

Media and the Preservation of Indigenous Languages: The Case of Films Made in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Sociolinguists, sociologists and other scholars have highlighted the consequence of language endangerment. Its implication on the cultural relevance of African people explains the hosting of conferences and other meetings by culture advocates and language experts. The momentum generated by such fora and concerns expressed by stakeholders have resulted in efforts geared towards the revitalization of indigenous African languages. The mass media constitute one of the agencies that are in the vanguard to preserve the languages. The concern of this study was to find out the success of film in preserving the language of Akwa Ibom people, one of Nigeria's indigenous languages, from going extinct. It also sought to find out if the people of the state learn the language and sustain interest in it because of its use in film stories. Data were generated from 480 respondents sampled using a questionnaire, responses from a focus group comprising six discussants, and results from interviews with five prominent producers of Akwacross films. At the end, it was found out that while movie makers deliberately produce films using the Akwa Ibom language with the hope of promoting and preserving this language, viewers of the movies do not in the main profess to use the film medium as a means of learning the language and that the medium does not motivate them to develop interest in the language. Film therefore is merely a storage facility for the language. As a result of these findings, the study recommends among other things, that culture advocates, promoters of indigenous languages and policy makers should enlist other agents of socialization like the family, school and social groups, including community associations and age grades, to promote and preserve indigenous languages. Film should be seen as a complementary channel for the preservation of languages and propagation of culture.

Keywords: culture, language, revitalization, preservation, film

INTRODUCTION

Some observers and scholars are of the view that cultural imperialism or cultural dominance manifests in several ways and that one of the ways that this happens is in the way some factors combine to hasten the disappearance of the languages of some (especially African) communities (Godsgift and Obukoadata, 2008; Oso, 2006; Ngonebu, 2003). In many African societies, indigenous languages are gradually but steadily being replaced with foreign languages. In Nigeria for instance, while the languages of the three major ethnic groups may have better chances of survival, the same cannot be said of the over 250 so-called minority languages. This is in spite of the fact that one of the things that stand a society out in the midst of others and make it relevant in the global equation is its culture. Language is the flagship of every culture. Nwala and Ubi (2012, p. 111) have noted that it is "a powerful

instrument for identifying cultures, the most important system of culture and the most important attribute of an ethnic group.”

The exposure to foreign languages and the adoption of such languages as lingua franca by governments have had serious negative implications on indigenous African languages. On the other hand, the process of globalisation has meant that citizens of African countries must make a conscious effort to be proficient in European languages, to be relevant in a globalizing world since those languages are seen not only as the dominant or elite languages but also as the accepted languages of a globalizing world (Oso, 2006). This situation has relegated indigenous languages of most African countries to the background and many of them are at present, on the verge of extinction. When a people's language faces that threat or is at best, offered as mere item of entertainment of guests and visitors during ceremonies like cultural days and at festivals, the implication is that an integral aspect of a people's culture is being allowed to wither away. The indigenous language of Akwa Ibom people in Nigeria happens to be one of the languages in Africa that are facing extinction. As efforts are made in different ways by stakeholders to reverse the trend, this study concerns itself with the contribution of film in this regard

Akwa Ibom State is one of the six states in the oil-rich South-South region of Nigeria. It has three major tribes with three major dialects — *Ibibio*, *Anang* and *Oron* — which are mutually intelligible. There are also minor dialects such as *Ekid*, *Andoni*, *Ibeno* and *Itu Mbonuso*, among others. The major differences between the major dialects lie in the lexical and phonological variations in them. Generally, situational code-switching and conversational code-mixing involving the three main dialects are commonly observed during transactions and interactions among the people of the state. This attitude reflects in the films produced in the state and may either be a deliberate strategy for wider acceptability and patronage or merely a result of the dialectical influence of the film producers.

Since there is no discrimination by audience members on the basis of the dialect used in production, this study considers any movie made either in any of the dialects or in a combination of them as a film made in the language of Akwa Ibom people. Also, there is an association made up of movie practitioners from Akwa Ibom and Cross River states, whose primary objective is the production and promotion of indigenous films from the two states. Efik language, the dominant language in Cross River state is also understood by the speakers of the dialects found in Akwa Ibom state. This mutual intelligibility is the basis for the synergy between the two states. Films produced by these people are commonly referred to as Akwacross films.

Even though information is scarce about the number of films produced yearly in the industry due mainly to the fact that many of the producers do not register their films with the National Film and Video Censors Board because they operate with lean budgets, there are indications that a good number of movies in the Nigerian film industry come from the two states. With the large number of youths engaged in acting and in the various aspects of production and distribution of the films, the Akacross film industry which of course is the largest entertainment industry in the two states, is believed to be a sizeable part of the Nigerian movie industry, having over 7 million people in Akwa Ibom and Cross River states as its primary target audience.

The focus of this study however is the language of Akwa Ibom people and the scope covers only Akwa Ibom State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Sociologists, language experts and culture advocates are deeply worried about the rate of endangerment or disappearance of indigenous African languages. One of the factors identified as reason for this is the imperialistic stance of Western languages especially English. Ibaba (2004) has cautioned that imperialism should not only be seen as a political phenomenon but also as a cultural one, manifesting in the approach to language use. The English language and other Western languages continue to dominate the global space at the expense of indigenous African languages. Some observers see this as a means to further dominate Africa (Sirajo, 1999; Oso, 2006; Anaeto, 2008). Speakers of minority languages have also expressed concern about the negative attitude of present generation towards indigenous languages. But that negative attitude cannot be unconnected with the fact that English and other elite languages have come to dominate Nigeria and indeed Africa.

These various concerns have resulted in agitation for deliberate actions and policies to revitalize endangered African languages. Efforts have equally been made by scholars, advocates and relevant organs and agencies, including the media, to protect endangered African languages. In Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, indigenous film makers have delved into productions using the *Ibibio*, *Anang* and *Oron* dialects (Akwa Ibom language), among other elements of culture. Has this effort translated to the revitalization of Akwa Ibom language? Can film production, using indigenous language mitigate the endangerment of the language? Do the residents of the state learn and use the language as a result of their exposure to Akwacross films?

STUDY AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the investigation is to determine the potential of film in language preservation. However, the specific objectives guiding the study include determining the perception of the frequency of use of indigenous Akwa Ibom language in films made in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria; finding out whether the residents of Akwa Ibom State learn the language through their exposure to the indigenous Akwacross films; determining the extent to which residents of the state find indigenous films interesting as a result of the use of the language; and to find out the extent to which the people of Akwa Ibom State deliberately expose themselves to Akwacrosss films for the purpose of learning the indigenous language of the people of the state.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilises agenda-setting theory, uses and gratifications theory as well as the cultural development hypothesis. Agenda-setting theory demonstrates that the facts through which people get to know about public issues are mostly made known to them by the media, and that the significance which they ascribe to an issue tends to be proportionate to the amount of attention given to the same issue by the media (Anaeto et al., 2008). To that extent, if film makers project a certain language through their movies, it is in the belief that the public will consider it important and will likely use such a language, thereby leading to its preservation and promotion. And if such a language is facing extinction, its projection in the films may lead to revitalization.

Uses and gratifications as a media theory came as a reaction to the notion that the media were powerful enough to influence public behaviour in the direction that media workers wished. With such level of influence, the media were imagined to control their audiences. But the research orientation which questioned the all-powerful-media tradition ascribed some level of authority and independence to media users based on the understanding that audience members could make decisions for themselves. Therefore the major tenet of the uses and gratifications perspective is that the “media do not do things to people rather people do things with media. In other words, the influence of media is limited to what people allow it to be” (Baran, 2009, p. 422). Uses and gratifications theory is relevant to this study in the sense that patrons of Akwacross films may among other things, see their exposure to the films as a means of learning, promoting and preserving their indigenous language. This is important because in contemporary Nigerian societies, family members are often urban-based, mingling in schools and work places with people from backgrounds different from theirs. This leaves them with little opportunity to speak their mother-tongues. They may therefore want to deliberately use the movies to compensate for the loss. And since uses and gratifications theory emphasizes the fact that the user decides what to use, it inspires the curiosity to find out the extent to which the people of Akwa Ibom State indeed use the film medium to learn, promote and preserve their indigenous language.

Cultural development hypothesis, which is a reaction to cultural imperialism perspective that Herb Schiller popularised in 1976 (cited in Ekeanyanwu, 2010), is an attempt to encourage ‘Third World’ leaders and the media to deliberately push indigenous values and beliefs onto the global stage until some, if not all of the values gradually gain relevance and are adopted as part of the emerging global culture (White, 2001). On his part, Ekeanyanwu (2010, p. 45) observes some weaknesses in the cultural imperialism thesis and advances a position for an alternative which should “help address developing nation’s cultural needs...provide developing societies...the framework and platform to exploit the other inherent possibilities provided by the interface between culture and communication”. He further argues that communication is a major carrier of culture and therefore communication experts such as movie makers, in this case, can contribute in promoting cultural elements from the developing world.

Since nothing says that communication can only carry the culture of one part of the globe, there is a potential in the media to convey indigenous African values to the global stage just as they have done with European and American values. To that extent therefore, if the use of indigenous African languages as means of expression in movies is sustained, and with the support and well planned actions on the part of the people and leaders in communities where indigenous languages face the threat of extinction, such languages will be revitalised, promoted and preserved.

METHODOLOGY

The crux of the study was to find out the opinion of the residents of Akwa Ibom State, concerning the use of film as a means of learning the language and to that extent, find out whether the medium is considered to be a useful vehicle for preserving the language. A survey design was adopted. Akwa Ibom State has a population of over five million people, using the last census figure and 3.4 exponential growth rate of the state. Four hundred and twenty respondents from the three senatorial areas of the state were surveyed, using the questionnaire. Six

respondents were recruited for focus group discussions. Interviews with five prominent indigenous film makers in the state provided the additional data for the study.

The state was divided into three clusters and two local governments were randomly selected, after which two electoral wards were also randomly selected. Thirty-five copies of the questionnaire were distributed in each of the 12 wards, giving us 420 respondents. Six focus group discussants were drawn, two each, from the senatorial areas. They were purposively selected based on frequency of exposure to indigenous Akwa Ibom films. The film makers interviewed were also purposely selected. They had each produced a minimum of three movies in the indigenous language of the state.

Data generated are analysed using percentages and weighted mean scores. Submissions of focus group discussants and interviewees' responses were qualitatively analysed and compared with quantitative analyses from which the conclusions were reached.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is not only the means through which humans express views, experiences, emotions and expectations. It serves as well as a vehicle through which they get others to accept expressed thoughts and act in certain pre-determined ways. Each society develops its linguistic code with some sense of pride because it serves a communicative purpose and demonstrates the creative ability of the people. One reason every language is important to its owners is that:

People who speak the same language find themselves emotionally attached to one another and appear to trust themselves more than they can trust those who do not speak that language. They also behave in ways that suggest that because of their language, they have something special which others do not have (Usua and Ire, 2008, p. 96).

Language is therefore one of the things that make a particular group of people think of themselves as special people thereby placing some value on themselves. The fact that a people's language is very important to the people remains undisputable. Not only is it the most distinct attribute of its users but also, every society develops its language in line with its peculiarities, necessitating its protection for the reason that it is the only way of thinking and behaving that befits the peculiar nature of the people that own the language. Language is a common property of the community; it becomes a label with which community members are identified. It also legitimizes membership of such a human community. Thus, Leong, in Adedimeji (2006, p. 249) describes it as "the tool used to define us and differentiate us from the next person."

The emotional attachment that people have towards their language is sometimes linked to politics, especially in the African context, as we will see below. Adedimeji (2006) in fact is of the view that language and politics are birds of a feather and that language domination is an extension of political domination, while in the view of Oso (2006, p. 30), "the use of any language is related to the distribution of power and other resources." Other writers have equally argued that language is not only a source of pride to its owners and a mark of identity but also one of the things that give them a sense of citizenship. Therefore, anything that leads to denial of opportunity for any group of people to use and protect their language amounts to a denial of rights of citizenship.

Language and culture are inseparable. According to Emenanjo (2006, p. 20), language "defines and delimits the realities of culture. It marks its geo-ethnic boundaries and transmits the essential, dynamic and stable elements of its native culture." To that extent, language sign-posts culture. Greenberg (Eze and Opara, 2010) opines that language is the basic means of accumulation, expression and transmission of every other cultural value. For Nwala and Ubi (2012), language depicts the way of life of its users and therefore becomes the channel through which the traditions and ethics of the people are learned and shared. It serves as the tie that binds the people to the culture into which they are born as well as providing the link to most other institutions of culture. Therefore without language, Essien (1990) notes, individuals, groups and societies lose their cultural identities and heritage because language is the foundation of the culture of the people.

Since language and culture are inseparable, it is not surprising that in many communities people attach so much importance to language and their attempt to protect and preserve their culture has also translated to effort to preserve and in some cases, revitalize their languages. Like its language component, culture itself is crucial to the existence of every human community. The extinction of the language of any society must be seen to have a very serious implication on the existence of that society. Culture is the most powerful means of separating one group from another, yet language gives character to culture. Therefore, as culture gives a sense of belonging and pride to the people as well as gauges their creative abilities and artistic prowess, language serves as both the backbone of the entire gamut of the culture as well as the means of interpretation of the symbolic elements within the cultural milieu of the people.

Because of the place of culture in human life, it has become one of the things that are taken seriously. Owete and Bobmanuel (2016) argue that the preservation of any people's culture has always been a preoccupation. "Whenever and wherever this culture was ever threatened, people have always risen up in defence of all that they cherish" (p. 276). It is not surprising that somehow, the issue of language and indeed culture, creeps into the domain of politics, and can easily serve as a symbol and instrument for rallying political, cultural and even revolutionary movements in some situations (Adedimeji, 2006; Nwala and Ubi, 2012).

For Owete and Bobmanuel (2016), culture is a basis for the negotiation of the relationship between societies just as it defines how influence will be applied in that relationship. Thus "diplomacy partly depends on culture for its full utilization". (269).

LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL DISCOURSE

Unfortunately, in spite of the importance of indigenous languages to communities, many African languages are said to be under threat. Scholars and language experts are of the view that Africa's contact with British colonisers resulted in the relegation of indigenous languages of the people to the background. Eze and Opara (2010) opine that with that contact, African people started dropping their local languages because of the influence of Western education and emphasized the use of English language.

It turns out that one of the vestiges that the British colonial government left behind in its former colonies is the English language which combined with and strengthened other economic and political factors to facilitate new forms of imperialism at a time physical control was no longer going to be fashionable (Sirajo, 1999). By the time the process of globalization began to intensify especially at the turn of the 21st century, English language which is effectively the leading language of globalization, gained even greater acceptance and prominence. As Asadu and Usua (2011, p. 129) have noted, not only are Africans today required to have knowledge and ability to use this language, the real implication is that indigenous languages have become "endangered species that are likely to die any time."

Cultural dominance or particularly, language dominance, is seen by many as the worse type of imperialism. It is potentially a source of and reason for disaffection between communities and societies. Realising this, the United Nations in 2003 adopted a position that aimed at ensuring that people respect and protect the cultural practices and beliefs of member nations of the global union, including the people's languages (Ekeanyanwu, 2010)

THE MEDIA AND THE PROMOTION CULTURE

Whether we are looking at language as the flagship of culture or the whole gamut of the latter, people make effort to preserve what they have and often raise an alarm over any attempt to destroy it in whatever way. It is such effort or the need for it to be made that brings the media into the equation. In the view of Rodman (2006), people all over the world see the media as having direct and powerful effects on audiences. Therefore they have been seen as one of the agencies for cultural transmission and preservation. Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney and Wise (2006) observe that the media are essentially a distribution system for culture. In the process of communication, as Baran (2009) has noted, there occurs the creation and maintenance of culture. This is particularly so when media professionals produce contents that we read, listen to or watch, with the intention of promoting certain cultural elements and practices. Not only is meaning shared through that process but culture is being constructed and maintained. Thus, the media are said to supply the cultural fare, create and shape the cultural experiences of every society and transmit as well as disseminate culture that they generate in contents (UNESCO, 1981).

Of all the mass media of communication, many scholars are of the opinion that film perhaps makes the most impact in the cultural realm (Atakpo, 2006; Sunday, 2009; M'Bayo and Onabajo, 2009). According to Opeyemi (2008), as film satisfies the needs of the audience in part by re-enforcing the already-held beliefs of viewers, and depicts whatever culture is embedded in it. Film may be created as art or for social comment, yet beliefs, attitudes and values that make up the culture of the producer manage to creep in (Godsgift and Obukoadata, 2008; Presly 2010). Many people therefore believe that film has become a very powerful means of conveying the cultures and beliefs of any particular society, and a strong one for preserving the cultural codes of the society in which it is produced (Mottram, 1990; Ekwuazi, 1991; Abubakar, 2008; Omoregie, 2010).

Film is believed to carry credibility because of its visual-based projected motion. It brings real life events, practices and operations among others, to the audience. To that extent, film becomes both prestigious and persuasive and can easily draw attention and get people to embrace the ideas promoted through the medium (Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto, 2010). This notion about the potential of the film medium has actually resulted in its deliberate use in many regions of the world to deal with national issues like strikes, jail-breaking, migration as well

Table 1. Frequency of Use of Akwa Ibom Language in Films Cross-checked with Educational level of Respondents

Lang. use	No. of respondents	Educational level				Percentage
		SSCE/GCE	NCE/OND	HND/BSC	Masters/PhD	
Very often	125	36	24	60	5	30.27
Often	150	53	23	60	14	36.32
Occasionally	128	41	17	58	12	30.99
Never	10	3	2	3	2	2.42
Total	413	133	66	181	33	100

as in mobilising and in indoctrinating subjects (Ogunleye, 2000). In the United States of America particularly, it is noted that it has been a means for the manipulation of public opinion and in influencing the behaviour of citizens on a complex scale (Alozie, 2010). In Soviet Union, film was said to lead the way in bringing the many diverse nationalities to revolutionary consciousness, while in Germany, at a time the nation entered a period of economic disaster, film was used to evolve a new form of response to social and historical conditions (Mottram, 1990; Ogunleye, 2000; Alozie, 2010). In the same vein, in sub-Saharan Africa, film has been used for didactic teachings and in mobilizing populations for social and political purposes. From the experience in the defunct Lagos Protectorate of the colonial era where film was used to enlighten the people during the 1929 disease outbreak, to the early video film boom of the 1990s and beyond when film began to be used in fighting cultism and other social malaises, the medium has proved to be an effective means of addressing societal problems (Atakpo, 2006; Shaka, 2007).

As McQuail (2005) has noted, through the history of film medium, the display of didactic and propagandistic tendencies has always been obvious, though it should not invalidate the tenets of uses and gratifications perspective without a return to the field for further empirical scrutiny. This is important because it is from such tests that it could be concluded whether or not the influence of film is just one possible outcome and whether the result indicating the negotiation between the power of the media and the power of the people is another.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Out of the 420 copies of questionnaire administered to obtain data for the study, 413 were recovered and found useful for analysis. Both males and females were well represented. Similarly, levels of education and age brackets were well represented. Respondents regularly watched films and more of them watched Nigerian films. On most preferred films, 217 (52.54%) were for Nigerian films, 132 (32.44%) preferred American (US) films while 40 (9.69%) and 22 (5.33%) preferred European and Indian films, respectively.

The data obtained indicate that films made in Akwa Ibom State frequently adopt the indigenous language spoken in the state as seen in [Table 1](#).

From [Table 1](#), it can be said that in the experience of Akwa Ibom people, the language of the people has been frequently used in film production since the combination of those who favour *very often* and *often* stands at 275 (66.59 %), higher than those who only noted its use *occasionally* and *never* which, combined, is 138 (33.41 or %). Interestingly, this view cuts across the educational levels of respondents. The above findings are then compared with the submissions of the focus group discussants. Result from focus group discussion is in line with this outcome as discussants' unanimous position shows that the trend of producing films in the local Akwa Ibom language is fast becoming a vogue. Their discussion also indicates that many of the films that are created with English titles and actually produced in English language nevertheless allow the actors to occasionally code switch especially with local Akwa Ibom language interjections. Since the obvious interpretation is that the local language is frequently used to make films, it is necessary to further investigate whether indeed the people learn the language through their exposure to indigenous Akwacross films.

To attend to the above investigation, it is necessary to find out the extent of learning since it is nearly impossible not to learn anything at all about the language to which the people are constantly exposed through film. This is crossed-tabulated with age.

The data presented in [Table 2](#) show that the people of Akwa Ibom State do not learn their language as a result of their exposure to film, going by the simple majority. In terms of simple percentage, 24.70 percent of respondents are of the opinion that to a reasonable extent, the people learn the language by watching the indigenous films. Even though this opinion is expressed by a little below a quarter of the respondents, it remains significant that a number of the people of Akwa Ibom State learn the language through the film medium. This is because the total of one in every four people in this category would be the equivalent of a substantial part of the total population. In contrast however, more respondents (69.74%) opine that language learning as a result of exposure to film is to a *little* and *very little* extent. Still, 5.56 percent submits that no learning takes place as a result of exposure to film. To further probe this outcome, the weighted mean is calculated thus:

Table 2. Extent of Learning of Akwa Ibom Language through Akwacross Films Cross-checked with Age

Extent	Frequency	Age distribution of respondents					W(X)	FX	Percentage	Decision
		16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36 & above				
V. large	10	2	2	3	2	1	4	40	2.43	Negative
Large	92	10	26	36	12	8	3	276	22.27	
Little	189	33	56	61	22	17	2	378	45.77	
V. little	99	21	33	16	15	14	1	99	23.97	
No extent	23	9	6	5	1	2	0	0	5.56	
Total	413	75	123	121	52	42	10	793	100	

Table 3. Level of Interest of Respondents in Indigenous Film as a Result of Use of Akwa Ibom Language

Level	Frequency	W(X)	FX	Percentage	Decision
Very High	18	4	72	4.36	Negative
High	88	3	264	21.31	
Low	141	2	282	34.14	
Very low	115	1	115	27.84	
No interest	51	0	0	12.35	
Total	413	10	733	100	

$$(WMS) = \frac{\sum FX}{\sum F}$$

$$WMS = \frac{793}{413}$$

$$WMS = 1.9$$

With 1.9 WMS calculated, which is lower than the critical value of 2.0, it is further confirmed that in the main people do not learn the language through film. Focus group discussants were however divided on this subject matter. While three of them agreed that learning of the language occurs as a direct result of exposure to the indigenous films, the remaining three argued otherwise.

It is a possibility that interest in the indigenous films as a result of the use of Akwa Ibom language in production could ultimately result in the learning of the language. To find out whether the residents of the state find indigenous films interesting as a result of the use of the language, data are analyzed in terms of the level of interest as shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3 above shows that those whose interest in Akwacross films is *very high* and *high*, mainly because of the indigenous language, are 18 and 88 respectively. Those whose interest is *low* and *very low* are 141 and 115 respectively. In terms of percentage, the combination of *very high* and *high* is 25.67% while the combination of *low* and *very low* is 61.89%. Also, 51 respondents (or 12.35%) are of the view that the use of indigenous language in Akwacross films does not generate any interest in them. The weighted mean score is also calculated thus:

$$(WMS) = \frac{\sum FX}{\sum F}$$

$$WMS = \frac{793}{413}$$

$$WMS = 1.77$$

Since the calculated WMS of 1.77 is lower than the critical value of 2.0, the decision is that the use of indigenous Akwa Ibom language in the production of Akwacross films does not, in the main, stir interest among the people of the state. This is not without taking into cognizance the opinions of focus group discussants since the position of three out of the six respondents supports the result above. In spite of this outcome, the position of the other three discussants who support the view that the use of the language raises interest level in the films remains noteworthy especially because as we have seen above, there are those (25.67%) whose interest in the films is as a result of the use of the language.

On the extent to which the people of Akwa Ibom State deliberately expose themselves to Akwacross films for the purpose of learning the indigenous language of the people of the state, the result obtained is presented in **Table 4**.

The data show that only 113 respondents (or 27.36%) agree that deliberate exposure to Akwacross films for the purpose of learning the language of the Akwa Ibom people is to a *large* and *very large* extent. This is not an insignificant figure but is fewer than the 126 respondents (30.50%) who are of the opinion that exposure to the film with the intention of learning the language is only to a *very little* extent. Moreover, 99 respondents (23.97%)

Table 4. The Extent of Deliberate Exposure to Indigenous Film for the Purpose of Learning Akwa Ibom Language

Extent	Frequency	W(X)	FX	Percentage	Decision
Very large	52	4	208	12.59	Negative
Large	61	3	183	14.77	
Little	99	2	198	23.97	
Very little	126	1	126	30.50	
No exposure	75	0	0	18.17	
Total	413	10	733	100	

opine that learning is to a *little* extent while 75 respondents (or 18.17%) support the opinion that such intention does not exist. For the avoidance of doubt, WMS is calculated thus:

$$(WMS) = \frac{\sum FX}{\sum F}$$

$$WMS = \frac{715}{413}$$

$$WMS = 1.73$$

The calculated weighted mean score confirms that, in the main, the people of Akwa Ibom State do not deliberately expose themselves to Akwacross films with the intention of learning the Akwa Ibom language.

Still, on the extent to which the people expose themselves to the films with the intention of learning the language, the position of four of the focus group discussants aligns with the result presented above as they insisted that this is done to no reasonable extent while two said it happens to a reasonable extent.

The inputs of interviewees is considered important not only in finding out their reasons for producing in Akwa Ibom language, but also to compare their position on why they think people watch their films with the thinking of the consumers of the movie products. While the producers agreed that they produce with the intention of preserving the culture of the people, language being the leading component of that culture, they were however not in a position to confirm whether the people expose themselves to the films in a bid to learn the language. In the same vein the movie makers interviewed were not armed with information as to whether indeed the people learn the language as a result of their exposure to the films, and to what extent. Only one out of the five interviewees expressed a strong opinion that residents expose themselves to the films as a result of the use of the indigenous language. According to him, “most of the people here are not educated. They are more at home with language films”. He was also of the opinion that Akwa Ibom people born in the cities who have access to the films will pick, whether consciously or otherwise, some elements of the language as they watch the films. But this lone voice is not weighty enough to invalidate the result on this earlier presented.

Four out of the five film makers interviewed said that even though indigenous films are popular among the people, they were not certain whether that popularity is as a result of the use of the language in the production of the films. However, two of them who held this view were quick to add that even though language is only one of the cultural elements of the people of Akwa Ibom State, the fact remains that most of the people of the state especially those in the rural communities are largely illiterate, making language an important force behind the popularity of the films.

Taken together, the data presented above have given us clear insight into the subject matter. Movie makers in Akwa Ibom state frequently produce in the local language of the people as seen in table one and corroborated by focus group discussants and the five film producers interviewed. The producers confirmed that the medium is not only popular among the people, but is also believed to have the potential of preserving the language. However, the next sets of results — that the people do not learn their language through the films they watch; that the level of interest of citizens is not raised by the use of the local language in films; that the people do not deliberately expose themselves to the films just so that they learn the language — suggest that interest and frequent exposure to the films may be results of other factors. One of such possible factors is that they may use the medium mainly for entertainment. If this is the case, the study has once again re-enforced uses and gratifications theory as the people of Akwa Ibom State who, in spite of heavy exposure to films made in the local language, do not adopt the attitude that movie makers want them to adopt towards the language. Further, the outcome of the study has raised some concerns about cultural development hypothesis which many African scholars naturally support.

Such scholars and indeed cultural advocates may have shown patriotism in calling for efforts towards the preservation of indigenous cultural practices, but as this study has demonstrated, the influence of the media is very minimal in bringing it to a reality. It therefore calls attention to the type of education adopted by African societies where Akwa Ibom State belongs. As Presly (2010, p. 341) has noted, “the greatest cultural imperialist tool is our form of Western education which does not place emphasis on our peculiarities and dynamics.” The cultural development thesis will be meaningful if it recognizes the contributions that other factors such as the system of

education that is operational in the society can play. It should also take into account the need for other agencies that can help drive cultural development with the media merely complementing the process. Also, since, as Ekeanyanwu (2010) has argued, cultural dominance cannot be blamed on the media, language endangerment can equally not be blamed on the media (see also Lekoko, 2010).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since every language derives from the environment of its speakers and is applied in the activities of the people, it shapes their very existence and therefore becomes the most outstanding element of their culture.. Any society that succeeds in promoting and preserving its language equally succeeds in making itself relevant and respected by others. This explains why the dominance that some languages enjoy over others is often not acceptable by speakers of imperilled languages. In the case of African societies, many languages are already facing extinction. Sociologists, language promoters and culture advocates, worried about the degenerating state of many indigenous African languages, believed by some to be a further consequence of imperialism, have called the attention of the global community to this development. Workshops, conferences and other meetings and advocacy programmes have been organised to address this trend.

One of the agencies that have been considered to have the capacity of being in the vanguard for the reversal of the trend is the media industry. The generally held notion is that the media, especially those from the North, have played a major role in perpetuating cultural dominance, resulting in the promotion of Western languages at the expense of indigenous ones. That being the case, a school of thought argues that the mass media can also be exploited to reverse cultural dominance, and by extension, tackle the endangerment of indigenous African languages.

The Nigerian movie industry, the third in the world in terms of volume of production, has played a role in reflecting Nigerian cultural values in productions. Some of the box office successes are movies produced in indigenous languages. The success of one of the early video films, *Living in Bondage* which was produced in Igbo, one of the indigenous Nigerian languages, was a good impetus for myriads of 'language films' to be produced in Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State is not left out in the production of films in indigenous languages. Akwacross films have recorded their successes in terms of popularity among the people of Akwa Ibom State. The cultural application of the film medium, and in particular, its use in the promotion and preservation of the language of the Akwa Ibom people was of interest to the researcher. This was so particularly, as a result of the danger of extinction that the language, like most minority languages, faces.

While the Akwa Ibom language is perceived to be frequently used in movie production in the state and the people frequently expose themselves to the films, language learning motivates only a fraction of the population to watch the films. In other words, this factor is not the main reason behind frequent exposure to the films since the results show that the people of Akwa Ibom State do not, in the main, watch the films with the primary intention of learning the language. Equally, the interest of the people in the films is not as a result of the language used in the production per se. The conclusion therefore is that since the language features in films, and because the people expose themselves to the films, the medium is only useful in telling the majority of the people about the existence of such a language without influencing them to use it.

Based on this outcome, the study recommends a reassessment of the notion that film is a strong agency for promoting and preserving languages. Real promotion and preservation can only happen if the people use the language adequately (Emenanjo and Blembó, 1999). Therefore cultural advocates and language promoters should shift emphasis from the media to other agents of socialization like the family and community associations to influence usage of indigenous languages while the media perform a complementary role by simply reinforcing what would have been done by the other agencies. Community leaders and government officials should devise means and avenues as well as create incentives such as competitions and fora for interactions, especially for young people, for the purpose of encouraging the use of indigenous languages.

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