CHALLENGES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL NIGERIAN ENVIRONMENT

Christian Okey Nwaiwu
Department of Languages
Akanu-Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana Afikpo, Ebonyi State
Email: christiannwaiwu16@gmail.com

Abstract

Challenges of Effective Communication in the Digital Nigerian Environment is an exposition on how the advent of new technologies and subsequent emergence of on-line communication impacted on the writing efforts of the average Nigerian. Prior to the coming of the new digital writing, written communication was carried out through the traditional physical and mental method. This medium however, is cumbersome and time-consuming and hence it is identified as one of the inadequacies of traditional communication. The glamour and glitter of the new on-line communication especially among the youths is however, a source of worry to many and the concern of this paper. Using interview and excerpts of internet publications, the paper examines the concept of digital communication in Nigeria's environment. It identifies the values and challenges of on-line communication, discusses excerpts of on-line written communication as culled from the websites and comments on how on-line communication has impacted on the written communication of the average Nigerian. The paper concludes that the new medium of communication be embraced with caution as the nation works towards joining the global community in this digital age.

Keywords: Effective Communication, Digital, Nigerian Environment, Trditional, Physical and Mental Method.

Introduction

Communication is sine qua non in one's individual and collective existence. It is necessary for the completeness of society. Communication enables one to reach out and co-operate with others in the society. It equally helps in the facilitation and induction of the young into the adult society. According to Obi, I. Vitus and Chris Nwaiwu, communication is the passing on "feelings, thoughts, information, ideas, values, attitudes, skills etc" from an encoder to the decoder (14). Little, P. believes that this can be effective with the help of "an agreed symbol"(12); that is using the appropriate symbol and language as tools. Without a language that is commonly shared and understood codes, symbols or signs that are familiar to the reading audiences (decoders), such communication would be difficult if not impossible and hence, prone to criticism and rejection. Communication can take the forms of verbal and non-verbal devices. However, this will be delimited to the verbal form of on-line writing and how it has impacted on effective communication.

Communication in a Digital Environment

A digital environment is a society that has embraced and cued to the modern technological style of communication through the new media (Njoku, Steve, 3). The emergence of personal computers and mobile phones is a development that has had great positive impact on global communication. (The World Book Encyclopedia, 890; Neiss and Gershon, 22). Njoku was of the view that the new world order of the Information Communication Technology (I.C.T) has made the modern society amazingly sophisticated and hence the use of physical and mental abilities to perform tasks, including communication, has radically shifted to the use of electro-mechanical devices (2).

Invariably, the challenges to live up to the new world order has given way to globalization, a situation where the entire world is unified into one small village with common socio-economic, political, cultural and educational (linguistic) systems. It is not surprising that the new digital method of communication, has spread so fast within a short period of time when viewed from the angles of the attraction it has on the average Nigerian and the excitement with which the youths embrace it. This way, the new digital communication has helped to revolutionalise the entire universe. Odowu, Fred asserts that in Nigeria, digital communication was not heard of until the twilight of the 21st century(9). At present however, there is no facet of the nation's human endeavour that is not glued to digital communication.

The internet, computer, mobile phone and array of other social media available in I.C.T have become a source of excitement to the average Nigerian. Writing on the influence of Mass Madia on the academic performance of secondary school students on Okigwe Metropolitan City of Imo state, Obah, C. Godwin argued that the Nigerian youth generally and students in particular are so glued to the media that they regard any information in print, electronic and on-line as models(2). This is because Ifechelobi, Jane sees the media as "influential users of the English language" and hence the media "suggest and participate in determining standards of correctness(52). Invariably, the new on-line media has not helped matters as regard effective communication. The new media style has increased the zeal of a typical Nigerian to now read and write (communicate) through browsing the internet, using the google, facebook, twitter, whatsApp and other electronic texting of messages which in most cases, are not in tandem with appropriate style of communication. This is because we want to

live up to the dictates of the new world order. Njoku sees this development though as commendable because

> the recent new world order has made it such that onlysocieties with the right information, skill and attitudes can be part of the world of automation as building of skyscrapers, jets, robots, underground rail, military arsenals etc. cannot happen throughchance. (12)

Collaborating this statement, Ezenwa-Ohaeta N, contained that the dynamic nature of the society and results of recent researches suggest the need for the "transformation from industrial to information age (1). Recently, the Transparency International came up with an assessment of tertiary institutions in Nigeria using quality of research and I.C.T compliance, among other criteria, to rate the best institutions among Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities. The implication here is that Nigeria cannot be left behind in the glamour and glitter of the new communication. However, the excesses of the average Nigerian, especially the youths, in embracing the new digital development and the attendant negative effect the action has caused on effective communication is a source of worry.

That the average literate Nigerian can no longer communicate effectively and functionally has been attributed to the craze for I.C.T and its subsidiaries. It is important to state that effective communication is a function of appropriate use of language and style. If we recall that the media have been identified as influential users of the English language and if it is no longer in doubt that people look up to the media as conveyors of correct and standard forms of English (Ifechelobi, 52), we will understand why on-line digital style of communication is fast becoming a norm in the country.

Methodology

To obtain the data for this study, a randomly selected staff and students of Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana were interviewed. In addition, excerpts of text messages and similar writings culled from the internet were examined and discussed.

Findings

Result of findings of this work show that the challenges encountered border on general and technical issues. The general challenges include epileptic power supply, occasional poor network problem and high cost of internet accessories like the Modem, Flash drive, and Mobile phone/computer laptops used for browsing. On the other hand, the technical challenges are specifically linguistic as can be confirmed from excerpts culled from the internet.

Values of Digital Communication

Digital communication by way of on-line interaction has a number of immeasurable values. According to Gambo, Ahmed, the emergence of the personal computers in the 1960s made a great positive impact on pedagogy. He identified four areas in which the personal computer has positively affected teaching and learning to include volume, speed, tone and accuracy (3). In general, the on-line communication through the social media is an innovation that has been embraced with enthusiasm (Weiss and Gerhson in Njoku, 18, Encyclopedia Americana, 114). The satellite now links the radio, T.V, internet and many others, and hence communication has become simplified. The internet and related network of computers have made the World Wide Web (www) a reality. The immeasurable benefit of the internet has made many to see it as the "super highway" and hence the belief that anyone who is out of the internet is far away from the information super highway of the world. Little wonder, a Covenant University graduate recently slammed graduates who

can hardly "attach a file to an e-mail" (#newsHub8/2/20). A onetime Honourable Minister of Education, Professor Ruqayatu Ahmed Rufai, at the investiture of former Governor Godswill Akpabio of Akwa Ibom State as Grand Patron of Science Teachers' Association of Nigeria (STAN), remarked that an ICT-based functional education was the only way to meet the challenges of the 21st century. She assured STAN that the curriculum of science education at all levels would be reviewed to be ICT-driven, in line with international best practices (STAN Newsletter,11).

A number of other benefits derivable from digital communication can be exemplified in the postings in the Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Gmail and Yahoo (among others), which enable ICT literate Nigerians to communicate with ease. By this way, communication is made faster, easier and more enjoyable than the earlier form of communicating through physical and mental abilities. Realizing the immeasurable place which the new digital development holds for the country, the Nigerian government formulated the National Policy for Information Technology (IT) in 2001 with the vision of making Nigeria an ICT capable country in Africa and a key player in the information society by the year 2005 by using ICT as the engine for sustainable development and global competitiveness. The mission was to use IT to facilitate education, create wealth eradicate poverty, create job opportunities and enhance competition of Nigerians globally (16).

It is in recognition of the indispensable role of the new digital world order that the relevant authorities decided to make the acquisition of basic ICT skills and capabilities part of the national minimum standards for Teachers education. This is because the teaching profession is a communication one. These

are clearly stated in the National Minimum Standards of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE 2000), the National Universities Commission (NUC 2004), Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN 1993). Implicit of all these is that the era has gone when Nigerians cannot afford not to communicate digitally. Every literate Nigerian is now expected not just to be computer literate, but to be able to prove their e-capabilities in a crazy-driven digital Nigerian society.

Challenges of Digital Communication on the Use of English

Chukwu, Ephraim rightly observes that the essence of communication is to express ideas rather than impress the decoding audience "with dual or multiple interpretative expressions offering no specific message" (18). The number of language ambiguities which he identifies in his paper is relevant in this work. The purpose for which communication exist are information, education and entertainment. Humans are always communicating; receiving and giving information and creating or solving problems through communication. Humans also communicate by reading and writing, watching television, listening and talking to people. It is important that communication is made simple, devoid of any ambiguity that may send false signal to the decoder or result in any form of misunderstanding. Simplicity and concreteness of the encoder make communication effective and helps in understanding a person, thing or situation and enables the communicating parties to resolve differences, build trust, respect and create environment where creative ideas, problem solving, affection and caring can flourish (www.Helpguide.org). In the digital information age, one is expected to send, receive and process huge numbers of messages which must be effective and functional. Effective communication is about more than just exchange of information. It is also about understanding the

emotion behind the information. Effective communication can improve relationship at work, home and social institutions by deepening one's connection with others and improving teamwork, decision-making and problem solving. Effective communication enables one to pass even negative or difficult messages without creating conflict or destroying trust.

According to Otagburuagu, E.J, the access of most Nigerians to the internet has made most youths to spend valuable time browsing in the internet and engaging in other communication chores on-line, to the detriment of studying the language skills for better communication(5). This goes to explain how e-capabilities have challenged some Nigerians to be lazy in physical and mental communication because of the glamour of the social media. Ordinarily, the on-line is not supposed to constitute a threat but an addition to the traditional physical and mental form of communication. A number of writings which appear on-line in recent times are fraught with linguistic challenges arising from social and semantic factors. This makes one wonder if on-line communication has any provisions for proof-reading and editing. Unlike years back when on-line communication could only be assessed through the few cyber cafes in town, the reverse is the case now because of the computer and internet facilities which abound in most homes. An ICT baseline study by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) shows that there are 14,800 ICT organizations and institutions in Nigeria which offer ICT related services (7). Abbas, Mohamed contends that "by the year two thousand, there were over fifty million internet users and over two billion users projected for the year 2013(18). Currently in the year 2020, the figure must have been over doubled considering the quest for e-communication, coupled with the availability and affordability of other e-devices.

Achebe has rightly observed that the hunter learns to shoot without missing, the moment the bird-prey begins to fly without perching (22). This is the case with the situation in Nigeria where the most important agencies dealing with students now communicate with them online. The Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB), West African Examinations Council (WAEC) National Examination Council (NECO), National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), National Teachers' Institution (NTI) and virtually all tertiary and selected private secondary schools in Nigeria now communicate with their prospective applicants and students on-line. The students who are part of the youths on their part, are enjoying the on-line experience as they get more interested in the opportunities provided by the web. How has this trend affected communication? According to www.helpguide.org "Effective communication is all about more than just exchanging information. It's also about understanding the emotion behind the information (28/3/14). Widdowson is of the view that the difficulties which users of language encounter arise not so much from a defective knowledge of the system but from an unfamiliarity with language use (67). Other scholars who hold this view of functional language include Robinson, P; Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Munby, J (1978). The challenges encountered in on-line communication can be physical or linguistic. Among the physical challenges are epileptic power supply, sporadic nature of internet network and high cost of internet accessories like the modem, flash drive and cellular phones for browsing. The linguistic challenges arise as a result of on-line digital writings which are fraught with a number of inadequacies as can be attested from the following excerpts culled from the internet which border on the extent to which they communicate to the internet reading audience.

➢ *Good character is lyk a <u>lite</u> that <u>illungnates</u>. It leaves no room <u>4</u> dark thoughts.* **Airtel Network 1/2/14.**

Comment

The preponderance of abbreviations in the excerpt above may be tolerated as it is assumed the writer is communicating in an informal situation. However the technical error "illungnate" (illuminates) obviously distorts meaning in the sentence.

➢ *Watch official Trailer. Visit* <u>http://youtube.be/tnRtor</u> <u>Deivk. sent 15-March- 2014</u>*. Glo Network 15/3/14*

Comment

The writer here must have mistaken the spelling of Thriller as "trailer" which is a vehicle that can be pulled behind another vehicle, used for carrying heavy load (Longman, 1764). In addition, the last line containing the date the message was posted contains a mechanical error of inconsistency in writing of date.

➢ *<u>GEJ</u> Defends Suspension of Central Bank Governor as over 30 students killed in Nigerian <u>Schools</u> attack. To get more &<u>enjoys</u> FREE Text VOA @N30/wk.*

Comment

GEJ is an abbreviation of a group or an organization the full meaning hopefully, will be disclosed in the body of the report since this is a headline. However, the killing of the over 30 students is deceptive. The killings reported above took place in a single school in Nigeria, that is Federal Govt. College Buni-yadi in Yobe state. It is not a nation-wide attack on Nigerian schools as portrayed in the headline above. Therefore, the expression requires an appropriate marker "a Nigerian school attack". Again, the last sentence is marred by errors of concord

"...enjoys" and absence of appropriate punctuations which created ambiguity in it.

> ➢ *Nigerian state declares Friday public holiday celebrates forgiveness day. Opera News online 7/2/20*

The body of the report reads...Governor Simon Lalong had in February 7 last year inaugurated...

Comment

The preposition "in" is wrongly used in the expression above. Assuming the exact date is not mentioned, "in" would be accepted. In this case, the appropriate options are:
....*Governor Simon Lalong had on February 7 2019 inaugurated...*

<div align="center">or</div>

....*Governor Simon Lalong had in February last year inaugurated...*

> ➢ *Supreme Court: Fr. Mbaka called me on phone and pleaded – Emeka Ihedioha. On-line News Report 8/02/20*

The opera on-line news above is misleading and good example of fake news. The heading suggest that Fr. Mbaka pleaded for forgiveness from Emeka Ihedioda whose removal as governor of Imo state came shortly after Fr. Mbaka prophesied it.

> *Read on*

> > *Fr. Mbaka equally pleaded with Ihedioha to stop seeing him as a political enemy, but a massager of truth from the Almighty. Ihedioha's statement was released by his spokesman, Chibuike Onyeukwu and made available on in the early hour of today. The former Governor said that the truth remains that Fr. Mbaka is quite convinced*

> *that <u>sacking</u> redress from the supreme court is founded on clear illegitimacy, and nothing will stop him from reclaiming his stolen mandate.*

Comment

The entire report is misleading with preponderance of grammar errors. The report shows that Fr. Mbaka did not plead but gave Ihedioha a piece of advice. Hence he report should read:

> *Fr. Mbaka equally advised Ihedioha to stop seeing him as .....but a messenger of truth.......Ihedioha's statement was released by his........and made available in the early hours of today.*

Again the last paragraph beginning from "The former Governor said....."lacks the consistency required in reported speech as the writer jumped from simple past "said that" to simple present "remains" etc while the word "sacking" is a corruption of "seeking".

➢ *Pretty Corper Serving in Gombe State Dies in A GhastlyMotor Accident*. Opera New 10/12/20.

This is <u>one of the peril</u> of serving her father-land...By the time of <u>filing</u> this report the cause of the accident <u>is</u> yet to be ascertained, also the number of people dead was not ascertained while the injured <u>were ferried</u> to the hospital.

Comment

A ghastly accident is not as serious as fatal accident. Since the death of the corper and others whose number could not be determined occurred in that single accident the appropriate word should be fatal Not Ghastly. The word "peril" is an uncountable noun so the correct usage rather than "one of the peril" is:

This is the peril of .... OR
This is one of the dangers of........
By the time of filling this report......(wrong)
By the time of filling in this report..... (correct)
The cause of accident is yet......(wrong)
The cause of the accident was yet....(correct)
The injured were ferried to the hospital....(wrong)
The injured had been taken to the hospital....(correct)
  (This is based in the context of use).

➤ *Reactions as this covenant University Graduate blasts, condemns* <u>*Graduate*</u> *from public Universities.* **Opera online News 10/2/20**.

Editorial post
This story may not go down well with Graduates from other universities especially those who went to <u>publish</u> universities.
Read on

> *"I'm a covenant university graduate. When I started at my PPA this year, I met other Corp members* <u>*that had graduated*</u> *from public universities and didn't know how to attach a file to an e-mail,* <u>*not talk of writing one*</u>*....."*

Comment
Since the covenant graduate is referring to graduates of public universities generally, the heading of this report "Blasts, condemns Graduate from......." should read
  -   Blasts, Condemns Graduates...
  Who went to publish universities.....(wrong)
  Who went to public universities ......(correct)
  ....met other Corp members that......(wrong)
  ....met other Corp members who.....(correct)

Moreover, a corp member is already a graduate and hence.....Corp members <u>that had graduate</u>.....is tautological

.......and didn't know (wrong)

.......but didn't know (correct)

......Not talk of.........(wrong)

......Let alone write......(correct)

From the excerpts in the foregoing, it is clear that the new digital communication is not without linguistic blemish. Among the communication inadequacies identified in the new digital communication include fake news, sensational headlines that tend to mislead the reading audience and contradicts the content of the story, unnecessary exaggeration of issues linguistics ambiguities, poor expressions and weak technical control. Chuckwu has rightly advised encoders to write with the intention of expressing ideas rather than impressing the decoder "with dual or multiple interpretative expressions that offer no specific message (18-19). The good news however is that there exist avenues through which such ambiguous expressions can be disambiguated by editors and proof-readers of on-line communication before getting them posted. In addition, digital communication is an evolving trend and hence it will be difficult to expect a hundred percent perfection from it. Moreover, the traditional method of communication cannot be said to be free from these linguistic inadequacies of on-line channel. Be that as it may, when the two methods are compared, one cannot but embrace the new digital online form of communication for number of reasons.

➢ Digital communication has provision for reduction and elimination of technical errors as one can easily click on

the computer or google with an Android device to check and correct spellings.

➢ It makes communication faster than the traditional method. It is faster and more convent to type using the computer than writing using the pen, paper and mental abilities. Text messages can also be sent and received in the twinkling of an eye, not minding the distance.

➢ The volume of what is communicated by the medium of the new technology is higher than that of the traditional method.

➢ On-line communication helps in pedagogical tasks such as e-learning. This is because what is communicated visually tends to remain permanent in the mind.

➢ E-communication through projectors and power point presentation appear concise, yet coherent than the traditional method of communication

➢ Computer based examinations (C.B.E) as it is now adopted in most internal and external assessment of candidates helps to check examination malpractices.

Conclusion

Digital communication, as one of the products of I.C.T, is a welcome development despite its shortcomings. Evidence abound to prove that I.C.T and its subsidiaries assist in revitalizing education generally and communication in particular, when its usage is not abused. It is therefore expected and required of everyone to embrace the new technology with caution so as to ensure that positive results are derived from it.

Works Cited

Abbas, M. Mohammed. "Current Trends in ICT in the Third World". *Njoku Steve, ICT and the Nigerian Teachers: Time to Catch Up with the Rest of the World*. Abuja: TRCN, 2006.

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart.* London: Heinemann 1982.

Chuckwu, A. Ephraim. "Understanding Linguistic Ambiguities for the Effective Use of English". *AJELLS*, 6 (1) Onitsha, 2015.

Ezenwa-Ohaeto-Ngozi. *Electronic Messaging and Conventional Communication: Focus on Youths*. USA LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2011.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. *TRCN Decree* No 31. *Supplementary Official Gazette Extraordinary* 10 (80) part A: Pps. A285-A320. 1993.

Gambo, Ahmed. "Teaching Statistics in a Digital Society. Seminar", Fed. Poly. Damaturu 13/4/07

Hambagda, O.A Communication for Management. Lagos: Mouth Press Ltd. 1996

Hutchinson, Thomas and A. Walters. *English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge: CUP. 1987.

Ifechelobi, Jane. "Language Use and the Mass Media: A focus on selected Nigerian Newspaper." *AJELLS*. Vol. 3 (1), Samaria publishers, 2012.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. London: Oxford, 2010.

Munby, J. *Communicative Syllabus Design.* Cambridge: University Press. 1977.

National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA). ICT Baseline Study, Abuja, 2003.

National University Commission (NUC) Draft Bench Marks and Minimum Academic standard: Abuja, 2004.

Njoku, Steve. *ICT and the Nigerian Teacher. Time to Catch Up with the Rest of the World*. Abuja: TRCN, 2006.

Obah, G.C. *A Study of the Influence of Mass Media on the Academic Performance of Sec. Sch. Students in Okigwe*. Research project, PGDE: NTI, 2019.

Obi, V. I and C. Nwaiwu. *Communication in English for Tertiary Institutions*. Onitsha: Chambers Books, 2009.

Oduwo, Fred. *Trends in the Nigerian ICT development. An overview of Nigcomsat*. A final   year project, Fed. Poly. Offa, 2007. Opera News. NewsHub 8/2/20.

Otagburuagu, E. J. "Literacy and the Nigerian Economy in the 21st Century". *Journal of Applied Literacy and Reading*. Vol. 3, 2007

Peter Little. *Communication in Business*. London, Longman 1979.