

**TOWARDS STRENGTHENING AFRICAN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY VIA THE
ELECTRONIC MEDIA: AN APPRAISAL OF THE POTENTIAL OF
THE NIGERIAN TELEVISION AUTHORITY (NTA)**

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Introduction

Efforts to promote mother-tongue literacy have been diversified but there is a growing interest among scholars on the need to exploit the tool of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) to enhance the teaching and learning of African languages. Osborn (2006), writing on African language use on the Internet and computers, emphasises the potential of these ICTs not only to enhance current literacy efforts but also to open up new possibilities for literacy instruction. Osborn (2006: 89) is swift to point out the following reasons, among others, for lack of use of African languages via these channels: (i) the problem of connectivity which is centred on cities and towns; (ii) only people with means and education can access computers and Internet connections; and (iii) the case of less widely spoken languages not having any orthographic conventions.

In view of the pervasive dearth of computer-assisted programmes/facilities in the learning process in Africa, attention has shifted to exploiting the option of the mass media. Peterson (2006: 1) argues that "... the influence of mass media is a factor in language choice in the contemporary world." With regard to the African situation, UNESCO (1995: 5) asserts that "[t]he electronic media have immense potential for use as tools for improving both formal and informal education in sub-Saharan Africa." Coming to the home front in Nigeria, the "Report of the Core Working Group on the Review of the National Mass Communication Policy" (2004) underscores the potential of the electronic media, particularly the visually oriented as immense and limitless. Salawu (2006) vigorously argues that African language pedagogy should go beyond classroom activity and the space should be enlarged to include the media of mass communication, because they are generally accessible. Citing Lasswell (1960), who asserts that a function of mass media is transmission of cultural heritage for social continuity, Salawu (2006: 89) concludes that "African media will be fulfilling this function if they are actively involved in the promotion of African languages."

Some scholars have researched the roles of the media in Nigeria with regard to how they can be used to develop literacy and language competence in a multilingual society. Olateju (2002), focusing on radio as a mass media channel, examines how vocabulary from the media could help to develop reading skills. She concludes that listening to news items in an indigenous language after the English version had been rendered would achieve the following: (i) word identification; (ii) limitation of possibilities of occurrence of words and ideas; and (iii) the prediction of upcoming words which will help the individual with comprehension processes.

In a related study Adegbite (2002) describes three activities in electronic and print media which are used to promote reading habits in southwestern Nigeria, finding that mother-tongue literacy programming generates a lot of excitement in an informal setting. The content fascinates

the audience because of the local issues that touch their lives individually. Also, Adeniyi and Bello (2006) examine the role of the media in the development or otherwise of Nigerian languages. Focusing on two media houses running both radio and television stations (DAAR Communications, operator of African Independent Television (AIT) and Ray Power (the radio arm) and the Lagos State Broadcasting Corporation, operator of Lagos TV and Lagos/Eko FM), the authors evaluate in terms of how the Nigerian media through the use of indigenous languages could bring about sustainable national development.

While the first two studies cited above are geared towards enhancing literacy skills, particularly reading through the media (radio and newspapers/magazines), the third involves how radio and television have fared in respect of making media broadcasts local. Obviously Adeniyi and Bello (2006) tried to extend the works of Olateju (2002) and Adegbite (2002) by including television as capable of enhancing indigenous language learning, but their choice of just one private television station (AIT) and one state-owned television station (Lagos TV) without reference to national television in Nigeria leaves room for further studies to investigate the capability of national television in Nigeria in strengthening the local languages.

The present study draws attention to the leading role the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), being a national television with outlets in state capitals and major towns across the states of the federation, could play in developing Nigeria's local languages. The concern of the study is given impetus by the position of Bayer (2005) that communication through television is a significant mode to promote new discourse in multiple languages because it is interactive. Justifying this view further, Onabajo (2005: 95) states: "[t]he enormous powers usually ascribed to this medium stems from its audio-visual properties, which command instant believability."

Brief History of the NTA

The history of the NTA can be traced back to the history of Western Nigerian Television (WNTV) which came into existence through the vision of the ruling Action Group Party government led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the then Premier of Western Region. WNTV was officially inaugurated on October 31, 1959 and the first broadcast was made from Ibadan, at that time capital of the region, on November 1, 1959. Being the first television station in Nigeria and indeed the whole of Black Africa, it was so highly appreciated by other regional governments and even the federal government that they sooner rather than later took their cue from the initiative of the Western Region.

The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) government of the Eastern Region established in 1961 the Eastern Nigeria Television Service (ENTV). This was followed by the establishment of the Radio Television Kaduna by the government of the Northern Region, the Northern People's Congress (NPC). The federal government followed suit by establishing the Nigerian Television Service (NTS) on April 1, 1962. According to Duyilemi (2005) the federal government made it clear that although the new station would first be restricted to Lagos, the then federal capital, broadcasts would be established in all regional capitals of Enugu, Ibadan and Kaduna. However, following certain political developments in Nigeria thereafter which culminated in the creation of states, the NTS changed its name to NBC-TV, which was

established in all the states, including stations in Jos, Kano, Port Harcourt and Sokoto. Apart from these federally-controlled television stations the states themselves agitated for creating state-owned television stations. According to Umeh (1989: 58),

The creation of the new states caused a new wave of sectional consciousness, referred to as "statism." Every state wanted its own facilities, a university, a polytechnic, a college of education, a teaching hospital, its own radio and television stations, and so on.

Bendel State took the lead in this new wave of television acquisition by state governments and its state-owned television was established in 1973.

There was a turning point in the history of television broadcasting in Nigeria, however, with the promulgation of Decree 24 of 1977 retroactive to 1976. The decree merged all existing federal and state-owned stations under the Nigerian Television Authority. The establishment of the entity was the first attempt by the federal government to have a centrally financed and coordinated television industry. It was born out of the successful experiment of pooling all the broadcasting agencies in the country to form the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) in order to provide effective and coordinated coverage for the Second All-Africa Games hosted by Nigeria in 1973. With the successful takeover of all television services in Nigeria, the federal government had the opportunity to nationalize television programming. Duyilemi (2005: 297) writes:

This new chapter brought the "Network Services" in which all viewers in the country are treated to the same programme on television screens. There is therefore a national television policy that has to be carried by all public television stations. The network service of the NTA is a compulsory service to be observed by all state television services. The 9pm network news every evening on the NTA is viewed nationwide.

With the amendment to the NTA decree of 1977 when the civilian administration took over from the army in 1979, it was renamed the NTA ACT. The 1979 constitution gave the Nigerian president the power to allow state governments, organizations and individuals to operate television stations. By the end of 1983, nine additional stations had been established by Ogun, Oyo, Anambra, Ondo, Bendel, Imo, Lagos, Plateau and Kano states side by side with the 22 NTA stations (Umeh, 1989).

Since then, the Nigerian Television Authority has grown with the proliferation of stations not only in the 36 states of the federation including the national headquarters in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, but also in major towns across the states of the federation. Although there has been tremendous growth in the number of television stations in Nigeria, federal-controlled, state-owned and private stations, the federal government dominates the television landscape with 101 stations controlled by the federal government through the Nigerian Television Authority, out of which 79 had gone into full broadcast mode as of July 2010 (<http://www.balancingact-africa.com/news/broadcast/issue-no83/broadcast/nigeria-nta-rolls-out-79th-station-and-implements-wonder-cube-n-0>). With this number of NTA stations spread across the country, one could say that the NTA has penetrated the Nigerian populace and, justifies its slogan: "NTA THE LARGEST TV NETWORK IN AFRICA."

Educational Television Initiatives in Nigeria

Although there were very strong political reasons for the establishment of television at the time of the decolonisation process in Africa, the early proponents of television also used educational reason to justify their actions. In spite of the fact that establishing television stations was capital-intensive, television was seen as a symbol of nationhood and a panacea for educational problems in the newly emerging African states. Opening Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) Ibadan in 1959, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the then premier of Western Region, declared: “Television will serve as teacher, entertainer, and as a stimulus to us all to transform Nigeria into a modern and prosperous nation” (*cf.* Duyilemi, 2005: 288).

True to expectations, when the free primary education programme was introduced by the government of the Western Region, and there was need for qualified teachers to teach the teeming population of pupils that registered for the program, it was decided that television and radio be used. This development, according to Sofowora (2007), gave birth to television for education and instruction in the schools. At its inception educational television was basically targeted at primary and secondary levels and covered core subjects at both levels with most emphasis placed on science, mathematics and English. Following the example of WNTV, the Nigerian Television Service (NTS) Channel 10 in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education had by March 1965 begun the production of two series of educational programs in English and science.

There were some problems identified with educational broadcasting of the NTS, *viz.* disappointingly small audience, faulty receivers, inadequate publicity for the service, inconvenient time table, and the high proportion of untrained teachers in the primary schools, secondary schools and teacher training colleges. We see this in the Federal Ministry of Information Report of 1971 quoted by Sofowora (2007: 3762). If this was the picture of educational television service in Nigeria at its inception, one would want to know how it has worked in recent times, particularly in the new millennium. Sofowora (2007: 3763) write as of a few years ago:

A critical examination of the present state of educational television in the country today reveals that the situation is much more deplorable in this millennium than in the seventies. Although we have over thirty television stations in the country today, we cannot boast of a standard educational television programme. Most of the media houses have been heavily commercialised. Only little slots are attributed [*sic*] to educational and instructional programmes on television.

The setbacks suffered by educational television services in Nigeria were also experienced at the continental level because by late 1980's and 1990's the optimistic aspirations of television had been dashed due to the high cost of production, the lack of technical know-how, dysfunctional technological state of television production in the continent, and a significant shift in the audience's programming preferences to less intellectual-stimulating television programs and more entertainment programs.

With regard to television for higher education in Nigeria there are fresh moves to boost it. In order to improve open and distance learning in Nigeria, the government is looking into having

dedicated channels for radio and television broadcasts to support its educational initiatives in Nigeria (Jegade, 2002). As part of the several facilities and equipment that can be put to use, having a dedicated television channel has been identified a major tool. According to Agyeman (2007) the government of Nigeria has ceded the educational unit of the Nigerian Television Authority in Tejuoso, Lagos to the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to enable it to televise some of its courses. “The thinking as recommended in the Blueprint for Open and Distance Learning Programmes in Nigeria,” Jegede (2002: 6) notes, “is to use this as the pivot for the much-needed dedicated television broadcast channel for educational activities in Nigeria.”

Apart from the relevance of educational television to distance learning, the great numbers of students in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria necessitated an innovative approach to teaching and research. Due to the problem of overpopulation and the need to provide quality education, the authorities of the Obafemi Awolowo University (Ile-Ife) established a closed circuit television system in the Department of Educational Technology. According to Sofowora (2007) this was the first university in Nigeria to establish a television studio and to offer courses in television production at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The television system was established to handle the teaching of the general studies courses with large student enrolment in medicine, social sciences and hard sciences, education and the humanities.

With the insight provided on educational television initiatives in Nigeria, we move to the next section of the study which focuses on how the NTA could advance mother-tongue literacy via educational television.

Terrains for Exploration

The NTA already has educational broadcasts but predominantly only in the English language. There is “The Challenge,” an ETV broadcast designed to test the public speaking prowess of secondary school students in English. For mathematics there is “Work it out” designed to sharpen the mathematical skills of primary school pupils. There is also “Take a Step,” a quiz show, which is a fusion of subject areas including English, mathematics, integrated science, technology, and vocational studies. All of these educational television programs are aired on Saturday and Sunday to take advantage of the target audience’s leisure. There remain vast opportunities for the NTA to explore in order to break the hegemony of English that pervades the air at present.

Curriculum-based Programming

In order to give legitimacy to the local languages, the NTA could devote some air time to the teaching and learning of local languages in the respective localities where NTA stations are based. Cues could be taken from several radio stations across the country and even state-owned television stations that broadcast educational programmes in local languages in the form of quiz and debate competitions among pupils in primary and secondary schools. Apart from generously rewarding pupils that demonstrate great proficiency in their indigenous languages in such competitions the educational television broadcast could be designed to meet the needs of the target audience with certain topics drawn from the syllabi of the pupils, particularly in respect of

joint examinations for primary school leavers, junior secondary and senior secondary examinations. A 30-minute educational program designed in this way would go a long way to enhance the prestige of local languages on air and also underscore the social responsibility of the mass media to accommodate the needs of their audience. In this manner the television station would be fulfilling the functions of responsive community media that take due cognizance of pressing social needs in the immediate community and taking useful steps towards addressing them.

News Broadcasts

Aside from direct educational programming that is classroom-confined, there are some other programs that could help the pupils to improve their proficiency in the local languages. One such outlet is the news broadcast. Local news as against the network news on NTA stations would first be in English and the indigenous language version would come later. One disheartening development concerning news in both English and native languages was that while the news in English was cast with the reports fully packaged in English, the news in the indigenous language in some stations, more often than not, represented an abridged version of the news in English. Worse still, the reports that were given in full in English would just be summarized in local language with a lot of details left out.

Shortly before the expiration of his tenure, Dr. Tony Iredia, the former director-general of the NTA, using his prerogative as a helmsman committed to making the NTA more inclusive, decreed that the order in which news in the foreign and local languages was cast be reversed. Now the indigenous language was to come first. This innovation is highly commendable, and goes a long way to confer relevance and legitimacy on the local languages. Though the premium put on the local languages by this radical act may not strike the ordinary television viewer as remarkable, this writer considers this move as having profound implications for getting round the seemingly gargantuan task of de-emphasizing the English language in this all-important domain of national life.

What is particularly of interest to the researcher is that some reporters, particularly in the southwestern part of Nigeria, who had hitherto been reporting in English are now also the ones reporting in the indigenous language, Yoruba. What strikes the researcher as a welcome development is the clinical manner in which the reporters handle Yoruba, without mixing codes from English. Such reporters in ordinary everyday interactional situations would code-mix freely but because the media serve as agenda-setters, the linguistic habit of these reporters is an eloquent testimony of the African language teaching model and linguistic competence needed to break the domination of English. As a matter of fact, pupils who use the indigenous language would, apart from imbibing the linguistic habit, also be able to enrich their vocabulary in the local language.

While the present researcher celebrates the innovation at NTA, he holds the view that the initiative of using the language of the immediate speech community to cast and report news should be a launchpad for other innovative steps that the station could further take to enhance the status of local languages. For instance, the network news at 9 pm on NTA could be broken down into segments and put in the people's indigenous languages for accurate and up-to-date

information that meets the needs of the rural population. To avoid translating the whole news segment at once thereby delaying the broadcast of the news, a news flash or breaking news could be rendered in indigenous languages without delay while other news items with less urgency could be presented subsequently. The importance of this is that television viewers who do not use the English language, the language of the NTA network news at 9 pm, would have the alternative of watching the version in the local languages. This position finds expression in the view of Wilson (1987: 44):

Local languages are important in the dissemination of information in the rural areas bearing in mind that a great majority of the peoples do not understand nor do they speak English, which very often is the medium used for all broadcasting in the country.

Wilson (1987) contends that if television is to perform the role for which it is known to be best suited, then it must use a language that is understood by the majority of the people it reaches. Wilson (1987: 38) writes that television should:

- (a) mobilise the people at the grassroots level towards national consciousness;
- (b) be a source of education and enlightenment for the masses leading them towards self-actualization and national development; and
- (c) serve intra/inter-cultural and other communication purposes leading to group cohesion and national unity.

Beyond meeting these ideological goals, broadcasting news in local languages would also expand the vocabulary of the respective indigenous languages and thus enhance job opportunities for trained linguists who will translate from the original English version packaged at the NTA national headquarters to the different local languages.

Children's Entertainment Programs

In addition to packaging news in the local languages, one other thing that can be explored is children's entertainment programs in indigenous languages. Experience particularly of observant parents shows that children love cartoons in English especially "Sesame Street" and recall the episodes they have watched, the characters that engage them most and the lessons (if any) they have learned. Although the actions of the characters in educational cartoons do amuse children, it is the animation, background music or sound track and color combinations that primarily catch their fancy. So why can we not devise means of producing educational cartoons in our local languages to parallel the English versions that hold our children spellbound while eating or even doing their homework?

We could also shift attention to documentaries in indigenous languages that touch on very interesting aspects of children's lives. This is an area where linguists and educational psychologists need to explore in collaboration. The production of these documentaries could cover African flora and fauna in a bid to make the target learners understand their environment and the cultural space that defines it. Understanding the African world in terms of the flora and fauna in the medium of the local languages would help to acculturate the already culturally displaced viewers and then facilitate their learning of such concepts whenever they are taught in the medium of a foreign language.

We have to emphasize that learning through television should not be limited to educational broadcasts. The informal aspects of literacy should also be given due recognition. We will be working towards attaining holistic mother-tongue literacy in Africa patterned after that of Papua New Guinea. Faraclas (1994: 2) quoted in van Broekhuizen (p. 3) reports on literacy efforts in Papua New Guinea as follows:

The Movement for Critical Literacies in Papua New Guinea has redefined literacy itself. Literacy is no longer the power to decode and encode written texts. This is only a peripheral and even non-essential aspect of literacy. For thousands of Papua New Guineans, literacy has become synonymous with the power to critically read and creatively write the discourses, versions of culture, and other structures and systems that determine how and why we live our lives.

Informal Educational Broadcasts

We need to mention the symbiotic relationship between culture and language so that we can understand our topics better. According to Onabajo (2005) culture involves how people live their lives in respect of their mode of dress, marriage, religion, festivals, child naming, family life, economy and technology. Explaining the place of language in cultural identity, Emenanjo (2002: 4) writes that “cultures are systems of symbols for the identification of a people and language is one of the most potent symbols in the network.” Lending his voice to the discourse, Austin (2008: 89) sees languages as important “repositories of history and culture.” Considering those rather obvious facts, we can explore how the promotion of cultural aspects of television can advance the cause of indigenous language learning.

One cultural aspect that can be used to catch the interest of target learners is story-telling. This can present the beauty of the African cultural heritage and to acquaint students with their historical ties. We need to recall here that in the past, the network service of NTA used to broadcast a program “Tales by Moonlight” in English. English as the medium of communication in the story-telling series detracts greatly from the pedagogical essence of the program, because certain verbal artifacts such as songs, proverbs and idioms that would lose their color in English renditions are lost. Every language has its unique way of viewing, thinking about and expressing the world. African culture in story needs to be broadcast in African languages.

To downplay English and underscore the relevance and function of African languages, the likes of “Tales by Moonlight” should be broadcast in the local languages and reflect the unique cultural heritage of the varied communities where NTA stations are based. In addition to teaching African morality and how it rewards honesty, gives respect to others, and so on, efforts should be made by the story-teller to teach consciously cultural traits such as clothing, poem recitation, proverbs, idioms, greetings and the like in the local languages. Greeting customs alone are enough to engage the target audience. Although greeting is universal, entrenched in every society, the elaborate forms of greetings in most African societies is worth learning. For instance, among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, greeting customs are highly elaborate. According to Abiodun (2006: 1),

Whereas greeting is common to all cultures, its features differ from culture to culture. In some cultures, greeting assumes an elaborate form in which it is keenly knitted with other socio-cultural aspects of life. In some other cultures it assumes a simple form that is seen as just an aspect of life.

Therefore the various communities where NTA stations are located should teach and thereby preserve the rich cultural heritage for posterity.

Finally, other cultural legacies that could be transmitted by television while teaching local languages include songs, drama, and local music. These could be strategically linked up with other cultural practices such as marriage and naming ceremonies. As part of their social responsibility NTA stations could devise shows that would be presented as competitions among pupils in the various primary and secondary schools in the locality. NTA's returning to such cultural programs would be reminiscent of the early years of television broadcasting in Nigeria when such programs were the pride of the media. Duyilemi (2005: 290) recalls the early successes of the Western Nigerian Television (WNTV) Ibadan:

Television stations producers went to town in search of cultural talents in many areas: drama, songs, dances, musical plays and comical displays. The highlights of these exercises were the various discoveries made by the station in its talent hunts. Those talents discovered later became international, national and local celebrities in African cultural music, and dances, and in other entertainment fields.

Arguing for the promotion of the local languages on the various NTA stations without considering the possible challenges to the realisation of this goal would leave a great lacuna in this study, hence our focus in the next section of the study in which we study three main challenges that will have to be tackled headlong by educational television on NTA to reinforce local language teaching in Nigeria.

Deluge of Political Propaganda on Television

The ideological considerations that underlined the establishment of television stations in Nigeria as well as in other African countries have not been pursued proportionately. What we have now is a situation in which the political motivation for television establishment has supplanted the educational drive. Looking back to the early years of television broadcasting in Nigeria when the infestation of television with political propaganda began, Umeh (1989: 57) says:

...observers at the time believed that although these television stations were welcome and useful in many respects, they nevertheless served partisan political purposes for their various governments. This political and sectionalistic heritage was to be passed over to future television establishments in Nigeria.

Then Bamgbose (2006) lamented that most of Nigeria's government-owned electronic media fouled the air with government propaganda. On state radio stations broadcasters fell all over one another to sing the praises of incumbent governors seeking re-election for a second term. That was to the detriment of broadcasting quality and broadly undermined educational programs, particularly in the local languages. The same is now true of South Africa, for example. Sado (2007) reports:

In September (2006) the South African Department of Arts and Culture, DAC, and the national television broadcaster, SABC, initiated a partnership aimed at adapting literature about the culture and the arts of South Africa for television. This is primarily aimed at initiating the interest of the younger generation in arts and culture through TV. According to Dr. Z. P. Jordan, the Minister for Arts and Culture, the South African society is not a reading one. Hence, there is need to propagate and preserve the cultural values and arts of the people through the TV adaptation of literary classics written in indigenous South African languages. This is expected to help the younger generation who watch more TV than they read books, learn their arts and culture through TV while also being stimulated to get interested in reading about this culture.

Nigeria needs to take her cue from the South African media and give priority to the teaching of her culture and language on television. Nigeria needs to restrict politicking in the media that displaces educational offerings. Adelakun (2009: 3) submits:

The area of content is one in which Nigerian television station needs to buckle up. Very few programmes on television engage. Nollywood lends a hand here – the films are beamed wholesale and they fill up the empty programme schedule. Midnight broadcasts more or less comprise basically Nigerian music being played all night long ... Now, many game shows in which the viewers are encouraged to call in or send text messages pervade the air.

Incoherent Media Policy

The media in Nigeria lack a coherent policy that gives due consideration to local language education programming. Little wonder then that after Dr. Iredia's exit from office some NTA stations have reverted to the old practice of giving primacy to English in news broadcasts. That is a great setback to the crusade of de-emphasizing English in the media and empowering the local languages. Whatever other innovations are made at the different NTA local stations with regard to the entrenchment of Nigeria's cultural values cannot be left to the whims and caprices of the respective managements. A coherent media policy is needed to place a high premium on Nigeria's arts and culture and put them on television. That would clearly meet the mandate of NTA. When the local stations are properly monitored by the network centers they will implement the mandate to the letter, or be sanctioned.

The practice that obtains at present where the satellite stations hook on to the network for certain programs needs to be critically examined. Do the people in local communities actually benefit from these network programs when the language of broadcast is alien to them? While the stations in the capital cities cater to the general interest of Nigerians by broadcasting in the lingua franca, there should be a media policy that grants some measure of autonomy to satellite NTA stations to create programs that will serve the needs of the local people.

While we acknowledge and appreciate the ideology underlying the network service as an attempt to give impetus to the country's "Unity in Diversity." But national issues should be relayed in the language the people understand if the impact is to be felt. So, while the satellite stations will still keep in touch with the national network service, a media policy should be adopted that encourages the local stations to design programs that meet the needs of local people

Lethargy toward Learning Local Languages

When the drums sounded on Tuesday, March 17, 2009 in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, to launch the rebranding initiative of late president Yar'Adua's administration, there was a catalogue of social vices, namely corruption, drug dealing, cybercrime, advance-fee fraud and negative attitudes towards nation building, all detracting from the country's image. There was no mention made of the lethargy of Nigerians towards promoting their local languages. What else should have taken a vantage point in the rebranding effort if the negative attitudes of Nigerians towards local languages were not focused? Today many young Nigerians neither speak nor write in their local languages. Neither do they show any enthusiasm towards learning them in schools. We are compelled to ask this question: What identity does a country have to project to the world when its linguistic heritage is seriously threatened? No wonder that Ngugi wa Thiong'o quoted by Nwakunor (2009: 91) says:

...the death of any language is the loss of knowledge contained in that language. The weakening of any language is the weakening of its knowledge producing potential. It is a human loss. Each language no matter how small contains the best knowledge of its immediate environment: the plants and their properties, for instance. Language is the primary computer with a natural hard drive.

The mass media have a vital role to play in supporting the local languages so as to activate the "natural hard drive." Ammon and Mercator (1997: 51) cited in Musau (1999: 143) believe that a policy which has as its objective the spread of a specific language or languages must try not only to entrench it more deeply in the speakers but must also improve attitudes towards the languages. They see the mass media in African countries as being instrumental to achieving this laudable objective. Since the speakers' attitudes towards their language depend largely on its functions, status and prestige, giving a language prominence by using it as a language of broadcasting would foster language maintenance. Besides, television needs to come up with jingles that underscore the prestige of local languages and the need for the people to have positive attitudes towards them. This project is what the Ministry of Information and the National Orientation Agency need to consider in order to reverse the negative attitudes of Nigerians towards their local languages.

Conclusion

This study has evaluated the place of educational television in boosting the teaching and learning of Nigeria's local languages through the proliferation of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) as a catalyst for meeting the goal of injecting initiatives into the hitherto text-based, classroom-confined and therefore stilted mother-tongue literacy. Although the study has tried to point out the areas where the NTA has put in place programs in educational television, the fact that such programs are not at present tailored toward entrenching mother-tongue literacy shows that national television is not yet responding resourcefully enough to its responsibility to serve the people. Equally, the challenges we discussed in the preceding section demonstrate that the agency and the leadership in Nigeria need to rethink whether national television should continue to serve party/sectional interests or should give consideration to meeting the information needs of the people.

With the potential of the NTA to strengthen local language literacy in Nigeria as pointed out in this paper, there is room for great improvement. We challenge NTA and the media regulatory body in Nigeria to give the matter of educational television for local languages the priority it deserves. We cannot but agree with Brock-Utne (2002: 7) that the strengthening of African languages in education and in the media “is a matter of social justice for the masses of Africans, as well as the exercise of democracy.”

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