Negotiating the Use of Native Languages in Emerging Pluralistic and Independent Broadcast Systems in Africa

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Abstract

Since the 1990s liberal and democratic reforms in African countries, competitive independent and pluralistic broadcastings, particularly radio, have emerged to provide channel and program diversity for the first time in these emerging democracies. Independent radio has become an entrée into civic discourse and socio-political awareness and a force for social and political integration and accountability. However, these positive developments have overshadowed the observation that Africa's emerging independent radio has become an avenue for corroding their societies' languages and cultures. While they have been insensitive to native languages, they are successful in domesticating the languages of their former European colonizers. Using the experiences of Ghana's radio, this article raises important questions about the relationship between Africa's native languages and the development of a true African broadcasting system. It calls for a re-examination of the belief that the multilingual character of African societies does not serve broadcasting well. It argues that a true African broadcast system that allows for mass participation can develop only if African broadcasters and policy makers address the native language deficiency in broadcasting. Finally, it calls for a deliberate and planned effort to promote the use of African native languages over Euro-imperial languages in broadcasting.

Key terms: broadcasting system, european languages, independent radio, privatisation, democratic reforms.

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Résumé

Depuis les réformes libérales et démocratiques qui ont eu lieu dans les pays Africains, des canaux de radiodiffusion indépendants et pluralistes concurrents, des chaînes radios en particulier, sont apparus et offrent une certaine diversité de chaînes et de programmes, ce qui constitue une première dans ces démocraties émergentes. Les radios indépendantes constituent le premier pas vers le discours civique et la prise de conscience socio-politique, mais sont également une force favorisant l'intégration et la responsabilité sociopolitique. Cependant, ces développements positifs ne doivent pas occulter l'observation selon laquelle ces radios africaines émergentes sont devenues un moyen de destruction des langues et cultures sociétales du continent. En effet, celles-ci ne sont pas ouvertes aux langues locales, mais privilégient les langues de leurs anciens colonisateurs européens. En se basant sur l'expérience des radios ghanéennes, cet article soulève d'importantes questions concernant la relation entre les langues locales africaines et le développement d'un véritable système de radiodiffusion africain. Il remet en question l'idée selon laquelle le caractère multilingue des sociétés africaines dessert le principe de radiodiffusion. Il soutient qu'un véritable système africain de radiodiffusion permettant la participation des masses ne peut se développer que si les responsables africains de la radiodiffusion ainsi que les décideurs politiques s'attaquent au problème de la sous-représentation des langues locales dans ce milieu médiatique. Enfin, cette communication appelle à des efforts planifiés, afin de privilégier l'usage des langues locales africaines sur les langues euro-impérialistes dans le domaine de la radiodiffusion.

Mots clés: communication audio-visuelle, langues européenne, radio indépendant, privatisation, processus de reformes démocratique.

Introduction

Language plays a very critical role in national broadcasting systems. While Western and Asian countries have relied on their own languages for broadcasting, sub-Sahara African countries continue to rely overwhelmingly on Euro-imperial languages—English or French—for broadcasting even though the majority of their population does not comprehend these languages. African broadcasters, policy makers and media scholars have traditionally failed to examine the implications of dependency on these foreign languages for the development of a true African broadcasting system. They also have failed to examine the role that dependency on foreign languages has played in the failure of national broadcasting systems to encourage civic participation in the media. On the contrary, media scholars have typically attributed the failure of national broadcasting systems to heavy government control and censorship, inadequate resources, unstable

political structures and poor programming content (Ansah 1985; Bourgault 1995).

Using the experience of Ghana's emerging pluralistic and independent radio with its continued and overwhelming dependence on English and its insensitivity to the country's native languages, this article attempts to put the debate about the relationship between Africa's native languages and its emerging pluralistic broadcasting systems on public and scholarly agendas. More importantly, it raises the following significant, yet unaddressed, questions that are applicable to other emerging democratic African nations reforming their broadcasting systems: Why is Africa's emerging independent broadcast, particularly radio, not promoting the predominant use of more widely spoken native languages in broadcast? What implications does the continued dependence on Euro-imperial languages in Africa's contemporary broadcast have on the development of a true African broadcast identity? To what extent should the emerging independent plural radio reflect national cultures and languages?

Using results from audience survey data (n=408) as well as in-depth interviews with Ghanaian broadcasters, government officials, media scholars and journalists that was gathered in Ghana's capital Accra from 1998 to 2002 and 2005, this article makes the following arguments. First, though the emerging independent and private radio have provided channel and program diversity, they have failed to reflect and promote their society's cultures and native languages. Second, insensitivity to their society's native languages and local cultural products is a consequence of the erroneous view of broadcasters that the public has a 'need for entertainment and pleasure' (Senghor 1996:97), which can be met by airing more foreign programs, broadcasting with foreign languages, and in some cases, mimicking foreign accents. Third, a culturally appropriate and true African radio broadcast can develop only if broadcasters and media policy makers develop deliberate policies to encourage the use of widely spoken native languages and promote local cultures and talents; something they have not paid attention to as they reform their public broadcasting. Such policies would ensure the ability of emerging pluralistic radio to communicate with the majority of the populace and encourage participation in civic discourse in discernible languages. Finally, this paper calls on African broadcasters, media scholars and policy makers to re-examine the overwhelming dependence on Euro-imperial languages for broadcasting.

Language and culture in national broadcasting reforms

The centrality of language and culture in national broadcasting reforms has been extensively researched in the United States and Europe (Grant 1994; Owen 1977; Schudson 1994; Thomsen 1989) and Asia (Kamin 1996; Lee and Youn 1995; Servaes and Wang 1997). On the contrary, very little research has been done on similar broadcasting issues in sub-Saharan Africa (Leonard 1996). Arguably, language and culture are the most visible and most problematic forces for societal integration. Schudson argued, 'Culture, that is, the way of life of a society, brings individuals and families of varying circumstances and backgrounds together in a collectivity with which people may strongly identify, take primary meanings from, and find emotionally satisfying' (1994:64). Likewise, the importance of language in any society can scarcely be overestimated. According to Anderson, 'The fatality of human linguistic diversity' has strongly guided the formation of nation states (1983:46).

By origin, practice and convention, broadcasting systems are very much national institutions that respond to cultural, domestic, political and social pressures and to the expectations of their audiences (McQuail 1993). Ugboajah (1985) argued that the structure and content of broadcasting systems should reflect the cultural character of the societies within which they operate. Thomsen (1989) also noted that as broadcasting systems become pluralized they cease to reflect the culture and the circumstances of their intended publics and may even undermine local language and cultural identity as a result of the transnational flow of content. Similarly, theories dealing with cultural integrity and imperialism typically have been concerned with matters of cultural quality of the media's content, its authenticity in real life experiences and the cultural task of broadcasting. Underlying these theoretical positions is a strong belief that languages and cultures are both valuable collective properties of nations and vulnerable to alien influences (McQuail 1993). Throughout the history of broadcasting development, we see these ideas deeply rooted in arguments for protecting national languages and cultural identities.

Strong cultural reasoning has permeated broadcast policy formulation, content and structure in Europe and North America since the 1940s. Discussions about language problems by parties representing regional and cultural interests were pivotal in broadcast reforms in many Western countries. European media scholars (Drijvers 1992; Schlesinger 1991) have argued that public service broadcasting was conceived of as a 'cultural lever' in the hands of European states for the defense of their national cultures. On the national level, they argued, public service broadcasting

sought to unite nations by ignoring local and regional differences and by presenting a unified national culture. On the international level, they sought to defend national cultures against the growing threat of internationalization (Blanco and Bulck 1995).

Belgium, Spain and Canada offer solid examples of the extent to which broadcasting language was a political and cultural matter. In Belgium and Spain, cultural and language concerns in broadcasting led to the development of independent Flemish-speaking and French-speaking channels, respectively. It also led to the creation of separate 'cultural councils' responsible for 'cultural matters' in the Flemish-speaking and French-speaking communities and to the creation of regional broadcasting (Blanco and Bulck 1995:245). In Canada, broadcasting began as an effort to assert cultural autonomy against the hegemony of the United States and to 'create a national consciousness' (Schudson 1994:74).

During the 1980s, several Asian countries also began to reform their public broadcasting systems by introducing commercial and pluralistic broadcasting (Straubhaar 1995; White 1996). As part of the reforms, Asian broadcasters and government officials made deliberate policies to ensure that broadcast pluralism would promote program diversity without sacrificing individual national cultures and languages (Lee and Youn 1995; Servaes and Wang 1997). In Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Singapore, for instance, safeguards were made to ensure that national cultures were protected from foreign influences. A regional broadcasting union, Asian Broadcasting Union (ABU) was created to ensure that national cultures, languages and local programming were protected and promoted as private and independent broadcasting developed alongside public broadcasting (Kamin 1996).

Unlike in Europe or Asia, African policies to protect and promote native languages and cultures in broadcast reforms are woefully inadequate or totally absent though the role of culture and language as integrating factors is clearly evident in many African societies. African societies have developed historically and continue to exist on the basis of strong cultural, linguistic and ethnic bonds. Many nations self-consciously use language policy and mass media to integrate citizens and ensure their loyalty (Tomlinson 1991). Nonetheless, African broadcasters have typically employed French or English, the languages of their former colonizers, for both official communications and broadcasting.

Prior to handing over political governance to African native administrators in the 1960s, however, efforts were made in some countries to indigenize broadcasting. Native broadcasters, administrators and

technicians were trained to take over from departing expatriates (UNESCO 1961). Immediately following independence, African governments recognized that in order to realize national and rural development goals and to reach the majority rural peasant population, radio broadcasting should accommodate native languages and cultural differences.

Thus, in the 1960s, some governments began to introduce native languages for radio broadcasting. For instance, in Zambia where there were about twenty major languages spoken by seventy-three ethnic groups, time was allocated to seven native languages in proportion to the size of language communities in the nation (Mytton 1983). Following President Kenneth Kaunda's tribal balancing policy instituted upon Zambia's independence, broadcasts in a variety of native languages including Bemba and Nyanja were added to English in 1967. In the mid-1980s, Kaonde, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale and Tonga were allocated broadcasting time. In 1988, however, all Zambian languages were removed from the general radio service. By 1990, Zambia's Radio 2 and Radio 4 were broadcasting only in English. Seven Zambian languages shared equal airtime on Radio 1, although the languages representing the largest groups of people received the best times of day for broadcasting (Spitulnik 1992). Similarly in Kenya, the Voice of Kenya (now the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation) used English to transmit its General Service program and Swahili for the National Service program. In addition, broadcasting time in three Kenyan regional services was shared by sixteen native languages (Heath 1986).

Indigenizing radio broadcasting in Ghana

In 1935, British administrators introduced radio into Ghana. Despite the fact that Ghana had about seventy-nine living native languages (UNESCO 1989), all radio programs were broadcast in English, the national and official language. However, British administrators soon realized that radio broadcasting in Ghana must use vernacular languages if its programs were to be understood by the natives. So in 1939, colonial administrators began introducing Ghanaian languages and personnel into radio broadcasting. Ghana Radio began to broadcast in Ewe, Twi and Hausa local languages. Two other languages, Ga and Dagbani, were added during the 1940s (Ansah 1979; Kugblenu 1974). By 1960 the state broadcasting system, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), was using fifteen of the seventy-nine native languages to broadcast different national and regional programs throughout the country (Ansah 1979). The ethnic languages used for national programs included Asante/Akuapim Twi, Fante, Ewe, Hausa, Ga-

Adangbe, Nzema, Dagbani, Dagaari and Kasem. Those used to air the government's non-formal radio education programs in the Northern and Upper regions of the country were Frafra, Buli, Kusaal, Sisaala and Gonja (UNESCO 1989).

The indigenizing of Ghana's broadcasting intensified during the post-colonial period and well into the 1970s. The post-independence government of Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) reiterated the importance of broadcasting in consolidating the new nation. In the early 1960s, the government with the support of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched development plans intended to expand radio broadcasting to rural areas (UNESCO 1968). Educational radio was established to promote rural education and development. Radio listening clubs in native languages were also established to increase awareness among rural peasants of the new government and its development plans (Coleman and Opoku 1968). Tudesq (1983) has explained how the use of mass media, particularly radio, for development was a highly salable idea in the 1960s. The idea of rural radio broadcasting in native languages appealed to the new elites in the newly independent Ghana, because radio permitted the elites and government to communicate directly to the majority rural peasants and to re-orient them toward the central government and its policies. However, critics have argued that the Nkrumah government's efforts to indigenize broadcasting and to establish rural radio projects in native languages were propaganda plots intended to politically sensitize the rural populations (Ansah 1979, 1988; Coleman and Opoku 1968).

By the late 1960s, the novelty of rural radio broadcasts had begun to wear off. As more and more Ghanaians acquired radio sets, interest in group listening began to wane. Many of the rural radio projects began to fail due to poor conceptualization and implementation. For instance, some adult literacy programs were ill-received by adult audiences who objected to literacy lessons originally designed for school children (Coleman and Opoku 1968). In addition, most of the early rural radio projects were insufficiently integrated into the existing national broadcasting services. Consequently, the government abandoned most of the rural radio services.

Nonetheless, radio broadcasting continued to expand, albeit slowly, in the 1970s and 1980s, because it was too important a tool to be ignored. In the 1980s, GBC increased its radio transmitters for its regional FM services. The transmitters were provided through bilateral aid in support of rural-based community education projects (Amakyi 1988). During the same period, GBC also focused on using native languages and programs in its

regional FM services. A UNESCO (1989) survey of the broadcasting content of Ghana from 1975 to 1988 revealed that news bulletins produced originally in English were increasingly translated into rural languages. By the late 1970s, news on GBC Radio was translated into six native languages—Akan, Dagbani, Ewe, Ga, Nzema and Hausa (Ansah 1979). At the time, news represented nearly 50 percent of radio broadcasting. The UNESCO (1989) survey on Ghana showed that cultural programs dealing with traditional Ghanaian festivals and folklore represented less than 15 percent of broadcast time in the 1980s; that educational programs occupied about 20 percent of radio broadcast time; that religious broadcasting by major Christian and Muslim groups averaged less than 5 percent of broadcast schedules; and that advertisements instituted to help stem budget deficits averaged 2 percent of broadcast time.

The development of radio broadcasting in Ghana has not occurred in a smooth political environment. In the early 1960s, political pressures began to mount against President Nkrumah and his CPP government as the population increasingly showed their disappointments in the unfulfilled promises of the early post-independence era. The government began to find means to curb media access and to consolidate power through repeater stations that disseminated messages from the capital cities where broadcasting could be more carefully monitored and controlled. Ultimately, a pattern emerged in Ghana that favored direct government control of broadcasting and the use of broadcasting to disseminate government propaganda (Ansah 1985; Bourgault 1995). By the 1970s, the state-owned GBC was firmly under control of the government. This control and GBC's monopoly were broken in 1995 when the erstwhile government of Jerry Rawlings and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) liberalized the Ghanaian economy and allowed for broadcast pluralism and privatization.

Private radio broadcasting
In the mid 1990s, Ghana, like many African countries, was confronted by many significant changes politically, economically and socially. The government embarked on a serious goal of establishing a democratic, liberal and free market economy (Gyimah-Boadi 1999). The changes brought about a process of democratization and pluralism, decentralization of economic and political decision-making, and the encouragement of the private sector to take over many functions previously undertaken by the state. In the process, Ghana's public broadcast system came under intense criticisms and ultimately reform as a result of external and internal pressures.

Externally, the reform was associated with a new era of political plu-ralism and neo-liberal economic policies that swept across sub-Saharan Africa in the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union. After decades of state control and limited choice of media, liberal rhetoric that associated democracy with private media and a free market was attractive to both the general public and business community (Heath 1999, 2001). In addition, pressure was exerted from international donor agencies, such as the IMF and the World Bank, which had made democratic and liberal reform a condition for continued external loans (Gyimah-Boadi 1999).

Internal pressure came mainly from the Ghanaian academic community in the form of organized conferences that aimed at putting democracy and media liberalization on the public agenda (School of Communication Studies 1993). For example, at a conference organized by the Unda/OCIC (International Catholic Organization for Cinema and Audiovisual) in Accra on September 6, 1992, the academic community recognized a change in government attitude towards the media. In a speech delivered at the opening ceremony, the Information Minister of Ghana declared a major policy change:

> the political changes taking place on the continent are likely to lead to the review of state monopoly in the electronic media. We in Ghana have, within the framework of our national communication policy, proposed a degree of deregulation in the electronic media set within clearly defined guidelines (Bonnah-Koomson 1994:85).

This official policy declaration signaled a change in the attitude of Rawlings and the NDC government. It also inspired the School of Communication Studies, University of Ghana to organize two conferences on broadcast pluralism and privatization. The conferences, held in March 1993 and November 1994, highlighted the need for broadcast pluralism and publicly criticized the government for its disregard of the constitutional rights of Ghanaians by not allowing for press freedom and independent broadcasting as guaranteed by the 1992 Fourth Republic Constitution of Ghana (Bonnah-Koomson 1995). Article 162 of the 1992 Constitution guaranteed freedom of expression and eliminated the need to obtain licensing for the operation of any medium of mass communication, including radio and television. It stated:

> There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media; and in particular there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain license as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a

newspaper, journal, or other media for mass communication or information (Republic of Ghana 1992:3).

The conferences also set a public agenda around arguments for and against the introduction of independent and private broadcasting in Ghana. Proponents urging constitutional rights and broadcast liberalization, who were mainly from the academic community, argued that independent broadcasting was needed to assure genuine pluralism, social development and national unity. They further claimed that broadcast pluralism would promote program diversity and competition as well as encourage the development and use of Ghanaian cultural products and languages. But those opposed to broadcast pluralism, mainly government officials, invoked a cultural argument and expressed concern about the negative effects commercial broadcasting could have on Ghana's culture, local talents and native languages (Ansu-Kyeremeh 1995; Bonnah-Koomson 1995; Heath 1999; Karikari 1994).

Nevertheless, in 1995 the NDC government reluctantly authorized private ownership and operation of broadcasting (Blankson 2000; Heath 1999, 2001). This action broke the decades of monopoly enjoyed by the state-owned GBC and set a pace for the establishment of independent private radio in Ghana. By 2005, the number of new private FM radio stations operating alongside the two state-owned stations GBC 1(Radio 1) and GBC 2 (Radio 2) increased from zero to fifty-seven. Of these FM radio stations, twenty-nine and fifteen were in the two major regional capitals of Accra and Kumasi respectively. The other thirteen stations were operating in other regional centers. The FM radio stations in Accra included Joy FM, Radio Gold, Radio Univers, Choice FM, Radio Atlantis, Groove FM, Radio Vibe, Peace FM, Channel R and Radio GAR, owned by Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. Those in Kumasi included Spirit FM, Zuria FM, Radio Mercury, GCR FM, Kessben FM, Nkosuo FM, Mett FM, Kapital FM, Fox FM, Luv FM, Ashh FM, Hello FM, Otec FM, Invisible FM and Focus FM.

These private stations began to provide channel and program diversity for the first time in Ghana's history. However, the stations were very similar in many ways and followed almost the same broadcast format. Music, particularly Western and Caribbean, interjected with talk accounted for between 75 and 80 percent of the radio airtime (Blankson 2000). Though the radio stations played a number of 'hip-life' (a Ghanaian version of rap music), noticeably absent were traditional Ghanaian folk music, such as 'boboobo' and 'kpalongo', and guitar music or 'highlife'. The GBC continued to be the primary source of local and foreign news. Some of the

private radio stations, however, retransmitted foreign or world news through exchanges with international stations such as the Voice of America (VOA), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Radio Netherlands. Almost all stations aired their local and foreign news in English. Besides music and the news segments, the stations introduced a variety of interactive phone-in or talk programs that actively engaged the public. These programs addressed a wide range of social, health, environmental and political issues. Other programs engaged in mobilizing citizens for community work. Despite the diverse, interactive and entertaining content of the emerging radio stations, their overwhelming dependence on English and their relatively limited use of Ghanaian native languages and cultural programs are issues that need to be addressed.

Insensitivity of radio to Ghanaian culture and languages

Ghana has about seventy-nine native languages; however, English has been the predominant language for broadcasting since the colonial period. Though the colonial government introduced native languages into broadcasting, a policy continued by the immediate post-colonial government, the predominance of English and its possible effects on native language use in broadcasting were ignored. When broadcasting pluralism became a reality in 1995 and more vibrant and competitive commercial radio stations emerged for the first time in Ghana's history, Ghanaians hoped that their native languages and cultural talents would be promoted and utilized by the new radio stations. On the contrary, the emerging radio stations opted to broadcast solely in English. Both public and private radio stations neglected to use any of the country's seventy-nine native languages solely or predominantly to air their programs. Ghana's radio environment began to experience what the former Deputy Minister of Communication, Commander Griffith, described as the 'foreignization' of Ghana's radio broadcasting. The Minister observed that some of the radio stations, particularly Vibe FM, were so dominated by English when they started broadcasting that listeners phoned in to inquire whether the stations were foreign (Griffith, pers. comm., October 22, 1999).

By late 2000 none of the Accra radio stations was broadcasting solely or predominantly in any Ghanaian native language. However, in response to public criticism, some stations began to develop and air one or two programs in a native language. Stations like Radio GAR, Radio One, Radio Two, Joy FM, Radio Gold, Peace FM and Radio Univers began re-broadcasting their news bulletins in either Twi or Ewe. Between 1995 and 2000, all of the stations that had developed audience participation programs

used predominantly English. Early in 1997, the University of Ghana station, Radio Univers, successfully introduced a Twi talk program, 'Obiara Nka Bi'. Following its success, Radio GAR developed an Akan talk program called 'Agoro Na Me Pe' that received public acclaim. Others such as Vibe FM, Groove FM and Joy FM followed the successful lead provided by Radio Univers and introduced similar audience participation programs that actively engaged the public using native languages.

Radio Gold, for instance, developed an Akan program that discussed Akan culture and traditions. By late 2001, Peace FM and Radio Gold had begun to air their news in English and two native languages, Twi and Ga, in response to public criticism. Radio Gold and Joy FM also started airing some of their phone-in programs in Twi. While the phone-in program format required the program host to be multilingual in order to understand callers, the host spoke only in English. This format also required that listeners have the ability to comprehend what the host said in English. The state-owned Radio GAR did not have an audience participation program aired exclusively in any of the Ghanaian languages until mid-2001, even though its policy guidelines called for 80 percent of programming in vernacular languages. The public expectation that emerging radio stations would encourage the use of Ghanaian native languages in broadcasting was, however, thrown into question.

Culturally appropriate language in broadcasting reforms

The emerging cultural and linguistic character of radio broadcasting in Ghana, and many other African societies, raises important questions. Does the emerging character of radio pose a threat to the cultures and languages of the societies within which they operate? Is there a culturally appropriate broadcast language in multilingual African societies? Is there a justification for the continued overwhelming reliance on Euro-imperial languages in Africa's radio? Or does such dependency prevent the development and use of native languages in broadcasting?

The importance of national languages in broadcasting systems globally cannot be disputed except in Africa where broadcasting relies heavily on foreign languages. This raises concern over the effects that continued dependence on foreign languages have on the continent's emerging broadcasting systems, particularly radio. Schudson (1994) reminded us that language is itself the fundamental human mass medium. It is the mass medium through which all other media speak. No other medium is so deeply rooted, so emotionally fraught, so insistently the basis for political aspirations, or so much an impediment to the efforts of states to use modern

media for hegemonic control. Thus, in Africa, as in other societies, the use of a native language should not be seen as a neutral medium for communication but a highly charged cultural object to be harnessed for development and civic participation. How has this characterization of language played out in African broadcasting systems?

Some media critics, including Senghor, have charged that the emerging private stations have become 'Trojan horses of Anglo-Saxon culture and music and, thus, for hastening the disintegration of local cultures' (Senghor 1996:97). Senghor (1996), for instance, claimed that the success enjoyed by radio stations bears witness to listeners' demands and needs for entertainment and pleasure, something that the state-run stations did not know how to address. However, evidence from Ghana, Burkina Faso and several other African societies does not support Senghor's claim. In Ghana, radio stations had become competitive grounds where program hosts and news readers prove who could speak with the best foreign accent. A phenomenon known in Ghanaian popular culture as LAFA (Locally Acquired Foreign Accent) emerged whereby program presenters and hosts, who had never traveled to the United States or the Caribbean, were mimicking American and Caribbean accents. In their attempt to do so, they mispronounced common Ghanaian names and words. Not surprisingly, Ghanaian youth picked up on it and began to mimic foreign accents and American slang (Blankson 2000).

The emergence of LAFA in private radio and popular culture has caused Ghanaians to question whether broadcast pluralism had become a recipe for corroding indigenous Ghanaian languages and ways of speaking. In my interview with Major Tandoh, the Executive Director of Ghana Radio Frequency Distribution and Registration Board (GRFDRB), he expressed the sentiment held by government officials when he stated:

> I call it [LAFA] foreignization of broadcasting. People try to sound foreign. As an apostle of freedom of expression, I would refrain from commenting on whether this is a good style of broadcasting or not. Individuals should be allowed to make up their minds on this matter. The radio stations have their own policies and procedures. For example, a radio station like Radio Gold does not permit their DJs to use nick-names as well as present their material in any foreign accent. That is the policy of the station. Everyone has a constitutional right and I would say the use of foreign accent has no effect on the content of the matter being broadcast. However, being a Ghanaian I would prefer that the presenters use the Ghanaian accent and conduct themselves as Ghanaians (Tandoh, pers. comm., November 15, 1999).

Several of the broadcasters, government officials and media scholars interviewed agreed that majority of the public dislike LAFA in radio. They also believed that LAFA was fueled by the Ghanaian youth. The audience members surveyed confirmed this belief. While 55 percent of the radio audience (n=408) indicated a dislike for foreign accents in private radio, only 33 percent liked the presenters mimicking foreign accents. The remaining 12 percent were indifferent. Furthermore, of the 132 respondents who liked LAFA in radio, 77 percent were between the ages of twenty and thirty, 11 percent were under twenty, and 12 percent were above forty. In contrast, 62 percent of the 224 respondents who disliked the use of foreign accents in broadcasting were 30 years or older. The popularity of LAFA in private radio can be explained by the fact that the majority of the presenters, newsreaders and disc jockeys are under thirty years old and find the use of foreign accents as a 'status-booster'. As one interviewee explained, the young radio presenters and the Ghanaian youth have embraced LAFA as a 'hip' or 'cool' thing (Blankson 2000).

The emergence of foreign accents in radio is not unique to Ghana. Similar language developments have been reported in other emerging African democracies that have privatized their media systems. In Swahili-speaking East African nations such as Kenya, the development of a new language, Swahili mixed with English, is used by the media and most people (Kupe 2002). Similarly, in French-speaking African countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon and Gabon, 'Franglais' has emerged from the proliferation of private commercial media (Kouega 1999). Also in Burkina Faso, Horizon FM's musical programs, mostly reggae, rock and pop, were hosted by a disc jockey who spoke in a jargon of 'franglais' and wore a baseball cap (Senghor 1996:97). Franglais (or Frenglish) is created by mixing French and American English together. It is produced either by poor knowledge of one or the other language or for humorous effect.

Despite these troubling developments, some contemporary African private broadcasters and media scholars have refused to acknowledge the negative effects these developments have had on their society's languages and on broadcast professionalism in general. Perhaps, African private and commercial broadcasters should begin to acknowledge that they have the obligation, as do public broadcasters, to protect and promote their society's native languages and harness them to encourage more public participation in the media.

Like their African counterparts, Ghana's radio broadcasters have downplayed the importance of local languages. Their insensitivity to native languages has contributed to the erosion of early post-independence efforts

in the 1960s and 1970s to indigenize broadcasting. This observation raises the critical question of what constitutes an appropriate broadcast language, if any, in developing African democracies that are in the process of re-forming their broadcasting systems. This question is made more critical because it is asked in the context of societies that are multilingual and that have depended on Euro-imperial languages for decades, languages that are unintelligible to over half of their populations.

Interestingly, some Western media scholars have defended the pre-dominant use of Euro-imperial languages as the most appropriate broad-cast languages in African societies. For example, Spitulnik (1992) argued that English and French are the only languages that are 'ethnically neutral' and, thus, non-native to the indigenous ethnic groups. He also claimed that English or French have become the predominant broadcast language of choice in countries colonized by Britain or France in order to resolve com-petition among linguistic groups. Unfortunately, these arguments have been used successfully to discourage African broadcasters and policy makers from promoting the development of their widely spoken native languages in broadcasting. Some African broadcasters and media scholars are con-vinced that Africa's diverse native languages do not serve broadcasting institutions well since minority languages are excluded (Senghor 1996). Senegal, for example, uses six of its twelve spoken native languages to broadcast radio programs. Senghor (1996) argued that the exclusive use of widely spoken local languages on national radio excludes linguistic mi-norities from the audience. She further claimed that in broadcasting sys-tems where several local languages are used, the dominant local language, meaning that of the largest population group or that of the most powerful social group, tends to overshadow the other languages. Therefore, she cautioned, 'Imagine the situation in other African states, with their multi-tude of languages' (Senghor 1996:85).

Unfortunately, this negative view towards the use of native languages in Africa's broadcasting is shared by many broadcasters and media policy makers in Africa. This view has affected African broadcasting development in two significant ways. First, for decades it succeeded as a valid justification for efforts to deepen what Mazrui called the 'domestication of Euro-imperial languages' in African broadcasting (1996:4). And second, it succeeded in discouraging legitimate attempts to promote the use of more widely spoken native languages in broadcasting on the grounds that using a native language would exclude other linguistic minorities from the audience. But how valid or legitimate are these arguments? Those who hold such a negative view towards native language use in broadcasting fail to realize that these

arguments can also be used against the use of English or French in African societies. The case of Ghana, though not unique in Africa, provides a good illustration. In Ghana, Akan is spoken by 44 percent of the over 19 million Ghanaians (Akan Dictionary Project 2001; Nkansah-Kyeremateng 1996), while functional English is spoken by only 36 percent of the total population (UNESCO 1996).

The argument is also supported by the results of the survey of radio listeners in Accra. Out of the 408 radio listeners following discussions on phone-in talk programs, nearly 75 percent attributed the primary reason for never contributing to the phone-in discussions on radio to their inability to speak good English for fear of making mistakes. The majority of those who phoned-in were regular contributors to the phone-in programs. Yet over 85 percent of Ghanaian broadcasters and media scholars interviewed continue to believe that the use of a native language like Akan for broadcasting would exclude more linguistic minorities from the audience. It is obvious that the use of English in Ghana's radio actually excludes more minorities, including the majority of the 65 percent rural peasant population, from participating in radio broadcasting. According to UNESCO (1996), over 60 percent of Ghanaians were illiterate in 1996; literacy rate was 36 percent. It is quite obvious that the majority of Ghanaians do not and cannot use English to participate effectively in civic discourse on radio.

Evidence from Ghana, Nigeria, Namibia, Mali and other countries suggests that African radio audiences actually prefer programs aired in their native languages over those aired in the languages of their former colonizers (Abdulkadir 2000; Blankson 2000; Kouega 1999; Kupe 2002). Audiences also feel more comfortable participating in programs that are broadcast in a native language. In Ghana, for instance, my investigation revealed that the most popular programs were not the 'entertaining and pleasurable' musical programs claimed by Senghor (1996:97). Rather, the interactive programs that engaged the audience in discussions on social, health, economic and even political issues in one or two native languages were the most popular (Blankson 2000). Over 88 percent of the radio-listening audience surveyed (n=408) attributed the popularity of stations like Joy FM, Radio Gold and Radio GAR to their interactive talk programs in ethnic Akan languages. Radio Univers particularly attracted listeners with its educational programs, news bulletins and press reviews in Ewe and Twi. It was no surprise that over 65 percent of the audience surveyed disliked the predominant use of English on the radio airwaves. The majority considered the dominance of English as a hindrance to both the promotion of Ghana's native languages and the participation of many Ghanaians in

radio discussions. Only 28 percent of those surveyed considered English an appropriate language for radio broadcasting. To justify their response, these people cited the country's multilingual character and the neutrality of English language with regard to ethnic boundaries.

Evidence of the preference for native language programs over programs aired in foreign languages exists in other African countries (Abdulkadir 2000; Fardon and Furniss 2000; Gratz 2000; Reporters Without Borders 2005). Abdulkadir (2000), for instance, noted the popularity of Hausa programs on radio stations in Nigeria. Senghor (1996) acknowledged that the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation's popularity since its transformation in 1993 was the result of the successful interactive programs it had developed in various national languages to encourage open public debate among Namibians and their leaders. The programs were broadcast via satellite over a larger area to reflect the country's multicultural nature. Similarly in Mali, Radio Bamakan began broadcasting in September 1991 without authorization and immediately aroused the enthusiasm of the people of Bamako, because the station translated simultaneously into the local language, Bamanan, the democratically elected parliament's debates which were conducted in French, a language that less than 30 percent of the people of Bamako understood. It even broadcast a weekly review of the national and international press in Bamanan with equal success (Senghor 1996). Finally, the popular Senegalese station Sud FM exhibited considerable multilingualism, so that it was common to hear a listener, as well as the host, switch languages in one and the same show.

Unfortunately, many contemporary African broadcasters and media scholars have confused what they perceived as the audience's need for entertainment and pleasure with foreign programming and the use of foreign languages and accents. Others have even characterized Africa's emerging radio as a factor of cultural change, because radio broadcasts not only record, preserve and file traditions particular to the territory, land or community in which they broadcast, but also they manage to create or encourage the creation of new and popular verbal or musical forms (Senghor 1996). Furthermore, Senghor has argued, 'By preserving and creating local popular culture, radio stations succeed where the state and the elitist civil society of experts and intellectuals seem to have failed' (Senghor 1996:81).

Though these characterizations are interesting, my research in Ghana suggests otherwise. In Ghana the overwhelming majority of radio stations have not succeeded in appropriating, preserving or creating cultural forms and languages indigenous to the people. Rather, they have collectively succeeded in fortifying the domination of English over native languages

and in mimicking foreign accents at the expense of broadcast profession-alism. Though it is important to acknowledge the positive developments associated with the emerging radio stations as pointed out by Senghor (1996), it is equally important to critically examine their failures, especially as it relates to the use and promotion of native languages in broadcasting. After all, this is one of the major arguments raised to support the develop-ment of independent media in many African countries, including Ghana (Ansu-Kyeremeh 1995; Bonnah-Koomson 1994, 1995). In a sense, what African societies need is a broadcasting environment that would provide multiple forums for its people to freely engage each other in languages that the majority, if not all, would understand and feel comfortable with. African societies also need a broadcasting environment that recognizes the importance of local languages and thus protects and promotes their culture and languages, something that Africa's emerging private radio collectively has failed to do.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly in Ghana and other parts of Africa, radio broadcasting is more competitive and diverse in terms of program and channel choice than it has been historically. Radio broadcasting has become an entrée into civic discourse and socio-political awareness. It has also become a powerful force for social and political integration. Through the efforts of private radio, politics has become nationalized and civic discussions on various issues intensified. But on a more critical level, Africa's emerging radio stations have become avenues for corroding their society's languages and cultures. While they have collectively been insensitive to their native languages and cultural talents, they have been successful in domesticating English and Western broadcast content. Thus, for Africa's broadcasting to be useful to the majority of its people and for it to develop an identity of its own, the language and cultural policy question must be seriously addressed.

Clearly, what is happening in broadcasting is a reflection of African governments' failure to provide broadcast policies that seek to protect cultural integrity and promote native languages. It is also a consequence of the negative views broadcasters and media scholars have on the multilingual character of African societies, especially as it relates to broadcasting. Thus, African private and public broadcasters should have a mandate to protect and promote their society's cultures and languages. This is important because culture is a means of communication that provides language for meaningful interactions (Mazrui 1996). The potential of

indigenous African languages as cultural expressions and identity formation cannot be overlooked by media policy makers in this critical time of broadcast transformation. Contemporary African broadcasters cannot continue to rely overwhelmingly on Euro-imperial languages for their discourse if they hope to engage the majority of the people.

It is even doubtful that a 'true' African broadcasting system would emerge if it continues to be so tightly held hostage to the languages of former colonial powers. Mazrui reminded us that 'no country has ascended to the level of economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages' (1996:4). The claim that broadcast pluralism and independence in emerging African democracies would automatically encourage the growth of local cultures and the use of native languages cannot be realized unless private broadcasters realize they have the same obligation as public broadcasters to promote the culture and languages of the societies within which they operate. A true African broadcast identity can be realized only if emerging African democracies reforming their broadcasting systems towards commercialism develop deliberate policies to promote their native languages and cultures. African broadcasters and media policy makers should be mindful of the experiences of Asian countries where deliberate language and cultural policies successfully guided broadcast reforms and protected Asian languages from domination of Western languages and cultural products (Lee and Youn 1995; Servaes and Wang 1997). As media scholars concerned with the cultural and linguistic direction of Africa's broadcasting systems, we cannot but raise these issues at a critical time when African broadcasting is at its early stages of transformation towards pluralism and privatization.

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