

The Effects of Errors from Radio News Bulletin on Communication in Selected Audiences in Kenya

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Abstract: - The purpose of news in mass media is to inform, entertain and promote values, knowledge and right attitudes in the society. The informative function is key in the news bulletin broadcast. Radio is a major source of transmitting information in many parts of the world and more so in the rural areas. Kenya is not an exception to this phenomenon. A big number of the Kenyan citizens live in the rural areas practicing agriculture and livestock keeping for their livelihood. Majority are low income earners and cannot afford television sets or newspapers for their informative needs, thus depending on radio for entertainment, news and knowledge needs. Radio aims at delivering relevant information to different audiences across the divide. The target audience is diverse in terms of cognitive competence as well as expectations. The language of communication is therefore expected to be precise, simple and able to be understood by all the listeners. This research investigated the effect of errors from radio news bulletin on communication among different audiences in Kenya. The language under investigation was Kiswahili which is both an official and a national language in Kenya. This research was guided by relevant theory according to Spelber and Wilson (1985, 1995, and 1998). This theory posits that successful communication occurs when the expectations of the sender and the recipient are met and that the mind uses the most direct and shortest channel to achieve this objective. The information is therefore expected to be relevant and without ambiguity to avoid overtaxing the brain of the recipient. Accordingly, errors have the potential of impacting negatively on the transmission of relevant information. Errors in news bulletin can distort information, create confusion and lead to poor understanding. Four categories of respondents were purposefully sampled for this research. These included respondents from primary school level, secondary school, university and post school. Focus group discussions were used to test the understanding of selected news from two radio stations in Kenya namely Radio Citizen and Kenya Broadcasting Station (KBC). The findings revealed that errors distorted information and caused wrong interpretation among the listeners. The effect of errors on communication was higher among the primary school respondents than in other categories. The post school respondents were least affected by errors because of their exposure and contextual interpretation of meaning as opposed to their counterparts in school. This research can be used by policy makers in the media industry to address communication gaps brought about by the use of incorrect and ambiguous words especially in news broadcast. It can also be used by linguists to highlight the effect of errors on the audience.

Key words: news bulletin, relevance, errors, communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the art of transmitting information from the sender to the recipient through a medium. Communication occurs when the sender encodes a message and sends it to the recipient. Once the message is received and correctly decoded, creating the desired effects from the sender, then the process of communication is said to have taken place. Communication can take place in various forms such as direct or indirect communication. A person can communicate directly to another person, to a small group or a large audience depending with the set up and intended objectives. Communication can also be achieved through mass media. Mass media is the technology that is designed to reach a large audience at the same time. The most common examples of mass media are the television sets, radio, newspapers, internet and magazines. Two categories emerge which are print and broadcast media. Print media include newspapers and magazines whereas in broadcast media we have the radio, television sets and the internet. All these types of mass media have their own advantages and disadvantages.

The invention of radio however brought a major revolution in the world. In Kenya for example majority of the people rely on radio for news, entertainment and education programs. Radio is cheap and easy to access even in the remotest parts of the country, (Abong'o 2005). With the liberation of airwaves in Kenya in 1990s many radio stations have emerged especially the frequency modulated (FM) stations which have continued to attract a large audience. According to Gathigi (2009), 98% of the rural folks in Kenya rely on the radio for information, education and entertainment. This has boosted access to information, educational programs and created great awareness of what was happening around the world.

The purpose of the radio is to communicate to a wide scope of listeners. It aims at maintaining and creating good rapport with its audience in order to stay afloat in the market. Among the objectives of the radio are to educate, entertain and inform the audience of what is happening within and outside their environment. As an audio media radio is limited in the way it delivers its message. Unlike the television set which employs both the audio and visual means of communication, radio only relies on audio. Clarity of what is orally communicated is therefore quite important to avoid distorting of information to successfully communicate, correct use of language is imperative for a radio news broadcast. The language used

should not only be correct but, also appropriate, precise, appealing and easy to understand. In this regard the presence of errors can easily compromise the core mandate of any radio station. If not corrected and thoroughly purged from the text, errors are bound to cause confusion to the audience and hinder the intended meaning of communication. Errors also have the potential of diluting the expected standards of language in the society. Further more many people view media stations as sources of correct usage of languages and other learning competencies.

This research investigated the effect of errors on communication in radio news bulletin in Kenya. The targeted language of investigation was Kiswahili which is both a national and an official language in Kenya. It is also a lingua franca of East African region with more than 100 million users. Radio was selected because of its wide coverage and use among the target population as opposed to other types of mass media. Two media stations were purposefully selected for this purpose. These were Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) and Radio Citizen. These media stations enjoy the widest coverage in terms of audience and transmission according to Ipsos Synovate survey (2011).

Four categories of respondents were selected notably: primary school audience, secondary school, university level and post school. Recorded news bulletin were played to them and they were allowed to discuss their interpretation of recorded news through focus group discussions. Their discussions were recorded and analyzed using the tenets of relevance theory according to Spelber and Wilson (1985, 1995, and 1998) in order to draw correct conclusions. The results were presented and conclusions made from the analyzed text.

1.1. Effects of Errors among Different Respondents

This research identified five categories of errors: Among them were phonological, morphological, syntactical, semantics and pragmatical errors. These errors affected the respondents understanding of news in various ways. Some of the errors confused the listeners and led to poor understanding of the intended meaning. Other errors taxed the brain of listeners causing some to lose interest in the news while still others adopted the mistakes of newscasters assuming them to be the correct forms. These outcomes are further discussed below

1.1.1 Phonological errors

Phonological errors affect the production of sounds where some people lack the ability to articulate certain sounds that are supposed to be produced in specific areas such as the palate, lips, tongue, teeth or the jaws. Correct pronunciation is an important component in good communication. Deviant use of sounds can lead to ambiguity and complexity in meaning hence causing difficulty in communication. Sound production especially in the radio has to be accurate. The listener only relies on what is said to get the correct interpretation of an utterance. Wrong articulation will therefore lead to poor

understanding of the message. The following errors were identified in this research:

a. substituting one sound for another

These are the type of errors that occurred when one sound was replaced by another in a word or sentence. These types of errors mainly occurred in a written text that was read during the broadcast. Due to limitation of time and inadequate proofreading and editing, some of these errors were transferred as they were to the audience during the actual broadcast example

i *nchuini* instead of *nchini* to mean country

ii *alikuwa* instead of *alikuwa* to mean present

The two words *nchuini* and *alikuwa* were interpreted differently by different audiences. Among the primary school respondents the first word was referred to as a vessel that could travel on land while the second word was referred to as a state of increasing in size. Both interpretations were incorrect. The secondary respondents discovered the error in the two words and corrected them accordingly. The respondents who were university students however did not discover the errors and responded like their counterparts from primary school. The last category who were citizens gave the right interpretation and said that the two words had errors

b. deletion

This was another common error that occurred in the text that was being analyzed. Some sounds were omitted from the words causing confusion and wrong interpretation among the respondents. Example

iii *eno* instead of *eneo* to mean a certain place

iv *majuku* instead of *majukumu* to mean responsibilities

The respondents who were of primary level of education interpreted the word *enoto* mean some brand of medicine for stomachache and said the second word had a mistake which they could not identify. The same response was given by the other two categories of respondents except the university students who interpreted *majuku* as *mashaka* to mean trouble. This interpretation was also not correct. Generally because of the error of omitting some sounds, all the respondents could not get the correct meaning of the two words yet they were part of the broadcast text.

c. distortion

These errors occurred when some sounds were placed where they should not have been hence distorting the meaning. Among such words were

V *wanayama* instead of *wanyama* to mean animals

vi. *ubyngne* instead of *bunge* to mean parliament

The first category of respondents from primary school interpreted the first word to mean disorder. The fact that the sounds were disarranged may have led to this interpretation;

however they were not able to identify the error. They thought that perhaps it was a word they had not come across. Majority of word syllables in Kiswahili are formed by a consonant followed by a vowel. The second word was interpreted as an occurrence. Both interpretations were wrong. Respondent from secondary school interpreted the first word as 'chakula kitamu' meaning sweet food and the second word as 'wanyama' meaning animals. The second interpretation was correct but the first one was wrong. Respondents from university interpreted the first word as the name of a place and the second as the name of a person. Both interpretations were wrong. The respondents who were citizens said that they did not understand the first word and that the second word meant 'mwanachama' or a member of a certain group. They were right in the first interpretation because the word was actually distorted but wrong in interpreting the second word

These examples clearly showed that phonological errors affected the correct interpretation of news and understanding. This was demonstrated by the struggle witnessed during focused group discussions. It also showed that the listeners level of exposure affected their understanding of the news as they came. This is in line with relevance theory according to Spelber and Wilson (1995,1998). It states that an utterance or a sound is relevant to an individual when it connects with the background information that he/she has. The aim is to bring about conclusion that matter to him without overtaxing his/her mind.

1.1.2 Morphological errors

Morphology is the study of morphemes. Morphemes are the smallest meaningful unit in grammar. Morphemes are of two kinds namely: free and bound. Free morpheme can make sense alone such as a vehicle, car, zebra or giraffe. Bound morpheme however cannot make sense on their own. They need to be annexed to one or more morphemes. Examples are cars or chairs where (s) stands for the plural form of these nouns but cannot make sense alone. Many morphological errors emanate from omission of noun plural, wrong word formations, misuse of possessive forms, wrong use of prefixes, errors in compounding and conversion. Common errors in this category were as follows:

a. Addition of noun plural

These errors mainly happened in a sentence where a noun that was supposed to be singular was used in its plural form example

i. *walimkashifu* instead of *alimkashifu* to mean he criticized.

ii. *wameuawa* instead of *ameuawa* to mean he/she was killed

In Kiswahili the prefix –wa- is used to show the plural form whereas –a- is used in certain words to show the singular form. The use of –wa- prefix in these words was erroneous because the speaker was referring to a singular person. All the respondents noticed this error but they were were not sure of

whether the newscaster meant many people or that it was a mistake in writing the text.

b. Wrong use of prefixes

Word formation in Kiswahili is affected by prefixes of border line words. Most Bantu languages of which Kiswahili belong to are characterized by use of a grammatical system where noun and verb markers are in agreement. There are concordial agreement markers which show agreement between subject and verbs and between noun and noun modifiers. Error of this category were many. Example

iii. *jina anastahili* instead of *jina linastahili* meaning the name was supposed to

iv. *maafisa ya utawala* instead of *maafisa wa utawala* meaning administration officials

v. *kufungwa kwa kilabu moja* instead of *kufungwa kwa kilabu kimoja* meaning the closing of a certain club

in iii above the respondents in primary school adopted the wrong version assuming that what was written was the correct version. The word *anastahili* refers to the person whereas in this context the reference was on the name. The correct version should therefore have been *linastahili* referring to the name itself. Other respondents correctly identified and corrected the error. In iv the word *maafisa* refers to people or persons and the right conjunction should have been *wa* not *ya*. This error was identified and corrected by respondents from secondary and university categories. However for those in primary and post school, they said that there was no mistake in this wording. The cause of their assertion could have been as a result of poor mastery of the language under investigation. In number v where we have the word *kilabu moja* there was an omission of the singular prefix *-ki-*. Majority of the respondents had no problem with this word except for those in the university category. This acceptance of the error could have been influenced by their mother tongue interference where similar words were common. It was however necessary to include the singular marker *-ki-* so that we could have the word *kilabu kimoja*

c. misuse of possessive pronoun.

A possessive pronoun is a word that shows ownership in a sentence or phrase. Possessive pronouns are important in that they show clarity and that they are more concise. This reduces ambiguity and enhances good communication. Kiswahili has possessive pronouns which are *angu, ako ake, etu, enu ao* meaning mine, yours, his/hers, ours, yours and theirs respectively. Therefore since possessive pronouns shows belonging there are some words that are erroneous if used with these pronouns example:

vi. *mtu mwenye ameaga* this means the person who possesses death which is not correct

vii. *mtu mwenye ameonea* meaning the person who possesses communication

The speaker in the above two sentences wanted to refer to the subject and the right word should have been *ambaye*. When he/she uses *mwenye* it shows possessiveness which does not apply in this case. The respondents from primary, secondary and university levels had no problem with these errors. They argued that the words were correctly used as they were. This showed a gap in their mastery of the Kiswahili language which is a compulsory subject in primary and secondary school curriculum in Kenya. Respondents from post primary however argued correctly that the possessive pronoun was wrongly placed.

1.1.3 Syntactical Errors

Syntax refers to the rules, principles and guidelines that guide the order of words in a sentence. It deals with the general structure of words, clauses and phrases in a sentence and their relationships. A sentence is defined as the largest unit of syntax which has a subject and a predicate. It's important to note that not all sentences however have a subject and a predicate. Common sentences are simple, compound and complex. A simple sentence has one subject and one predicate. A compound sentence has two simple sentences combined whereas a compound sentence has one main clause and a subordinate clause imbedded in its structure. Conjunctions are used to connect the subordinate clause to the main sentence.

Syntactical errors occur when word order in a sentence were distorted thus causing confusion or leading to wrong interpretation. Every language has rules that guide the way words should be sequenced in a sentence. Kiswahili for instance has subject verb object order. In cases where the object is referred to at the beginning, appropriate guidelines have to be applied. Among the errors under this category were

a. tautology

a tautology is a statement or an expression that says the same thing twice. Tautological errors can be irritating to the reader because they add no value to the process of communication. These errors were common in this investigation as shown below:

viii. mashambulizi mawili ya kujitoa mhanga kufa meaning two suicide attacks leading to death

ix. miongoni mwa waliofariki alikuwa miongoni mwa walioaga dunia meaning among the dead, he/she was among the dead

in sentence number viii the word *kujitoa mhanga* and *kufa* have the same meaning. *Kujitoa mhanga* is to sacrifice oneself or commit suicide. So using the two words together brought unnecessary repetition. Respondents in three categories except primary level said that the use of the two words together was unnecessary. Those from the primary level however did not find anything wrong with the sentence. The danger here is that these errors could be transferred to the school environment by these respondents hence diluting the standard language.

A similar error was repeated in example number ix. The word *miongoni* meaning among is again repeated in the middle of the sentence. The word *waliofariki* and *walioaga dunia* mean the same thing in Kiswahili that is those who died. Respondents in all categories including those from primary school agreed that this repetition was unnecessary and stated the sentence correctly. These are commonly used Kiswahili words and therefore they were easily understood.

b. use of acronyms without elaboration

Acronym is a word or a name that is formed from the initial components of words or phrases. They are short ways of expressing ideas. Among the acronyms which are universally used are UNO meaning United Nations Organization, AU meaning African Union and UNEP meaning United Nation Environmental Program. In Kiswahili we have such acronyms as *UKIMWIU kosefu wa Kinga Mwilini* referring to aids disease. *TATAKIT aasisi ya Taaluma za Kiswahili* which is the institute of Kiswahili studies based in the university of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Errors occurred when English acronyms were indiscriminately used in Kiswahili news without any elaboration as shown in example x and xi below:

x. Tume ya JSC yatangaza upya referring to the judicial service commission in Kenya

xi. CCK imebuni sheria mpya referring to communication commission of Kenya, a body corporate formed by the government to regulate communication in Kenya

Respondents from primary level and post-secondary level did not understand the meaning of JSC. They thought that it was a government agency involved with employment. This was not quite precise. The other respondents were however able to correctly get the meaning of the acronyms. They however complained that it was wrong to use English acronyms in a Kiswahili text without clarification. A similar problem was noted in example xi where respondents from primary school level, secondary and post school were not able to correctly explain the meaning of CCK. The only group that interpreted the words correctly was the university students

II. CONCLUSIONS

This research found out that there is a relationship between grammatical errors and communication in the transmission of news bulletin through the radio. Three categories of errors were identified which were: phonological, morphological and syntactical errors. Different categories of respondents who were involved in this research. The respondents were of primary school level, secondary school, university and post school levels. These respondents were engaged in focus group discussion of selected news bulletin from selected media. It was discovered that all the respondents had difficulties in understanding the message as a result of the errors that were made. Although they were affected differently due to their different academic levels and experience, it was clear that the presence of errors affected their understanding in one way or another. The consequences of such errors was

misunderstanding, distortion of meaning, boredom among the audience and adapting wrong formations of words and sentences with the assumption that they were correct versions. This is because majority of the people believed that what is transmitted during the radio news bulletin was correct.

The interpretation from respondents who were of different levels of education and age also showed that more need to be done in simplifying the language of transmission to cater for everyone. There is need for deliberate effort to put clear guidelines on the correct usage of language especially during news transmission. Frequent training is important for those involved in media so as to ensure that they are accurate and have enough mastery of the correct content. Proper editing and proof reading of written bulletin should be done before the actual transmission. Correct pronunciation of words, sounds and sentences was an important training area for news casters. Transmission of news was not just about

communication but also ensuring that language of use was standard, accurate and precise.

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