

COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

WEEK FOUR: Colonialism and indigenous communication systems in Africa.

In this lecture, attempts have been made to explore communication during colonialism and how Africa suffered an intense, prolonged and violent process of subjugation to external forces. Firstly, between the 7th and 19th centuries, the Arabs captured between 10 and 18 million Africans, making them slaves (Miller, 2002). Later Western powers colonized many African territories, firstly indirectly, in order to capture slaves who had to work on the cotton farms in the Americas, and then directly (from the Berlin of 1885 Conference until the 1970s), occupying almost all African regions (Bussotti, 2014).

Learning Outcomes



1. Understanding the functionalist theory proposed by Jakobson
2. Explain the traditional system of communication: the primacy of phatic function
3. Effect of Colonial Rule in Africa
4. Analysis of media during and after colonialism in Africa

Introduction

According to Jakobson (1960), communication can be classified into six basic functions. One of the least important, from his perspective, is the phatic function, since it is not focused on the message, on the sender or on the receiver, but rather on the situation. It is possible to say that in Africa or, in general, in non-European countries, this function is traditionally the most relevant. However, colonization imposed a new form of communication, reducing the phatic function and, consequently, destroying the traditional and highly established manner of communicating used by the indigenous people. Today, most African elites continue to use the “colonized” language. This could be one of the main reasons for explaining the current permanent gap between lay people and the ruling African classes, also in the field of communication (Bussotti, 2015).

The functionalist theory proposed by Jakobson

Communication has a clear meaning: it finds its roots in the Latin verb “communicare” (“to share”), deriving from the word “communis” (“public common”). So, in its essence, the act of communicating assumes that people have common values and beliefs, and are able to constitute a community (Rosengren, 2000).

The functionalist approach proposed by Jakobson drew inspiration from the mechanistic model, according to which communication is the transfer of information from a source to a receiver, using symbols (Shannon, Weaver, 1949). Jakobson’s analysis of communication is based on the stimulus-response theory. He identifies six main functions of communication, which are:

- Denotative or cognitive, focused on the context;
- Emotive, sender-oriented;
- Conative or persuasive, receiver-oriented, with a frequent use of imperative sentences;
- Phatic, channel-oriented, centered not on messages (which often do not have important meanings), but on establishing or maintaining a sense of community among the participants in the process of communication;
- Metalinguistic, code-oriented (Tarski, 1930), such as a text on grammar and syntax structures;
- Poetic or aesthetic, message-oriented.

Linguistics has not considered Phatic as pivotal for the comprehension of communication is due to the fact that it is meaningless. In the Western way of life, this feature can be considered a waste of time. The phatic function is not an “invention” by Jakobson. He applied this concept to linguistic analysis, but the first person to probably coin this term was the anthropologist Malinowski. He spoke, in a classic essay written in 1923, of “phatic communion” as a “language used in free, aimless, social intercourse” (Malinowski, 1972: 142), whose main function was the “mere change of words” (Idem: 150). In short, this formulation intended to outline one of the key linguistic factors of “primitive” societies (or rather, communities), in which it is more important to establish relational ties than to persuade the other, to impose a certain point of view, in order to emerge as the leader of a group (Bussotti, 2015). Only in relatively recent times has the phatic side of communication been recovered. Once more, it occurred not from a linguistic point of view, but thanks to anthropological and micro-sociological aspects. Goffman, with his sociology of interaction, considered conversation to be the key factor for communicating with others (Goffman, 1967, 1969).

- The history of Africa simply be illustrated as the slave trade firstly and colonialism or European invasion or European imperialism (depending on the approach adopted) immediately afterwards represent an indispensable milestone that framed African society, from West to East and from North to South (with the partial exception of Maghreb region).
- The key hypothesis defended here is that traditional forms of communication in Africa have been dramatically replaced by different, external forms because of the strong influence of the slave trade and colonialism.
- The colonial expansion of European states in Africa was usually accompanied by missionary efforts to proliferate Christianity and European civilization. A kind of benevolent tutelage of the 'inferior native' populations occurred that was particularly well-illustrated in Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*. The direct consequences of the colonial expansion ranged from genocide that wiped out of large segments of a population, to the subtle destruction of African cultures (Franz, 2023).

The traditional system of communication: the primacy of phatic function

Today many studies point out that African communication has its own particular features, different from Western ones. A "traditional African communication" can be considered, according to Des Wilson, "as a continuous process of information dissemination, entertainment and education used in societies which have not been seriously dislocated by western culture or any other external influence as is the case in many parts of the world" (Wilson, 1987: 89). It means that, firstly, there are many dimensions that are typical of traditional communication (such as symbols, signs, colours, music and so on); secondly, there are different cultures that can find a space in traditional communication, avoiding the attempt to homogenize, typical of the Western mass media; finally, that "the traditional system is not competitive" (Idem:100), since it belongs to the community. Communication is here a "common" asset that aims to include and not marginalize groups of individuals within society.

For instance, a strategic function of traditional communication in Africa is the regulation of justice and deviance, outside the formal, Western schemes: "In pre-colonial Uganda each society had set conventions, customs and traditions which regulated social behaviour, harmony and

stability. These unwritten laws provided a set of acceptable behaviours and controlled deviants in society” (Sewanyane, 2004: 49-50).

It was the same for Swahili people (Fabian, 1986) and most African populations: this led some scholars to conclude that the general way of communicating in traditional Africa suffered from a very significant breakdown among the natives because of the experience of colonialism (Afisi, 2009). Its consequence was the loss of the bases of traditional forms of communication, such as songs, storytelling, drumming, principally proverbs, which had “a deterrent effect of wrong-doing” (Sewanyane, 2004: 50).

The Arab influences and the first contact with Europeans provoked significant changes, altering the large prevalence of the traditional, phatic model of communication. But the great transformation occurred when slave trades and especially modern colonialism became the main factors in African societies. Here, the phatic function lost its primacy, in favour of the conative function, which was necessary to impose a form of communication on native people in accordance with the objectives of colonial regimes.

Effect of Colonial Rule in Africa

Negative effects

According to Elimu (2015) the following are some of the negative effects:

- The Africans lost their political independence.
- Some traditional political institutions were destroyed and replaced with foreign ones.
- Foreign culture was imposed on Africans without regard for their own culture. This led to the loss of the African culture.
- Many followers of traditional religion were converted into Christianity. They were made to believe that their traditional beliefs were primitive.
- Africans lost large tracts of their land to the European settlers.
- Many Africans were forced to live in crowded areas and were never able to regain their land again.
- Africans were discriminated against and mistreated in their own countries.
- Africans were viewed as slaves rather than free people. Africans provided free forced labour on settler farms.
- The African continent was broken up into political units that later became independent countries.

- People from the same traditional communities were divided and placed in different countries or colonies.
- The Africans were forced to trade with the colonial master much more than with fellow Africans living in neighbouring states.
- Development within the colonies was not balanced or uniform. It tended to favour areas occupied by white settlers. <https://learn.e-limu.org/topic/view/?t=244&c=45>

Positive effects

According to Elimu (2015) the following are some of the positive effects:

- Colonial rule brought an end to slave trade.
- Modern health facilities, formal education and other social services were introduced into the country.
- New breeds of animals and crops that could do well under the African climate were introduced.
- The African people developed the desire to control their own future and worked towards achieving justice and equality.
- Colonialism introduced a common currency which had not existed in the past.
- It introduced a new legal system.
- It brought manufactured goods some of which could not be produced locally.
- It introduced modern machines which are now used in agriculture and industries.
- Colonial governments introduced modern methods of communication.
- Cash crop farming was introduced.
- Traditional farming methods were improved through research and adopting new methods.

Source: <https://learn.e-limu.org/topic/view/?t=244&c=45>

The crisis of the traditional system of communication: establishment of the colonial communication systems

After the Berlin Conference (1885), colonialism penetrated into African societies, imposing a new kind of communication and a new mentality. A conative, directive approach was then necessary in order to be sure that indigenous people obeyed the orders of the various colonial governments. This transformation meant, as a direct consequence, that communication was used

in different manners, among which it is possible to distinguish the following three as being the most significant:

1. As a means for political and social control;
2. As a means for creating ethno-cultural unity among indigenous people;
3. As a means for looking down on indigenous people, provoking a fall in their self-esteem and proposing Western values as the main points of reference.

All these functions are purely conative, strictly linked to colonial policies and their plan to subjugate local people. A short examination of the three topics mentioned above will better clarify this characteristic.

- I. As Fabian states (Fabian, 1986), one of the basic preconditions for establishing regimes of a colonial type in Africa was the possibility of communicating with the colonised. As a result, control over communication became a strategic axis of all colonial policies. As a first measure, the colonial powers imposed the use of their respective languages. The British Empire, based on “indirect rule”, tried to leave room for vernacular languages too, using them as “a bulwark against modern nationalism”, even if knowledge of the English language was necessary in order to develop institutional communications between colonised and coloniser (Pupavac, 2012).
- II. Political and social control is better exerted if the colonisers have to deal with uniformed masses. Rules, customs, values, discipline are better imposed on homogeneous groups than heterogeneous ones. But Africa is a very heterogeneous territory. It was necessary, therefore, to draw up criteria able to standardize the various linguistic and cultural differences. European languages served this purpose; however, other ways were encountered to reach this goal.
- III. Finally, language, especially Western languages, had been used to look down on indigenous people, completing the operation to impose on them a specific, original identity and culture. It was done in two ways: firstly, by forming a local elite clearly distinguished from the rest of the crowd. Secondly, giving this elite the “right” ideology, based on the superiority of Western civilization in comparison with the African one. Many authors represented African people and culture in a very negative way.

The colonizers create a very negative image of Africa and Africans, so that, in our common language, the word “black” is constantly related to “evil, bad, dirty”, while white connotes

honesty, cleanliness and beautiful people (Idem). But there are examples of “enlightened” colonizers who tried to use the conative way of communication in its proper sense. In the Portuguese administration in Mozambique, for example, some administrators thought that persuasion could be used in order to educate native people.

Africans had to learn from the European colonizers; they, in their turn, had to use persuasion (and not imposition) to implement their colonial strategies. So, in a harder or softer way, images of inferiority have been continuously inculcated into African people. Today, a large proportion of African elites tend to reproduce this language in order to control local people and to continue a dialogue with the former colonizers (van der Puye, 2023).

African Culture and Indigenous Communication

Culture or 'the way of life of a people, their ideas, acts, and artifacts' is one of the main determinants of whether a society develops rapidly or slowly. Numerous studies by anthropologists show that the traditional values of a people are closely related to the pace with which they accept or reject the demands of modern industrial or commercial operations. Since no society in the modern world exists in a vacuum, it is the pre-established patterns of culture which, to a large extent, determine whether that society accepts or resists innovation and change and the speed with which this is done (van der Puye, 2023).

African culture is functionally linked to the popular media forms -- radio, TV, and the press -- since they played a very significant role in their struggles against colonialism and exploitation. Since time immemorial, the media have helped to rescue, incorporate, preserve, and mediate elements which serve the interests of these popular classes. These interests include not only the people's aspirations, but also those factors which define their beliefs, expressions, and historical cultural development in general. Today, in spite of modern-day inclinations, the drum continues to assemble school children in Ghana because of its importance as a medium with communal significance. Popular theater, for instance, are cultural performances by and for communities which give expression to that community's reality, aspirations, and diverse struggles for survival and development. Throughout history, popular theater forms such as dances, dramas, musical

compositions, narratives, and others have played a role in the cultural struggles of the African peoples and their development (van der Puye, 2023).

The nature of struggle has dictated the role of these art forms. Colonialism disrupted not only the political organization and economic production of the many African political entities, it also brought forms of cultural alienation, invasion, and disorientation. Control of wealth, natural resources, and cultural products were the main aims of colonialism. New systems for the production and distribution of wealth were initiated, along with mental and psychological control of self-perception and awareness. Consequently, African culture was destroyed, undervalued, undermined, and distorted. The systems by which Africans had struggled with nature and organized their societies became irrelevant in an incomprehensive and exploitative social order. (van der Puye, 2023).

Elements of African culture survived in its various languages, performing and other arts, religions, oration, and literature and depicts the strength of African culture. These elements also underscored African resistance to annihilation and cultural destruction. During the fight for independence, African theater and cultural forms became elements of resistance and the struggle for independence. Songs, dances, and ritual dramas mobilized people to understand and reject their colonial situation. When personalities like the late Nnamdi Azikiwe, the First President of Nigeria, came to Ghana to establish newspapers, they did so with the conviction that they needed to intensify the struggle against colonialism through other art forms and get the African intelligentsia-who then seemed to be alienated from their people-to see the reality on the ground (van der Puye, 2023).

At the outset, establishing mass communication was a political necessity, an international demonstration of African sovereignty, and a way of consolidating national unity. For these young political entities, the media and mass communication helped to develop and encourage a feeling of national identity among the new citizens (van der Puye, 2023).

Today, using popular art forms with the available modern media have helped strengthen the national bonds that Africans desire to forge ahead. This cultural and communication hybridization has also encouraged the African resolve to accept what is good whilst perfecting

one's own cultural dimensions. After decades of existence, the various African media has given rise to a number of issues; questions abound as to whether they are playing a significant role in new development strategies and how they are meeting their goals (van der Puye, 2023).

An early History of Radio Broadcasting in Africa

Radio has made such a rapid progress and become a fundamental part of daily life throughout much of Africa that it is easy to forget how recently it arrived and how fast it has grown. Today, radio is at the center of most political, social, and economic activity (van der Puye, 2023).

According to British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the first radio broadcasts in Sub-Saharan Africa were made in the early 1920s. The earliest recording of a radio broadcast was made in 1923 in South Africa. It was Mendelssohn's "Auf Fluegeln des Gesanges." Kenya had its own radio station in 1927, followed by Mozambique in 1933, and Senegal in 1939. But these were only broadcasting programmes made for expatriates. In 1930, the British wanted to expand colonial broadcasting to indigenous people, but these plans were shelved when WWII erupted.

It wasn't until World War II that radio broadcasting was tailored to the needs of people in Africa. People wanted local news but also information about the theatres of war where their relatives and friends had gone to fight. For the first time there were broadcasts in African languages and dialects. People in Lagos could listen to the news in pidgin.

There were broadcasts in Hausa. The distinguished Hausa broadcaster (later Northern politician) Isa Kaita was based in Accra and unusually for that time gave detailed accounts of what was happening in the region, including a description of his own journey from Lagos to Accra under attack from German U-Boats.

During the war the first language service for Africa was set up by the BBC. It was in Afrikaans and aimed to counterbalance the pro-Nazi stands taken by some Afrikaners. After the Second World War radio expanded throughout the continent broadcasting news, music and even drama. The radio became a key tool of government, and in the event of a coup, the radio station was the first stop for the coup makers, where they would then get their message broadcast to the nation.

In Africa, community radio grew out of the need to respect linguistic plurality and to ensure that people in rural areas were better informed. In *Broadcasting in Africa*, Sydney Head listed over 175 indigenous African languages used in radio broadcasting in 1973. His list was incomplete and the true total today certainly exceeds 200, but still, over a thousand African languages are not heard on the radio.

BBC The Story of Africa

https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1624_story_of_africa/page17.shtml#:~:text=The%20first%20radio%20broadcasts%20in,1933%2C%20and%20Senegal%20in%201939. Retrieved April 5, 2023.

Early Newspapers in Africa

According to BBC, the first English newspaper on the continent of Africa was published in Cape Town in 1800. The following year in Sierra Leone *The Royal Gazette* and *Sierra Leone Advertiser* was published in Freetown. Both were European undertakings concerned with matters of government.

In 1826 Charles Force, an American freed slave, published the *Liberia Herald*. He died some months later, but the title was revived in 1830 by Edward Blyden, the anti-colonial thinker and academic, who moved from the Caribbean island of St. Thomas to Liberia. This marked the beginning of an African press which was critical of the European presence in Africa.

From the mid-19th century onwards a number of papers were published in Luanda, Angola, by a distinct group of educated, mixed race (mestizos) Angolans. Jose de Fontes Pereira and Joaquim Dias Cordeiro da Matta were regular contributors, writing articles highly critical of Portuguese rule.

West African newspapers

The first African produced paper in West Africa was Charles Bannerman's *Accra Herald*, produced in 1858 in the Gold Coast (modern Ghana). The following year the first Yoruba newspaper was produced, *Iwe Ihojin* ('The Paper with the News') which cost 30 cowrie shells. In 1863 a West Indian immigrant called Professor Robert Campbell brought out the *Anglo African*.

East Africa newspapers

Africans in East Africa were not as well served by the press as in West Africa. By the 1930s the English speaking press was dominated by the Standard Group, whose titles included the East African Standard (originally The African Standard started by the Asian journalist A. M. Jeevanjee), The Mombasa Times, the Tanganyika Standard and the Uganda Argus.

The African run-press in East Africa took off in the 1920s and 1930s. One of the earliest known newspapers in an African language was Sekanyola, published in 1920, written in Luganda and aimed at the Baganda in Uganda and Kenya.

South Africa

In South Africa, the first African edited paper was Isigidimi Sama Xhosa. It came out in 1876 with the backing of the Lovedale missionary press. One of its editors, John Tengo Jabavu, a devout Methodist and Pan Africanist, who was educated in Britain and America, then went on to publish and edit Imvo Zabantsundu in 1884. This was a bilingual paper with an English and Xhosa speaking readership.

In 1903, John L. Dube, later to be President of the ANC, published Ilanga Lase Natal. Once the ANC became established as the leading opponent to white rule, it voiced its concerns primarily through the publication Abantu Batho. It survived attempts to close it down by the authorities, but finally folded for financial reasons.

The fortunes of the African press in South Africa reflected the slow and uneven march towards segregation and the loss of rights experienced by black South Africans.

BBC The Story of Africa

https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1624_story_of_africa/page16.shtml Retrieved April 5, 2023.

Early History of Television in Africa

According to Zimbo Jam Network, it states that although the birth of TV broadcasting is widely known – 1936 in Europe, 1939 in North America – the evolution of TV in Africa is less well known. It is said the establishment of a Moroccan television station in 1954 marked the beginning of the television age in Africa, while others maintain that the first terrestrial television broadcast signals on the continent occurred on October 31, 1959, sent out by the Western Nigeria Television Service.

Zimbabwe's first broadcasts came in November 1960, when black and white programming started in Harare. This was followed soon afterwards by broadcasts in other parts of the then Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland: from stations in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, and Ndola, Zambia. By the 1980s these broadcasts had become colour, and by the early 1990s, almost 80 percent of the country was in receipt of terrestrial signals.

Algeria, Kenya, Uganda and Senegal launched television stations in the late 1950s and early to mid-60's, but some countries like South Africa and Cameroon TV stations until the 1970s and 1980s. Nigeria was a front-runner in introducing news and specific genres of content too. Nigerian Television – now known as the Nigerian Television Authority – started with a takeover of regional television stations in 1976 by the then Nigerian military authorities, and became the mouthpiece of the government. News programming was the bedrock of government's plan to forge national unity, and the scripted news was introduced by this monopoly in the late 70s.

The New Form of Colonialism in Africa

According Onimode (1981), he stated that in most parts of the region, the British, French, Portuguese and Spanish meticulously cultivated a domestic petty bourgeoisie consisting of tribal chiefs, businessmen, labour leaders, lawyers, doctors, engineers and military officers before independence. It was to this elitist class that they handed over political power while retaining other powers, ensuring economic domination of the States in the post-colonial period. In marked difference to conditions in the colonial period, Sub Saharan Africa no longer depends on Britain, France, Spain or Portugal singly, but on the entire international capitalist system. Imperialism in

Sub-Saharan Africa is no more unilateral but multilateral (Domatob, 1988). Other imperialist powers, especially the U.S. and Japan, have seriously challenged the historical British hegemony, to integrate the countries of the world into a multilateral capitalist system. The instrument of neo-colonialism are import-export trade, foreign investments, foreign aid and cultural penetration. In particular, the giant multinational corporations have emerged, through the medium of foreign investments, as the dominant agents of neo-colonialist (Onimode, 1981).

Summary



The Sub-Saharan media system was born in the colonial era. Following the partition of Africa in Berlin in 1885, the colonial era saw the establishment of mass media systems that initially served minority white settlers located in the emerging urban centers. Both early print and broadcasting frameworks were affected by the different policies and approaches of the colonial powers. The use of European languages, state-biased ownership systems, and limited media freedom are among colonial media attributes that continue today. Sub-Saharan Africa's media training, policies, technology, news values, language and advertising, heavily favour the neo-colonial status quo

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