UNPROFESSIONAL USE OF HAUSA LANGUAGE IN BILLBOARD ADVERTISING

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Abstract
One of the characteristics of billboard advertising is that it should be done in a local language. In Nigeria, Hausa is one of the major local languages that are used in billboard advertising. It has been observed over the years that most of the billboard advertisements are in colloquial Hausa. The use of Hausa language in these advertisements grossly falls below the standard Hausa and its orthography. Viewers and readers of these Hausa advertisements both natives and professional users of Hausa, always express concern and decry the sight of these rampant misuse of Hausa in billboard advertising. It is in view of this professional concern that this study examines critically and exposes some of these unprofessional errors and offers functional solutions.

Introduction

The frequency of advertising in modern media is probably difficult to quantify. People are being bombarded with hundreds and thousands of various types of advertising everyday. Whether people are relaxing at home, reading the newspapers, listening to the radio, viewing television, shopping, traveling, or simple lazing around, people cannot avoid seeing or hearing advertisements. These advertisements come in an extraordinary range of forms and contexts. The largest and most noticeable group belongs to commercial consumer advertising; but there are also such categories as trade advertising - i.e. from shop to consumers, prestige advertising by government department, classified advertising and direct mailing. The media through which these advertisements are disseminated vary. They include among others, posters, signs, billboards, notices, show cards, samples, circular, catalogue, labels, wrapping paper, price tags, tickets, facing caps, footballers' shirts, etc. The ears can be assailed as well as the eyes, with slogans, jingles, street cries, messages from loudspeakers, and range of auditory effects heard in radio and television advertising.

It is interesting to note that it is usually the visual content and design of an advertisement that makes the initial impact and causes the consumers to take note of it. But, in order to get people to identify the product, remember its name or at least make them feel that it is familiar, and persuade them that it is worth buying; advertising rely almost totally on the use of language. The use of language generally and African languages, Hausa particularly, in advertising has become indispensable. It is in view of the importance of the use of language in advertising that this study, examines critically the use of Hausa in billboard advertising. It should be noted however, that despite the prevalence of Hausa in literary activities since the 13th century, it is lamentable that most of the billboard advertisements are in colloquial Hausa. There is also the need to know some of the factors that are responsible for the inability of the copywriters to convey their

messages in standard Hausa and its orthography. Similarly, it will be interesting to identify how the non-application of Hausa verbal arts affects the impact of these advertisements.

Understanding Advertising

Arens et al (2008, P. 7) argue that advertising is the structured and composed non-personal communication of information, usually paid for and persuasive in nature, about products (goods, services and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media.

As a consumer, you are exposed to hundreds and may be even thousands of commercial messages everyday. They may appear in the forms used by the mini campaign magazine advertisement, billboards, pre-movie commercials, websites, and publicity products exposure or in the form of radio and television commercials, coupons, sales letters, event sponsorships, telemarketing calls, or e-mails. These are just a few of the many communication tools that companies and organizations use to initiate and maintain contact with their customers, clients, and prospects. All these may simply be referred to as advertising or preferably marketing communication.

It is important to note that advertising is, first of all, a type of communication. It is actually a very structured form of applied communication, employing both verbal and nonverbal elements that are composed to fill specific space and time formats determined by the sponsor. Again, advertising is typically directed to groups of people rather than to individuals. It is therefore non-personal, or mass communication. These could be consumers, who buy products like minis for their personal use. Or they might be business people who buy fleets of cars for commercial or government use.

Most advertising is paid for by sponsors; in Nigeria, we are aware of some sponsors such as Paterson Zochonis popularly known as (PZ), Lever Brothers, Nestle, Cadbury Nigeria Ltd, British American Tobacco (BAT), Nasco Company, various Pharmaceutical companies, etc, who pay the newspapers or the radio or television stations to carry the advertisements we read, see and hear.

Of course, most advertising is intended to be persuasive to win converts to a product, service, or idea. In addition to promoting tangible goods such as soft drinks like Coca-Cola, Maltina; Detergents - like Blue Omo, Rin; Beverages like Bounvita, Milo etc, advertising helps publicize the intangible services of banks, bill collectors e.g. (NEPA), Water Board, Vehicle repair shops, and telephone companies such as MTN, Glo etc. Increasingly, advertising is used to advocate a wide variety of ideas, whether economic, political, religious, or social. In this presentation, the term product encompasses goods, services and ideas.

The aim of this study is to examine critically the use of Hausa language in billboard advertising; specifically it is intended to expose some of the misuse of Hausa language by the copywriters of billboard advertising; and -simultaneously to offer some functional solution for strategic eradication of the misuse of one of our cherished indigenous language - The Hausa Language.

Methodology and Theory

In this study, electic method and theory will be adopted. Specifically the descriptive method as proposed by Osuala (1982) and the pragmatic theory of analysis by Crystal and Verley (1993) as

well as "Translation Criticism" theory of Simpson (1985). The Simpson Theory based on "positive and negative points" of the translation in the electronics media is applied. The descriptive method will allow the researcher to take an intense look at the phenomenon of the moment and describe precisely what one has seen, read, or heard. The pragmatic theory, will guide the researcher to examine the factors that govern the choice of language, and how words and phrases are used in special meaning in particular situation. The "translation criticism" will be adopted with some modification due to the focus of this study, which is a critical analysis of unprofessional use of Hausa language in billboard advertising.

In view of this therefore, the critical analysis of this research will be concerned mainly with the choice of words, grammatical construction, translation from English language to Hausa, and then the use of standard Hausa language and its orthography in Hausa billboard advertising. This is to allow the analyst to determine the professional competence of the copywriters in the use of Hausa in billboard advertising.

Critical Analyses of Assorted Hausa Billboard Advertisements

Pragmatic theories of analyses of language and advertising advanced by Crystal and Varley (1993) and Crystal (1987) are adopted here. The theories have drawn attention to several important features of the use of language, to be considered, especially in advertising. These features include among others as: that the language of advertising should be laudatory, positive, unreserved, and emphasizes the uniqueness of a product or service. The vocabulary should tend to be vivid, and concrete. Figurative expression, rhythm, rhyme and other phonetic effects should be noticeable. Abdulmumin (2011, P. 18) argues that in the use of Hausa Language in advertising, standard Hausa and its orthography must be applied to make the advertising more effective.

Billboard advertising refers to an advertisement on a very large board erected by the roadside or attached to a building, use for displaying advertisements. It is also used "to communicate a succinct message or image in the *local language* (emphasis mine) to a mass audience quickly and frequently at the lowest cost per thousand of any major medium" (Arens, et al 2008, P. 581). It is a component or a category of out - of - Home media. In other words it is called outdoor advertising. Arens et al (2008, P. 580) report that:

> As a national and global medium, outdoor advertising has achieved great success. It was probably the first advertising medium ever used, dating back more than 5,000 years to when hieroglyphics on obelisks directed travelers. In the middle Ages, bill posting was an accepted form of advertising in Europe. And in the nineteenth century, it evolved into a serious art form, thanks to the poster paintings of both Manet and Toulouse - Lautrec.

The foregoing demonstrates that billboard is one of the earliest medium of advertising in the world. It would probably continue to be used for as long as possible. Today around the globe, marketers, producers, manufacturers etc use billboard advertising to advertise their goods and services especially in local or indigenous languages to a mass audience quickly and frequently. For instance, in Nigeria the three major indigenous languages - Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are used by the advertisers, copywriters, producer's etc marketers to advertise their goods and services to

their audiences respectively. This study, basically examines assorted billboard advertisements in Hausa as follows:

Advertisement A: Indomie Instant Millionaire Promotion 1st September - 30th October, 2009.

Reads in Hausa as follows:

Mutane sittin zasu zama Milloniya a cikin *Kwanaki sittin* (1) (2) Sayi naka katan na taliyar *Indo mie dan kaim*ka zama *daya*daga (3) (4) *Cinkin su* (5)

In this advertisement, there are five places where the misuse ofHausa is noticed. Two major problems are recognized. One, use of two plurals in an expression in
Hausa is not correct. Example, where they write *Mutanesittin* *, *it should be Mutum sittin.* The same rule applies to *Kwanaki sittin* *. It should be *Kwana sittin.* Two, the *dan, should be written with vowel /o/ to appear as don; then in the words *kaim, there is an omission of the vowel /a/. Therefore, it should be written as: kai ma because here are two words mistaken as one word. And three, is about the orthography of: **zasu* it is not one word. There are two words here, and they should be written separately as *za su.* Then, * *daya,* should be written with hooked d" thus: *daya.* Lastly, *cinkinsu **,* should be written as one word thus: *cikinsu.*

Advertisement B:

Gaggarumin*Kafi*zabo wanda kuka Fi so VEDAN mai Nauyin Giran Bakwai Ya dawo *a kan* *NERA BIYAR* *KACHAL* *VEDAN - zai sa ki kasance wacce taji iya girki a koina* *ANAN* Jaka*dava*mai nauyin giram bakwai *Nera.*biyar *kachaL*

With a careful look at the use of Hausa in the above billboard advertisement, one can spot several orthographical errors. It obviously shows high level of incompetence in the professional use of Hausa language. In the first place for instance, there is no word **Gaggarumi* in Hausa. What is available is *Gagarumi,* (an adjective masculine), and it means: important or impressive. As such, some of the words in this advertisement are not concrete.

The use of *Gagantmin* in the advertisement, is not even suitable; rather *Gangariya* which means (pure without alloy), will fit in here more appropriately since the aim of the advertisement is to extol the quality of the product. Then the words - *Kafi,* are two words wrongly written as one word. They should be written separately as: *Kafi zabo* meaning -"something which is better than" the "taste of Guineafowl meat!" in soup! The words *akan,* here are two words that should

be written separately as: *a kan.* The spelling of * *Nera* which appears in two places, is wrong; it should be spelt and written as: *Naira.* The word * *Kachal* should be written without consonant/h/. It should be as: *Kacal* it has also appeared in two places. Then the word: **aaya* is wrongly written. The first consonant /d/ should be a hooked. Therefore it should be written as *daya.* The **Koina,* is a universal noun which must be written with a glottal stop internally within the word. For this reason, the word should be written as *Ko 'ina.* See Galadanci (1976, P. 110-111). Then, lastly the word **ANAN,* here are two words that should be written separately as *A NAN.*

Advertisement C: Maggi cube with star label, popularly known and called in Hausa - *Maggi mai tauraro.* One of its billboard advertisements with some people taking a meal reads in Hausa thus:

Dandano shine Komai.

The caption is of course simple, clear and precise. It is unfortunately however, full of orthographical errors. In the first word, the first consonant /D/ should be hooked as /Ɗ/. Likewise the fourth consonant /d/, should be /ɗ/. Thus, the word should appear as *Dandano.*

Then these words *shine* are not one word. These are two words that should be written separately as *Shi ne.*

Advertisement D: Another MAGGI STAR Cube advertisement reads as follows:

Don abinci mai *dandano*yi girki da dunkulen MAGGI mai tauraro

In this advertisement, there are two places of misuse of Hausa letters. All are in the areas of non-application of the hooked consonants /ɗ/and /ƙ/ respectively. In the first word underlined, all the letters /d/ are supposed to be hooked as /ɗ/. Therefore the word should be written as ɗ*an*ɗ*ano.* In the second word, *dunkule,* the consonant /k/ should be hooked as /ƙ/ and the word should appear as: *dun*ƙ*ule.*

Advertisement E:

Sabon Kwali Cafenol (ZAZZA BI) CIWON HAKORI YANA KORAR CIWO NANTAKE

In this advertisement, three words are written wrongly. The first word: *ZAZZA BI* is one word not two words as separated in the advertisement; then consonant /B/ should be hooked as /Ɓ/. Therefore, the word should be written as ZAZZBI. The second word *HAK.ORI,* consonant /k/ should be hooked as this /Ƙ7. The word should be written like this: HAKORI. The third words, here are two words not one word; and should be written separately as: *NAN TAKE.*

Advertisement F:

RANVITOL

Lafiya ita ce Farin cikinka

Saboda ka *Chanchanci*samun *Koshin* lafiya

In this advertisement, there are two words that are written wrongly. The problem of the first word: *Chanchanci*,* is that outdated spellings are used in writing it. Therefore, the word should be written in the current standard spellings as: *cancanci,* thereby deleting all the consonants /h/ in the word. In the second word *Koshin, the first consonant /k/ should be a hooked letter as: /K/. Therefore, the word should be written as *Koshin.*

Advertisement G:

Milo
Ku sa ? Mamaki *acikin abincij? yara* nku da safe.

In this advertisement, there are four spots of disorderly use ofHausa orthography. The first spot bears an omission of a 'segment' - *abin,* which will quality the first part of the advertisement to read meaningfully as: Ku sa *abin* mamaki...; in the second spot, here are two items that should be written separately as: *a cikin.* The locative 'a' is always independent in standard orthography. In the third spot, another omission is yet committed - a link element -n is omitted. You cannot have/say: **abinci yara*.* It should be written as: abincin yara-; then in the fourth spot, it is one word - precisely short possessive -nku, which is supposed to be written as one word thus: *yaranku* but is wrongly disjointed.

Advertisement H: This is MTN - (Mobile Telephone Network) line advertising their service as follows:

* * *
Fadi abinda kake so ka fadi

In this advertisement, there are four words that are wrongly written. Two words which appear in two different positions have similar problem. Their problem is in the orthography of hooked consonants /ɗ/. The hook sign on the consonant is misplaced as: / a /. Standard orthography requires that the hook sign should face rightward not leftward. Then, in the words *abinda,* here are two words that should be written separately as: *abin da,* but they are disorderly written as one word.

Advertisement I: This is a Glo - (Global Line Organisation) advertising their service in Hausa as follows:

Marabanku Glo

Abun nema an samu

Regin
hamsin
bisadari in aka kira
daga layin Glo zuwa Glo
har kwana chas' in

In this advertisement, there are several places of misuse of Hausa language and one of its aspects of Hausa verbal arts that is Proverb. In the first place, the proverb - quoted in this advertisement by the copywriter, is consciously and wrongly represented or manipulated. The original wording of the proverb reads: *"Abin nema ya samu, matar alke ta haifi Ɗan Jaki".* (It is a good luck that an itinerant trader's wife gives birth to an infant donkey).

In the quoted proverb, - *"Abun nema an samu…",* the word **abun* should be *abin.* The alteration of the 3rd person singular masculine pre-verbalpronoun" (Galadanci, 1976, P. 63) -*ya* with "the impersonal pronoun -an" Bargery (1934, P. 31) is wrong. The proverb can simply be quoted in its original wording as: *"Abin nema ya samu... " (What people are longing/or is available here).* It will also serve the purpose of being a headline which acts as attention - getter, attracting the consumer to get him to read the entire advertisement copy. The argument of this analyst is that the quotation of this proverb in its original wording is, however, by no means the most effective utilization of this aspect of Hausa verbal arts in advertising.

Other problem of the wordings of this advertisement is in the areas of colloquialism. For example, the word **Regin* is wrong, it should be written as *Ragin.* Then, there is unconscious omission of an element of quantifier - called enumerator = *Kashi* which normally precedes numerals for counting and calculating. Therefore, the statement in the advertisement should be written as: *^{H}Ragin kashi hamsin...".* Also the bisa does fit in here; it should be alterated with: *cikin,* and the first consonant of the word **dari* should be a hooked consonant: /ɗ/ to appear as: dari. Then, consonant /h/ in the word *chas' in should be removed and vowel /a/ should be inserted; so that the word can appear in its standard form as: *casa' in.*

Advertisement J: This is an advertisement of a Golden Penny - product called Pasta. It reads as follows:

Golden Penny Pasta

KAYIFICE

____Zabi ne ga ivali na

One of the problems of this advertisement is poor translation. This advertisement is originally in English and it reads:

Be outstanding — my family's choice

The first part of the translated version of the advertisement as in the above, is not appropriate. The aim of convincing a consumer to "be outstanding" if he/she uses the Golden Penny product of Pasta is not vividly captured in Hausa. Therefore, ideally the translation should be as: *Don zama Gawurtacce,* or *don zama fitacce.*

In the second part, although the translation is appropriate there are two orthographical errors. One, in the first word *Zabi, the consonant /b/ should be hooked as: /ɓ/, and it should appear as this: *zabi.* two, the last word: **Iyali na,* should not be written separately. It is one word that should be written as a single entity as *iyalina,* which indicates a short possessive. The standard Hausa rule requires that "a short possessive is joined to the preceding nominal", (Galadanci, 1976, P. 112).

Advertisement K: This is an advertisement for a mobile line - GLO free midnight calls. It reads in Hausa as follows:

Hi ran* tsakar dare ta GLO Kuma kira ta* tsakar dare a kyauta * * * * *karfe Gomashabiyu da dare zuwa karfe zumabiyar na asuba

In this advertisement, there are various misapplication of Hausa language structurally. In the first instance, there is a vivid ignorance of the Gender of Hausa nouns. The word Hira-, is a feminine noun, and should not be used with a masculine referential -n; as appeared in the advertisement: Hira*n tsakar dare ta GLO. Instead, it should be Hirar tsakar dare ta GLQ, with a feminine referential -r indicating a short genitival complex. Again, the word kira is a masculine noun, and should not be preceded with a feminine singular long genitival complex link element — ta; as is written in the advertisement: Kira *ta tsakar dare a kyauta. Standard orthography requires that it should be written with a masculine singular long genitival complex link element-na, to appear as: Kira na tsakar dare a kvauta.

The word * karfe should be written with a hooked consonant /ƙ/ as ƙarfe. The next problem is word division; *Gomashabiyu. These are three words that should be written separately as: Goma sha bivu. These words, are quantifiers under complex cardinal numerals for counting and calculating. Standard Hausa orthography requires that they should be written structurally and syntactically, separately. Then the use of conjunction da to precede dare which is a masculine noun is wrong; instead, a long genitival complex link element -na is the most appropriate here. Lastly, the insertion of the word zuma before biyar is unnecessary.

Advertisement L: This advertisement of Dabur Herbal TOOTHPASTE. The Hausa Billboard advertisement reads as follows:

> Man goge baki na daya a Nigeria
>
> Wanda ke dauke da Sinadaran ganyaitatuna
>
> DANKARA HASKEN HAKORI DA SAMUN NUNFASHI MAI KYAU

There are two fundamental problems in the use of Hausa language in this advertisement. First, is orthographical error, where many consonants were wrongly written. For example, the first consonant in the word *daya, should be a hooked consonant like this: /ɗ/; therefore, the word should be written as ɗaya. The same rule applies to the word *dauke; the first consonant should be hooked and the word should appear as ɗauke. Other orthographical errors are: in the word *DAN should be written with a vowel /O/ as DON in accordance with the standard orthography. The first consonant in the word *KARA should be hooked. Therefore, the word should be written as KARA. Similar rule is applicable to the third consonant in the word - HAKORI; this word should appear as HAKQRI.

The second problem is the use of vocabulary, where unconcrete vocabulary is used. For example: *ganya and *itatuna, these are not concrete and vivid Hausa vocabulary. The concrete Hausa vocabulary that should be used in the advertisement are: ganyayyaki which is a plural of ganye (leaf); and itatuwa which is a plural of itace (a tree). Then, the word *NUNFASHI is substandard. The standard form that should be used is: LUMFASHI. It is important to note also that toothpaste is usually translated as man goge haƙori, and Nigeria is translated as Nijeriya.

Observations and Recommendations

It is necessary to make the following observation and recommendation as far as this study of unprofessional use of Hausa in billboard advertising is concerned. It should be noted that most of the copywriting in the Hausa billboard advertising fall below the standard Hausa and its orthography. Majority of the copywriters even though they are probably native speakers of Hausa and in addition possess a good competence in the two working languages i.e. Hausa and English, yet most of them do not appear to have any formal or professional training in Hausa language and its orthography, and translation.

There is also a general assumption that when an individual is endowed with linguistic resource he/she may be able to manage it for communicative purposes in Mass Communication. It has to be understood that the absence of formal or professional training as observed in the use of Hausa in billboard advertising is a serious setback to the profession which lack proper approach in its developmental processes. This is due to the fact that the advertisers, copywriters and agents lack the technical knowledge in linguistic management for efficient utilization of the linguistic resources available to them.

In view of the foregoing analyses, some of the basic problems that are discovered are structured around three areas. One is ignorance of Hausa language, literature and culture; two,

unprofessional ism and three, use of substandard services. In order to address and rectify these problems, the following recommendations could serve as functional solutions:

Copywriters need to be educated properly in Hausa language literature and culture; so as to enable them acquire the necessary knowledge and skills and how to use the language effectively. They must learn that mere acquisition of the spoken ability of the language is not enough. They need to be trained in standard Hausa grammar and its orthography. This will enable them to produce easy-to-read lettering, which is essential for consumer comprehension in billboard advertising.

Advertisers should desist from employing sub-standard services of unprofessional copywriters. This will enable them to achieve positive and effective advertising. Unprofessionalism and sub-standard always lead to the production of negative and ineffective advertising.

Advertisers and copywriters should be courageous enough to avail themselves with the services of Professionals/Consultants in various centres and institutes of learning. This will enable them acquire the necessary services in terms of knowledge, skills and formal training for the production of effective and standard advertising in Hausa.

Conclusion

This study basically examined the unprofessional use of Hausa language in billboard advertising. Assorted Hausa billboard advertisements were randomly selected and analyzed. The analyses particularly concerned the choice of words, use of phrases and more importantly dealt with the non-application of the standard Hausa and its orthography. Other problem such as wrong spellings and misuse of Hausa grammar and poor translation were also examined in detail. Equally, functional solutions were provided to rectify the observed errors.

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