

UPLIFTMENT AND DEHUMANIZATION OF MAN: THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN COMMUNICATION

By

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Abstract

Language, man's intrinsic possession for communication can be properly utilized for the upliftment of the human person and the betterment of society. This is because the linguistic norm of every society contributes immensely to the development or destruction of an individual's character or that of society. Leech in enumerating the functions of language sees one of them as directive. This aims at influencing the behaviours and decisions of others. The phatic function maintains and cements social bonds. If language plays these all important roles towards man and his society, care should therefore be taken in crafting it to enable it achieve its desired purpose. The system of communication is the media which could be print or electronic. Social communication can also be through non-verbal means as exemplified in sign language, body movements, gesticulations etc. We are in a global age where information can easily be communicated within a flash. Also the youths who by themselves are society's future hope are constantly in the media in their quest for new information. In view of these challenges, it has become apparent that constant check and care is taken in language appropriations of a given society. This paper highlights the interface between the media and communication and how this could lead to the destruction or upliftment of man in society. The paper takes a look at what information people in the Nigeria society especially the youths are being fed with and shall ascertain the positive and negative values associated with such information. Given the foregoing therefore, this paper looks at the theories of language and communication and how they bear on the overall outlook of this work. The paper suggests ways through which communication can better society and man generally.

Keywords: Media, communication, society, man and language.

Introduction

According to the Bible, of everything that God made, it was only man that God made in his own image and likeness. Generic man stands for man and woman. In the creation of man, God called on the heavenly host and said to them, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26)

Language is one of the distinguishing features that stands man out among the whole created things. It is part of the image of God that gives man his place of glory in creation. Through linguistic utterance, God created everything. Language is therefore man's intrinsic inheritance for communication, part of man's image as a speaking being. Language is therefore fundamental in man's society for the transmission of culture – culture in all its ramifications- for the maintenance of law and order, and for the transmission of religious and political views across generations. It is language that has enabled man to live in grandeur. No wonder then why the psalmist wonders and asks God, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Psalm 8: 4, 5)

Language, as a cultural unit, is therefore a major feature that sets man apart from other lower animals. Different authors approach the subject of language from their different philosophies and orientations. Leech and Short (1969) enumerate the functions of language to include: expressive functions: that is expressing attitudes and beliefs; Informative function: it carries information from one source to another; directive function: influencing the behavior and decisions of others; aesthetic function: bringing out the artistic effect and phatic function, maintaining and cementing social bonds (p.45 – 58).

From the Leechian functions of language, one can deduce that language provides a focus for man's deepest, cultural and aesthetic experiences. Through man's language, thoughts are ordered and communicated to others. Thought can therefore corrupt language and vice versa. However the peoples' values, hopes and aspirations when positively coded and transmitted in language will uplift man but when negatively coded and transmitted will give rise to the dehumanization of man. To remain in the grandeur that God kept him during the creation, man ought to use language in a way that should show him to be noble, dignified and as truly made in the image of God; anything short of this dehumanizes man, depreciates his worth and strips him of his god-like personality. This paper will therefore highlight the ends of the negative and positive uses of language in communication.

Language, Communication and the media. It was Lyons (1979) that tells us that language serves as an instrument of communication, and as Chomsky (1975) puts it, when we

study language, we approach the “human essence” (71). In creation, according to the Bible, God made everything to manifest through mere linguistic utterance, “And God said, let there be light and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good, and God divided the light from the darkness (Genesis 1:3-4).

Language is therefore a very powerful tool in creation and de-creation as the case maybe. Through the use of language, wars that could lead to the destruction of man could be ignited. Hate speeches could lead to xenophobia, riots, arson and murder.

But when language is noble and palliative, it douses anger and leads man to the part of peace, the upliftment of the spirit, the route to splendour and grandeur. It is therefore an important tool in the human environment for effective communication. Flower (1986) captures this situation vividly when he argues that language is one of man’s greatest possessions “since it is a powerful influence on the way people perceive and adapt to the environment outside them” (p.39). He argues that this knowledge has both positive and negative aspects

Language is therefore a means for interpersonal communication between groups of people who have a shared knowledge of the language. It is not only the knowledge of the conventions of a given society but according to Fowler (1986), “it is also a skill, a practice that can be employed to achieve a desired effect (p.39). From the Fowlerian point of view therefore, the usual tendency of linguistic practices – both personal and institutional-is towards stability, the consolidation of socially legitimated areas of knowledge, modes of control and types of relationships.

No doubt, there is a complicated relationship between individual people, the structure of society, language and the world. Leach (quoted in Lenneberg (1964) explains this relationship when he argues that the environment of the child – physical and social – is perceived as a continuum; that this environment does not contain any intrinsically separate “things”, that the child is taught to impose upon this environment a kind of discriminating grid which serves to distinguish the world as being composed of a large number of separate things, each labeled with a name. The argument Leach makes is that the world has no intrinsic structure but receives the structure that human beings think it has from the influence of their language.

Even though we agree partly with Leach’s position, we do not agree that categorization depends exclusively on language. Rather language is a central part of social process, a highly efficient medium in the coding of social categorization. We agree with Fowler (1986) that, “the obvious role of language is the expression of the discriminations which a culture needs to make”(p.18), that language provides words for already existing concepts as well as crystallizes and stabilizes ideas. It is therefore true that a child learns the values and preoccupations of its culture by learning the language. This is why we

must be careful in the kind of language we use in our daily relationships with the other person, the other community, the other tribe and the other nation.

To attain maximal peace and uplift the human person, language, through whatever medium, must be structured in such a way as to reflect the noble ideals and aspirations of the leaders, and bring out in the led the positive desires of the leaders. This is so because as Fowler (1986) notes, language is the major instrument of socialization, the process by which a person is inherently moulded into conformity with the established system by beliefs of the society into which one is born. Language, as agreed by all, gives knowledge and allows knowledge to be transmitted from one person to another. Language, to Fowler (1986), is therefore a stabilizing, stereotyping mode of communication.

Language therefore is not just spoken (verbalized) or written word. Language can be seen in the way we dress, eat, farm and the use of gesticulations. To assume a language is to assume a world view. Language must therefore be structured in such a way as to effectively communicate a stand point. Language and communication are therefore intertwined, leading to a labyrinthine path that may make or mar our progress as humans, God's special creatures and by so doing, destroy our civilization.

Communication, in its simplest form, is the activities of coding, sending out and receiving information and the interpretation (decoding) of same. Messages in communication are given from a specific language – oral, written, iconic, gesticulated, etc - and directed towards a specific or general audience for interpretation and comprehension. Communication therefore requires that the communicating parties share an area of communicative commonality. The communication process is complete only when the receiver understands the message of the sender.

Communication medium may be oral, written,, iconic, pictorial, etc, Given the foregoing therefore, books, pictures, words, gestures, all communicate a standpoint, a world view, an idea, philosophy or ideology because they have got material substance. There is no area of human experience that communication does not touch and this is why it is central to understanding human behavior and especially the diffusion of ideas and knowledge of goods and services. In this paper, we are much more concerned with the aspect of communication that deals with the diffusion of ideas because of its relative bearing on the nature of human civilization.

Gerbner (1985), highlights three main branches of communication study to include:

- i. **Semiotics:** The study of signs and symbols and how they combine to convey meaning in different social contexts. It is mainly concerned with how verbal, non verbal, visual, and aural signs and symbols combine to create meaning.
- ii. **Media Effects:** The study of behavior and interaction through exposure to messages. How messages affect people's belief, attitudes and public opinion.

iii. **Message production:** The large scale organization of communication through social institution and system, the mass media, political organization, government and advocacy groups.

The media is the main ways through which a large number of people receive information and entertainment. It is usually divided into two groups, the print and the electronic media.

Through the media, all sorts of information are passed on to the public. Communication consists of transmitting information from one person to another and as Lasswell (1953) puts it in his maxim, it consists of, “who says what in which channel, to whom and with what effect? (p.84), to circumscribe the field of communication. Irrespective of this stand point, Luhmann (1990) sees communication as improbable despite the fact that we experience and practice it every day of our lives, that we cannot exist without communication. That, “instead of viewing communication as a phenomena” we should see it as a “problem” (p.87) that even though communication is a subjectless and actionless activity, that it is, “a co-ordinated selectivity that comes about when ego fixes his own state on the basis of uttered information”. (p.154)

(Luhmann 1995) To Luhmann therefore, communication is not an action preformed by an actor but a selection performed by a system.

Lasswell (1946) tells us that a message content analysis should take into account the frequency with which certain symbols appear in a message and the direction in which the symbols try to persuade the audience’s opinion and, “the intensity of the symbols” (p.74). We will analyze the content of the messages especially those contained in the music we will use in our analysis of the decadence in our society.

It is the decadence found in our society today that made Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) to conclude that man lives in culture industry with an increase in technology; and Castells (1996) argues that the modern network society, as a social structure, is characterized by network communications that gave rise to globalization. Today the world is but a global village hence anything happening in Europe and the Americas are quickly heard and seen in other parts of the world and vice versa.

Blumber and Katz (1974) argue that the media generally serves the function of surveillance for both society and individuals. Katz, et al (1974) provided a framework for understanding the correlation between media and audiences when they argue that the audience is conceived as active, that is that an important part of mass media is assumed to be goal-oriented, that individuals and the public have power vis-à-vis the seemingly all powerful media, “that the media compete with other sources of need satisfaction, that methodologically speaking many of the goals of mass media can be derived from data supplied by individual audience members themselves” (p.15-17)

If the media is properly handled the society will be better organized and our civilization maintained or upgraded but if not, man shall suffer the worst dehumanization.

The Content of Our Media: Any parent who has children knows too well, and will always remember, that these children at their young ages – two, three or four – learn quickly and retain what they saw and heard. It is therefore unthinkable, if not outright madness, for us to deliberately fill our young children with vivid descriptions of death through speeches, pictures, videos, books and songs – the other speaking media we talked about and classified as language in action. Yet people all over the world do this kind of programming.

Little (2004) tells us that young Palestinian children are forced to train as suicide bombers and their leaders take good pride in saying that the pupils are volunteers. That these children through all kinds of speaking media get constant indoctrination in hatred for Jews, Americans and anyone else who dares to speak against violence. That leaders of these young suicide bombers urge them on as their pride and joy and speaking of them as the “next martyrs” (p.13). The veiling of this kind of language is deceptive. Here a suicide bomber is hailed as a martyr. This goes on to encourage the child to build up and maintain the mindset of a destroyer, a human machine carefully moulded to maim and to destroy the human person and thereby diminishing us all, making us less human and making our world look like an inhospitable machine designed for the denigration of the human person. This is bad.

Up North in Nigeria, the *almajiris* are made to see Christianity as an enemy of Islam and those who embrace it as the cause of their low estate in life. In the *almajiri* camps and on the streets, they are indoctrinated right from childhood to hate, to maim and to kill the Christian who is regarded as an infidel, a kafir. Mobilizing these children in these *almajiri* camps to military activity is wide spread in the North. They burn and loot shops belonging to the southern Nigeria Christians and are constantly supported at the camp for any nefarious activity desiring attention. They are fingered in almost all the riots, looting and arson in Northern Nigeria since the 1980s till today. The grown up ones later joined the ranks of the Boko Haram as attested to from the hundreds of youths arrested in Bauchi, Borno, and Kano States. According to Little (2004), “can there be a greater sin than teaching a child’s heart to see darkness as light?” (p.9)

As we have earlier noted, to assume a language is to assume a world view. When the *almajiri* masters teach their subjects the language of hate and hence retaliation, they make sure that their conquest of the soul of their subjects is complete. They therefore live in the absolute certainty that their language, which is their gift to their subjects, is the very prison in which their subjects’ achievements – maiming, looting, arson and murder - could be realized as well as restricted.

The dehumanization of man through various media pervades almost all facets of our lives. Even in the music industry, most songs especially in rap music are loaded with explicit sex expletives. This is true of the music of Kanye West, Kendrick Lamar, Awilo Locomba, Davido and a host of others.

These explicit sex expletives offend our persons as God's special creatures. In Kanye West's music, his musical genius and his sense of humour are all entrenched in gutter language. In the track, "I'm in it" (Yeezus), West croons, "chasin love, all the bittersweet hours lost/Eatin' Asian p.y, all I need was sweet and sour sauce". What offensive lines, "Asian p.y; sour sauce ": and in "New slaves" (Yeezus), he gibbers, 'fuck you and your Hampton house/ I'll fuck your Hampton spouse/come on her Hampton blouse/And in her Hampton month". The gutter language runs all over his other tracks, "Don't like", "Drunk in love" etc. The lurid, sex expletives are deadening. And all these make our young boys and girls crooning and asking for Kanye West's music all the way.

In Kendrick Lamar's "To Pimp a Butterfly" one is shocked to hear such lines as, "her body got that axx that a ruler couldn't measure/ And it made me come fast but I never get embarrassed/she rolling, I'm holding my scrotum and posing/ This voice here is golden, so f,... y'all, I goes in."

Lamar's soul is in deep sin yet this is what our young ones want to hear, the culture of explicit sex utterances. The debasing of our civilization is fully accounted for in these hip hop raps.

Juicy J in "Stay Trippy" (2013) opens his song with the lines, "If you believe in having sex, say hell yeah!" The hollering command makes our children to chorus "yeah" indicating they love sex and are not ashamed to announce it publicly. And most of the wrappers lines bear the lurid lines of sex even in their titles. Hasizzle has his album entitled, "She Rode That Dick like a Soldier" and the album contains scenes of real life sex, Lil Wayne in the label, "Universal Motown cash money" tags his album "Pussy Monster", and shows that he is never shy on the subject of sex. Rasheda in "Got that Good (My Bubble Gum)" in her "Dat type of Girl" Album proclaim herself "the type of girl you wanna chew all of my bubble gum" and goes ahead to set the ground rules for anyone making love to her, "First things first – I, Sheeda, mess around with no man who won't eat her". This is the way our modern music goes. It doesn't end here for in Outkast's "spread" one notices an ecstatic, if not orgasmic feeling when his lines droop, as he tells his sex mate he wants to do it, "backwardly, forwardly, horizontally".

In most modern young American artists' song, the sex expletives continue to ring a bell. It is there in Missy Elliot's' songs, Gucci Mare's album, in Danny Browns music and in 2 Live Crew. The list is endless. Plies (Miami Wrapper) has an obsession with female, anatomy and goes dirty when on stage. "In Ms Pretty Pussy" he sings:

Or I can rub on your clit and just play with your neck/ And

let me slide my finger in that pussy just to check, aint about who
spending the most money. It's about who fuck the best. I'm a high
bitch who a freak baby when it comes to sex.

Like Plies, Eazy- E utilizes profanity and sexual innuendo to fill the ears of his audience. Listen to him in "Give me that Nut" album:

Now my dick all hard/And you know what I'm thinking/Took the
panties off and the pussy was stankin/ pulled off the drawers and
I started to begin/ I want you to taste it/Open wide now don't you
waste it....., spread them legs open far and wide... let me put my dick inside.

Nigerians are not left out in this profanity. Flavour, Davido and Akinyele's lyrics show and bear profane language. In Akinyele, the Queen rapper's titles are as shocking as her lyrics, "put it (dick) in your mouth" "pussy makes the world go round" and "fuck me for free".

In fashion, the vogue now is the skimpy tight- fitting dresses and men's clothes that lays one's contours bare to the public eye. The "meanest mini skirt" is preferred to the long flowing skirt. The "body hug" is the real thing and for the under wear, the lingerie is the preferred panties. These presentations, by the advertisers, especially Gucci, Versace, Tommy Hilfilger, transform social life of our day from a discursive print culture to a figurative one. Domains of social life ranging from politics to fashion, now fall under the sway of the reign of images. In this way, iconic representation or persuasive images have a greater impact on lives and behavior than verbal discourse and we fall under the debased culture the advertisers present to us.

Some People in France now even enter the nudist club and walk and ride naked on bikes. In America, members of the Church of Satan worship nude in their churches. Through all these behaviours, man's dignity is reduced. Man is dehumanized. What then should we do?

What We Should Do. If we hope to change man for the better, we might start by engaging on a large-scale deprogramming of our language of hate in our children, children are highly impressionable. If we start now, we can form our kids' thoughts and actions into whatever we desire. The child's mind is a tabula rasa that can take in any information given to it. The hate motif fed our children presently in different parts of the world should be replaced with love motif. We should not divide our society into the rings of "them" and "us". Different religions should be allowed to cohabit with one another. The creation of an educational system designed to promote peace and reconciliation should be put in place in our countries.

If this is done, within a short time, our children shall imbibe the culture of peace and our civilization would be maintained.

The curriculum content of our institutions from the kindergarten to the tertiary levels must be checked and audited. To win the war against a breakdown of law and order in the future, we must take proper intelligence and preventive law enforcement actions to stop the build up to hate and subsequent war against the rest of us by future terrorists whom their leaders might mark as martyrs. Proper linguistic terms must be used in addressing whatever one is; a terrorist should not be seen as a freedom fighter or a martyr. We should not lure our young ones into becoming destructive machines.

To further uplift man and his civilization, an energized, informed citizenry that is proactive in running a government at all levels must be put in place. This kind of government will nip trouble before it is fomented.

Our government, at all levels, should sensor the linguistic content of the lyrics of our musicians so as to avoid the production of trash that lowers our dignity especially in those areas where human dignity – sex, family, relationship - is involved. By so doing, the lyrical content of our music shall come to be edifying, noble and grand as found in the music of Robert Kelly, Mary McKee and Genesis, Sonny Okossuns, Osita Osadebe, Buchi and Sister Oluchi,

Our culture should stop seeing the exposure of the private part of the human person as something edifying. Nudity in all its forms must be condemned so as to save our civilization. God was not foolish when he made animal skin for man to wear after his fall.

Again in relating with others, we propose the application of the Nonviolent Communication approach to issues as recommended by Rosenberg (1960). Rosenberg argues that all humans, no matter how evil, have the capacity for compassion but resorts to violence or other harmful behavior when they do not recognize more effective strategies for meeting needs. It is our culture learned through our language – verbal and non verbal – that infuses in us habits of thinking and speaking that lead to the use of violence. Nonviolent communication should be taught our children and applied by us as a process of communication made to improve compassionate connection to us. Let it be taught as a set of values to our children, let it be made a parenting technique and an educational method. Let it be a world view similar to that proposed by Mahatma Gandhi, - the reaching of ahimsa – the overflowing love that arises when all ill-will, anger and hatred have subsided from the heart.

When we put all these proposals into practice, our society will be uplifted, boys will not turn into ready-made destructive machines made to maim and kill; our girls should not go nude on the street and our hearing shall not be polluted through offensive language. Man shall return to his grandeur because our society will be better.

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