listen to news and programs in English and read newspapers and magazines published in English.
3. Many indigenous and minority languages do not have the orthography and sufficient representation in public advertising. Even in major languages, some lack syntactic and semantic expressions (Udemadu, 2004).
4. Many of Nigeria's indigenous languages are not documented, making it



difficult for speakers to read, write, and understand them.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

Undoubtedly, indigenous language advertisement can contribute in a significant way towards promoting our various mother tongues (Nwachukwu, 2005). Our findings strongly support the idea that using indigenous languages in advertising would facilitate language learning and improve the accessibility of products and services to all communities. Additionally, our findings indicate that utilizing various media platforms such as radio, television, and newspapers for advertising in Indigenous languages is more effective than using foreign languages (Cook, 2001; Ndukwe, 2009; Udemadu, 2011). The failure of governments, companies, and organizations to utilize indigenous languages in advertising their programs, products, and services has resulted in misconceptions about government policies and programs, as well as low sales and weak patronage by customers (Nwachukwu, 2005). Furthermore, our results demonstrate that advertisements in indigenous languages exhibit greater cultural suitability and appear to be more persuasive and appealing than advertisements in English.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study revealed the importance of indigenous language advertising in promoting local languages in Nigeria. Scholars and researchers agree that advertisements made in Indigenous languages achieve their main objectives because they reach the targeted audience faster with messages and information. We also discovered that prominent programs and companies receive less patronage when advertisements are made in foreign languages. Therefore, we recommend the following:

1. Radio stations should prioritize making their advertisements in indigenous languages.
2. The government should produce all their jingles in indigenous languages and encourage the publication of newspapers and journals in indigenous languages for advertising purposes.
3. Companies, organizations, and individuals should advertise their products and services in indigenous languages to ensure better understanding by the people.
4. Government should make the teaching and learning of indigenous languages compulsory at all levels of education.

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