

Towards a Language Policy for Journalistic Practice in Africa

By

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Abstract

This paper provides a new dimension to language discussion and usage in journalistic practice in Ghana. The aim is to engineer consensus towards the establishment of a journalistic language policy in journalism education and practice in order to include the masses in the political discourse of Ghana and beyond. Whenever issues come up for discussion regarding the media, democracy, and allied subjects, almost no attention is paid to language usage. Meanwhile language is the main tool or medium through which national and global issues are made available to the citizenry of the country for informed choices to be made; it is through language that people give meaning to participation, which is a key component of liberal democracy, which is being practised in Ghana and in many other African countries.

Hence, the paper uses analytical semantics (textual and grammatical approaches) and sociolinguistic resources to do a content analytical study of two prominent daily newspapers in Ghana—the **Daily Graphic** and **The Chronicle**. The comparative study used the front-page story of selected editions of each newspaper within three months—July to September, 2009. Aptitude tests in reading and understanding of the sentences used for the analysis were also used on sampled people.

The findings generally appears to confirm the reality that the newspapers in Ghana do not really communicate since their language styles do not make for easy reading and understanding considering the sociolinguistics and demography of Ghana. A very significant aspect of the findings is the fact that in Ghana, almost all newspapers are in English. The findings therefore provoke and provide the impetus for a discussion of the implications for journalism practice in Ghana, and language teaching in journalism institutions in Ghana and beyond. The idea is to enhance the capacity of the media to play more active roles in deepening democracy through using language (here English) that is accessible to the vast majority of the Ghanaian populace. The paper thus calls for improvement in English teaching and learning in journalism institutions and explores the possibility of a moderating language policy for media practice in the industry.

Introduction

The media are an inevitable component of democratic governance the world over. Societies, especially democratic ones, accord the media a strategic place because of their indispensable role in developing and securing democracy, So far as news is concerned, the media provide and

interpret “worthy” news to ensure and foster accountability, transparency, justice, respect for human rights, civic participation, among others, which are vital for development. The UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education (2007, p. 6), emphasises the function of the media thus:

As a source of information, analysis and comment on current events, journalism performs a number of functions in modern societies. The basic goal of most journalists, however, is to serve society by informing the public, scrutinizing the way power is exercised, stimulating democratic debate, and in those ways aiding political, economic, social and cultural development.

The media’s obligation to society, especially to developing societies, is what has motivated studies in development communication, as observed in the theories of development and social change. The ultimate aim of this field of study and its theories, in spite of the criticisms against them, is to remove constrictions for a more equal and participatory society and help solve the challenges associated with the lack of development in underdeveloped societies (Inkeles & Smith, 1974; Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964; Rogers, 1962, 1983; Waisbord, (n.d)). Thus, through the media, the people become discerning and get enlightened to know their rights, to engage in “discursive argumentation” on issues of general concern and to make constructive decisions and choices that positively affect their lives. Indeed, Waisbord (n.d, p. 1) points out that statistics produced by UNESCO showing the penetration of the media in an environment become the “proxy of development.”

This paper is therefore informed by the imperatives of the media’s role in national development in Ghana. Nonetheless, the above is achievable only if the media do their work well and reach

the majority of the people. Language serves as the main vehicle by which media information reaches the people. The issue of language has received the necessary attention in the media and academia in Ghana. However, concerns over bad English involving errors in spelling, tense, concord, apt words, etc. have been over flogged. This paper addresses the language challenge from a different perspective; it examines the readability and semantic accessibility of journalistic writing involving sentences that could be free from grammatical mistakes.

Indeed, Ghana, in her sporadic history of democracy and military rules, has never experienced the level of pluralism and freedoms the media is enjoying today. The country has a significant number of print and electronic media outlets scattered all over the country with very interesting language options. According to the National Communications Authority (NCA) (2009), there are about 171 radio stations and 15 free-to-air and encrypted TV stations actively operating in Ghana. These radio stations have a national distribution. And according to Ghana's National Media Commission (NMC) (2009), there are about 150 registered newspapers with about 70 active. These stations and papers are both privately and state owned. Apart from a marginal few radio and TV stations, which (like JOY FM in Accra) broadcast mainly in English, the electronic media generally broadcast in a blend of English and some of the country's many local languages depending on location and ethnic composition. Radio and TV are consequently very interactive, involving phone-in sessions for listeners and viewers to express their views either in English or in a local language. But significantly, almost all the newspapers in Ghana are in English. Thus, newspapers in Ghana are open to only those who can read and understand English.

This paper focuses on the print media (newspapers). The question this study seeks to answer is whether the Ghanaian newspapers use a language style that invites reading and makes

information or news relatively understandable to the broad spectrum of the populace who matter within the broad democratic framework. This is a relevant issue since in spite of the about 54 indigenous languages in Ghana, English still remains the official and national language.

This writer, upon a careful study of newspapers in Ghana, has identified a phenomenon in the use of language, which may be described as “semantic exclusivism and inclusivism.” As a concept, “semantic exclusivism” refers to a situation where newspapers, instead of using words and expressions to create images in readers’ minds thereby attract readership, rather unknowingly use language that the great majority of the targeted readership cannot identify with or understand. The result is that such readers are alienated or excluded from the media discourse. “Semantic inclusivism” also refers to a situation where the newspapers deliberately use language that targets an identified group within the population. Thus, such a group is selectively included in the agenda of such papers. This paper concentrates on “semantic exclusivism.”

This paper is towards the establishment of the concept of “semantic exclusivism” in mass communication and aims at engineering a consideration towards a journalistic language policy (English) in media practice using journalism training institutions as the preparatory ground. The idea is to prompt the media to use a language style that makes information readily accessible to Ghanaian citizens from Junior High School level up so as to facilitate socio-economic development in Ghana.

Concepts and methodology

This paper uses various key writing principles to situate the work. Due to the brief expectation of the paper, the principles will just be introduced without details. The first is the rhetorical

situation in writing. This refers to five elements to consider during any writing process: the writer, the topic, the purpose, the audience, and the context for writing (Troyka, 1993). Each of these elements plays an important role in the writing process since they collectively depict the position adopted in writing, the reader targeted, and the reasons for writing, which affects the content, word choice and comprehension of the sentences.

The second is the language level principle. Language can be analysed as formal, informal, and a level between the two. Formal language is complex and so relatively more difficult to understand. Informal language is simple and relatively easier to understand. Formal language is not readily accessible to all; it usually has long complex sentences, “high” vocabulary (often “big”, Latinate and technical words), among others. The relative opposite goes for the informal language level, which is colloquial with simple and familiar vocabulary and sentences. The above, together with other linguistic features such as word choice, mood, voice, etc. make up the unique writing style of a person or group.

In terms of journalistic writing, this paper considers the content, the reader, and the purpose as three key elements vital to achieving the ultimate goal of journalism. The topic here applies to the issue of the news story and how relevant it is to the orientations of the paper and the developmental aspirations of the people. The reader is the “consumer” of the news. Writing naturally demands reading. As such, every writer must consider and analyse his or her reader so as to tailor the writing to suit the interest, need and ability of the reader. Therefore, the question is, “Who should be the target of the newspapers? If one expectation of the media is to inform the people for development, then the readership should be as broad as possible—from the not too educated to the highly educated. Regarding the purpose, apart from the much touted media

functions of informing, persuading, entertaining, etc., journalism is to provide knowledge and enlightenment. In fact, journalism is fast becoming a social institution as it serves as a cumulative history of the total life and culture of a people.

For specific methodology, this work did a content analyses of two prominent daily newspapers—the *Daily Graphic* (published by Graphic Communications Group Limited) and *The Chronicle* (also published by General Portfolio Limited), which are state and privately owned papers respectively. The work used front-page stories of some randomly but purposely picked editions of both papers to determine first, the type of stories covered, and second, whether the language style used is accessible to the intended audience in terms of number of sentences per paragraph, words per sentence, type of sentence, clauses, vocabulary, etc. Two editions of each newspaper was selected per week between July and September, the days alternating between Mondays/Wednesdays and Tuesdays/Thursdays. However, a few samples for September are captured for attention. The Gunning Fog Index was also applied to each of the selected sentences to determine the readability index.

The Gunning Fog Index

The Gunning Fog Index Readability Formula (FOG Index), developed by the American textbook publisher, Robert Gunning, calculates and determines the extent of readability of a piece of writing. This facility, based on the observation that most American high school graduates were unable to read, identified writing as the main problem because “newspapers and business documents were full of ‘fog’ and unnecessary complexity (<http://www.readabilityformulas.com/gunning-fog-readability-formula.php>). The Fog Index is thus “weighted average of the number of words per sentence, and the number of long words per

text, which claims to be the number of years in full-time education required to understand the text” (<http://simbon.madpage.com/Fog/>). According to the FOG Index, “The ideal score for readability is 7 or 8. Anything above 12 is too hard for most people to read and short sentences written in Plain English achieve a better score than long sentences written in complicated language” (<http://www.readabilityformulas.com/gunning-fog-readability-formula.php>). The actual formula is as follows:

$$0.4 \left(\left(\frac{\text{words}}{\text{sentence}} \right) + 100 \left(\frac{\text{complex words}}{\text{words}} \right) \right)$$

(See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gunning-Fog_Index)

In applying the FOG Index to the Ghanaian situation, this paper acknowledges two challenges. First, the educational systems of America and Ghana today may not be exactly similar, particularly, in terms of quality and opportunities. The number of years from America’s grade 1 to grade 12 is almost equivalent to Ghana’s Primary 1 to Senior Secondary School (SSS) 3, and the curricula for both systems are equally rich in preparing students for their respective environments. Even the grading system for the college examinations in America has almost direct equivalence to the WASSCE grades for Ghana’s SSS as shown below.

Table 1: The grading systems of America’s and Ghana’s secondary examinations

US Grading System	Ghana Grading System	Value
A	A1	1
B	B2	2

C	B3	3
D	C4,C5,C6	4
E	D7, E8	5
F	F9	Fail

Source: <http://earthtrends.wri.org/povlinks/country/ghana.php>

But importantly, the American educational system is obviously far more endowed in terms of facilities, personnel and logistics, etc. Therefore, the implication of the Fog outcomes on Ghanaian writing should be very revealing.

Second, the FOG Index has one flaw: What is a complex word since the Index considers word with three syllables and above as complex? For example, short words like “abhor, prude, etc.” in Ghana are not familiar but complex, whilst words such as “criminal and happiness” are simple. Thus, the Fog Index will consider long names as complex.

Nevertheless, the Index gives a rough estimate of the readability of sentences in the newspapers which will be relevant to this study.

Data presentation, analyses and findings

This section presents an analysis of and a brief discussion on writings in the newspapers used for this work. Five front-page stories in five editions of each paper are captured. For each news story, the shortest and longest sentences have been presented and analysed to give an idea of the language style of the story. Apart from the headline, the sentences have been presented as they are in the papers.

Table 2: Sample sentences in the 2 newspapers

<i>Daily Graphic</i>	<i>The Chronicle</i>
<p><u>A</u></p> <p>Date: 2nd September, 2009</p> <p>Headline: Cocaine vessel held at Tema</p> <p>Type of story: social</p> <p>No of paragraphs: 10</p> <p>No of sentences: 10</p> <p><u>Shortest sentence</u></p> <p>He said the vessel, flying the Panamanian flag, carried 14,000 tonnes of sugar from Brazil.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ N^o of words: 15 ✓ N^o of clauses: 2 ✓ Type of sentence: complex ✓ “big” words / expressions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Vessel ✓ flying <p>FOG Index: 11</p> <p><u>Longest sentence:</u></p> <p>Briefing the <i>Daily Graphic</i> on the incident in Tema, the Chairman of the NACOB Board, Captain Assassie Gyimah (retd), said the vessel arrived in the country 10 days ago but was able to berth yesterday afternoon only for the security to discover the bags of substance suspected to be cocaine.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ N^o of words: 50 ✓ N^o of clauses: 3 	<p><u>A</u></p> <p>Date: 1st September, 2009</p> <p>Headline: As key region prepares to close Mac Manu legacy of “Owusu Ankomah”: Massive shake up in the west: Gradualists and radicals pitch camps to oust cancer in the region</p> <p>Type of story: political</p> <p>No of paragraphs: 27</p> <p>No of sentences : 34</p> <p><u>Shortest sentence</u></p> <p>This group believes only radicalism could change the face of the party and its fortune in the region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ N^o of words: 18 ✓ N^o of clauses: 2 ✓ Type of sentence: complex ✓ “big” words / expressions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Radicalism - Fortune - change the face <p>FOG Index: 12</p> <p><u>Longest sentence:</u></p> <p>Mr Kwesi Biney, the polemicist and firebrand chiefs-slayer and former Ahanta West District Chief Executive (DCE), Mr. Kwesi Blay; former Deputer Western Regional Minister, Mr. Dickson Nketsia, popularly called Kendicks, former regional first vice Chairman, Member of Parliament for Amenfi East and</p>

✓ **Type of sentence:** complex

✓ **“big” words / expressions**

- Briefing
- Vessel
- Security
- discover

FOG Index: 26

B

Date: 16 September, 2009

Headline: Crisis in school feeding programme; caterers to blame, says Alfred Vanderpuije but Nsawah disagrees

Type of story: educational/social

No of paragraphs: 27

No of sentences : 27

Shortest sentence

The idea is aimed at increasing enrolment, attendance and retention at the basic level.

- ✓ **N° of words:** 14
- ✓ **N° of clauses:** 1
- ✓ **Type of sentence:** simple
- ✓ **“big” words / expressions**
 - is aimed
 - retention

FOG Index: 17

Longest sentence:

Explaining the rational for the abrogation of

former Western Regional Minister—Hon. Joseph Boahen Aidoo as well as Mr. Padmore Kofi Yonkopa Arthur, regional director of National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO), are said to be the leading members of the radical group vowing to kick out the administration of Nana Owusu Ankomah, the incumbent chairman and direct brother of Member of Parliament for Sekondi Constituency, Hon. Papa Owusu Ankomah.

N° of words: 104

- ✓ **N° of clauses:** 2
- ✓ **Type of sentence:** complex
- ✓ **“big” words / expressions**
 - Polemicist
 - Firebrand
 - chiefs-slayer
 - radical group
 - incumbent

FOG Index: 18

B

Date: 18 September, 2009

Headline: Bows at NPP meeting, secretary, 6 others arrested for attacking chairman

Type of story: political

No of paragraphs: 11

No of sentences : 17

Shortest sentence:

Mr. Kokofu said, it was in the course of the meeting that the constituency secretary stormed the premise with the macho men.

contracts for the 44 caterers who worked for the AMA under the programme Mr. Vanderpuije stated that contracts under the school feeding programme were not permanent and that it would be reviewed annually to ensure that those who did not perform were kicked out.

- ✓ N^o of words: 51
- ✓ N^o of clauses: 5
- ✓ Type of sentence: complex
- ✓ “big” words / expressions
 - Rational
 - Abrogation
 - would be reviewed annually
 - did not perform

FOG Index: 16

C

Date: 21 / 09 / 09

Headline: Veep eulogises Nkrumah and affirms: Ghana worth dying for

Type of story: political
No of paragraphs: 11
No of sentences : 11

Shortest sentence:

He said it was against this backdrop that the ideals of Nkrumah should be immortalised.

- ✓ N^o of words: 15
- ✓ N^o of clauses: 3
- ✓ Type of sentence: complex
- ✓ “big” words / expressions
 - Backdrop

- ✓ N^o of words: 22
- ✓ N^o of clauses: 3
- ✓ Type of sentence: complex
- ✓ “big” words / expressions
 - the course
 - stormed the premise

FOG Index: 14

Longest sentence:

Mr. Kokofu, who later corroborated the report in an interview with the *Chronicle* at the Regional Police Headquarters, said the scheme by the constituency Secretary to attack him became apparent last Saturday, when he called a meeting of polling station executives at the Adoato Electoral Area to brief them on certain directives that he had received from the National hierarchy of the party, concerning the impending polling station elections.

- ✓ N^o of words: 69
- ✓ N^o of clauses: 5
- ✓ Type of sentence: complex
- ✓ “big” words / expressions
 - Corroborated
 - Scheme
 - Apparent
 - to brief
 - certain directives
 - National hierarchy
 - concerning

FOG Index: 24

- Ideals
- Immortalised
- Against this backdrop

Fog Index: 9

Longest sentence:

Speaking to the chiefs and people of Nkroful in the Ellembele District as part of the centenary celebration of Dr Nkrumah’s birthday, Vice-President Mahama said it was within this context that the debate over whether it was prudent to celebrate Nkrumah alone ought to be conducted.

- ✓ **N° of words:** 46
- ✓ **N° of clauses:** 6
- ✓ **Type of sentence:** complex
- ✓ **“big” words / expressions**
 - centenary
 - debate
 - prudent
 - within this context
 - ought to be conducted.

Fog Index: 24

D

Date: 25 / 09 / 09

Headline: Seven bodies washed ashore after beach jam in Accra

Type of story: social

No of paragraphs: 12

C

Date: 21 / 09 / 09

Headline: Another Pyram scam surfaces at jomoro. Bank Manager dupes clients... and absconds with GHc. 50,000 as police mount manhunt for William Thompson

Type of story: social

No of paragraphs: 16

No of sentences : 17

Shortest sentence:

Several attempts made by this reporter to speak to the District Chief Executive of the area proved futile, as he would not answer his cell phone.

- ✓ **N° of words:** 26
- ✓ **N° of clauses:** 4
- ✓ **Type of sentence:** complex
- ✓ **“big” words / expressions**
 - proved futile

Fog Index : 17

Longest sentence:

The Half Assini police in the Western region have mounted a search for the Managing Director of Classic Financial Limited, a Financial Institution, operating in the Jomoro and Ellembele districts, Mr Williamam Thompson, who has reportedly duped his clients to the tune GHc 50,000 and absconded.

- ✓ **N° of words:** 46
- ✓ **N° of clauses:** 4
- ✓ **Type of sentence:** complex
- ✓ **“big” words / expressions**
 - Mounted

No of sentences : 15

Shortest sentence:

Five of the bodies were recovered by the Osu Police and two by the Ministries police.

- ✓ **N° of words:** 16
- ✓ **N° of clauses:** 2
- ✓ **Type of sentence:** compound
- ✓ **“big” words / expressions**
 - Recovered
 - two by the Ministries police.

Fog Index : 12

Longest sentence:

The Osu District Police Commander, Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP), Peter Yembilla, told the *Daily Graphic* that on Monday, the Osu Police had a report from Lt David Dela Kpetigo, a naval officer, that Dankyiri Paul, another naval officer stationed near the Castle, drowned while trying to rescue a reveller at the beach.

- ✓ **N° of words:** 53
- ✓ **N° of clauses:** 4
- ✓ **Type of sentence:** very complex
- ✓ **“big” words / expressions**
 - a report
 - stationed
 - stationed
 - a reveller

Fog Index : 29

- reportedly duped
- absconded
- have mounted a search

Fog Index: 28

D

Date: 25 / 09 / 09

Headline: Star chamber in Mills Gov't. MCA boss removed. MCA boss removed but Mills denies knowledge

Type of story: political

No of paragraphs: 11

No of sentences : 12

Shortest sentence:

There was still no satisfactory answer from anyone when Chronicle picked up the information on Monday.

- ✓ **N° of words:** 16
- ✓ **N° of clauses:** 2
- ✓ **Type of sentence:** compound
- ✓ **“big” words / expressions**
 - picked up the information

Fog Index: 14

Longest sentence:

The United states Government met with the Ghanaian government delegation yesterday in preparation to sign a compact which will see the release of funds for the Millennium Challenge Authority (MCA) projects, but were rattled at the news that Mr Martin Esson Benjamin, the Chief Executive Officer of the

E

Date: 28 / 09 / 09

Headline: UK bribery scandal. AG initiates swift action

Type of story: political

No of paragraphs: 21

No of sentences : 22

Shortest sentence:

He (Former President Rawlings) said the investigations were needed to clear the name of the party and those of the individuals involved.

- ✓ **N° of words:** 19
- ✓ **N° of clauses:** 3
- ✓ **Type of sentence:** very complex
- ✓ **“big” words / expressions**
 - Investigations
 - Clear
 - to clear the name of the party
 - those of the individuals involved.

Fog Index: 15

Longest sentence:

Speaking to the *Daily Graphic* in Accra yesterday, the Attorney General said following the directives by President J.E.A. Mills for action on the bribery scandal, she also had taken advantage of the mutual legal assistance scheme under which Commonwealth countries co-operate in the prosecution of trans-border crimes and requested information from the UK authorities as to their investigations into the matter.

- ✓ **N° of words:** 61

US funded project had been removed.

- ✓ **N° of words:** 54
- ✓ **N° of clauses:** 5
- ✓ **Type of sentence:** very complex / compound
- ✓ **“big” words / expressions**
 - Compact
 - release of funds
 - rattled
 - US funded project

Fog Index: 30

E

Date: 28 / 09 / 09

Headline: Mabey & Johnson bribery scandal. Rawlings in a state of panic... as Mills calls for court findings

Type of story: political

No of paragraphs: 12 (up to sub-title “Contracts”)

No of sentences : 18

Shortest sentence:

On his numerous visits abroad, Mr Rawlings had also harped on allegations of corruption against everyone, except members of his government.

- ✓ **N° of words:** 21
- ✓ **N° of clauses:** 1
- ✓ **Type of sentence:** simple
- ✓ **“big” words / expressions**
 - Had also harped

Fog Index: 18

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ N^o of clauses: 6 ✓ Type of sentence: very complex ✓ “big” words / expressions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directives - Scandal - Prosecution - co-operate - investigations - following the directives - for action on the bribery scandal - the mutual legal assistance scheme - the prosecution of trans-border crimes - investigations into the matter <p>Fog Index = 17</p>	<p><u>Longest sentence:</u></p> <p>The revelation in a London court that Mabey & Johnson, a construction firm based in the United Kingdom, paid bribes to a number of Ministers in the Rawlings government, appears to have sent cold shivers down the spine of the Former President, who is well noted for his crusading role against corruption and describing his former appointees as men of integrity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ N^o of words: 61 ✓ N^o of clauses: 5 ✓ Type of sentence: very complex ✓ “big” words / expressions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revelation - have sent cold shivers down the spine - crusading role - men of integrity <p>Fog Index = 30</p>
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The content presentation above shows that political and social stories dominate daily topical issues in the Ghanaian media. And political and social issues are generally central to the very existence and survival of any people. But importantly, the analysis exhibits striking structural similarities between the writing styles of the two papers.

The *Daily Graphic* has an average shortest sentence word-count of 15 (the minimum being 14 words and the maximum, 19 words) while the average longest sentence is 52 words (minimum, 46 and maximum, 61 words). The average Fog Index of the shortest sentences was 14 (minimum, 9 and maximum, 17), whilst the average for the longest sentences is 22 (minimum, 16, maximum, 29).

The Chronicle also has 19 words as its average sentence word-count (minimum, 16 and maximum, 26) and 65 words as the average word-count for the longest sentences (minimum, 46 and maximum, 104). This newspaper's Fog Index results for the shortest sentences range from 12 to 18, while those for the longest sentences are amazingly between 18 and 30.

The above analysis flies in the face of the 7 or 8 results advocated by the Fog Index. In fact, according to the Index, "anything above 12 is too hard for most people to read."

Thus, from the study, it appears that newspapers in Ghana overuse long, complicated sentences riddled with "big" or difficult words and expressions. Indeed, for a newspaper sentence to have as many as 104 words leaves much to be desired in journalistic writing. The analyses indicate an average newspaper sentence, as noted above, of about 45 words with very formal language features. The results of the Fog Index make it clear that the language of the papers is too high for the average mind to process immediately for understanding.

And indeed, when some of the sentences (used in the analysis) above were given to some randomly sampled tertiary students of the Ghana Institute of Journalism, very interesting outcomes emerged, as summarised here. Ten students were randomly chosen from diploma and undergraduate programmes and given six sentences from the study to read. Two of the sentences were "shortest" sentences (one from the *Daily Graphic* (C), the other from *The Chronicle* (A)) and four "longest sentences" (two from the *Daily Graphic* (B and E), and two from *The Chronicle* (A and D)) (See data presentation above).

For the short sentences, almost all the students easily read (once) and understood the sentence as they told this writer the import of the sentences. However, one student had to read *The Chronicle*

sentence twice before being able to say the message. When asked why he could understand after reading once, he complained of a few “difficult” words which took his mind from the sentence as a whole. And for the “longest sentences,” none of the students read once and understood. Most of them read jerkily, stopped midway and started. It took an average of three readings for them to attempt reporting what the sentences said. Some two students could not end their report of *The Chronicle* sentence A. When asked what the matter was, they were all unanimous that the sentences were too long, that there were too many “big and unfamiliar words and expressions” in the sentences. Some told this writer that they normally skipped such sentences since they did not have the time and patience to waste trying to read and understand such sentences. And they agreed with this writer that they do not often have the full import of the information carried in the newspapers.

The above presentations and analyses could mean that Ghanaian newspapers are not immediately accessible semantically and also not reader friendly. It is true that journalism also educates the public; thus, through the language people learn new words and expressions. However, this could be tenable in a native and highly literate environment. Therefore, this language style in a socio-cultural milieu like Ghana’s implies that many targeted readers are excluded from the media discourse; in other words, there is semantic “exclusivism” in the Ghanaian print media since many people cannot read and understand or are demotivated from reading the newspapers.

Implications for Journalism

Obviously, one of the key tenets of liberal democracy is participation. The ability of a people to satisfy this duty responsibly depends on their knowledge and understanding of the socio-political happenings in their environment. Indeed information that portrays the socio-political reality in

the country and the world at large based on which people make informed decisions and choices is accessed predominantly through the media. The media as the chronicler and reporter of daily happenings reflect the image of a society. Above all, whatever appears in the media has an influence on the people. This explains why the newspapers have a duty to write newsworthy and factual stories on issues such as poverty, low productivity, high illiteracy, ignorance, health, and other uncomplimentary challenges of our nation for appropriate attitudinal changes to occur. According to Boulding's Image Theory (1976), behavioural change and social reconstruction of reality occur via the process of image formation derived from messages transmitted by communication networks.

But how does this happen? The only way is for the media's messages to reach the people through the appropriate use of language. Journalistic writing, whose purpose is to inform, educate, persuade, call to action, etc., must target an audience. Additionally, newspapers ought to attract readers, not only through their format and paper design, but also through their language style. In fact, newspapers are not to be studied; they are not textbooks or literature materials. One is expected to appreciate newspaper messages with a minimum of effort, that is, upon reading once, not more.

Meanwhile, the media are always urged to use amenable language that will present news vividly and accurately, language that will also appeal to the reader. According to Hicks, et al. (1999, p. 9), "Journalists are interpreters between specialist sources and the general public, translators of scientific jargon into plain English, scourges of obfuscation, mystification, misinformation." Mckane (2006), Stovall (1990) and other writers on journalistic writing extol good news writers as those who do not make news stories indigestible. Mass media writing, they contend, should be

clear, concise, simple and to the point. These writers emphasise modest language, language that should not draw attention unto itself. Porter (2005), in a draft essay, argues for a redefining of the language of journalism and stressed news “as a conversation...which must remove the walls between the “producers” of news and the “consumers” of news (<http://www.timporter.com/firstdraft/archives> accessed on April 14, 2010). In this essay, Roy Peter Clark is also quoted thus, “The most valued quality of the language of journalism is clarity and its most desired effect is to be understood.” Obviously, the point is for news to be as accessible as possible, linguistically and semantically.

Moreover, the Ghanaian demography depicts relatively low literacy levels. Awudi (2008) puts the illiteracy rate in Ghana at 40% with a high school dropout phenomenon where about 50% of pupils who leave the Junior High School (JHS) fail to progress to the Senior High School (SHS). But the situation appears to have deteriorated to 57.9% (http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_illiteracy_rate_in_Ghana, accessed 6th May, 2010). Meanwhile the literate variant includes all who enrol in basic education but drop out before SSS.

This grim picture could be because of the unenviable poverty situation in the country. According to Awidi (2008), 40% of Ghanaians live below the poverty line of \$1 per day. The table below from <http://earthtrends.wri.org/povlinks/country/ghana.php> (accessed 5 May, 2010) gives a more current data on Ghana’s poverty situation.

Table 3: Earth trends, Ghana

Variable	Value
Population living on less than \$1/day ^{2}	45%
Population living on less than \$2/day ^{3}	79%

A challenged economic situation as above would not motivate reading for its own sake. In fact, it is common knowledge that most Ghanaians generally do not read. Some of the factors for this include cost and interest, but the unattractive language style appears to be one key contributory factor.

The cause of the above situation is not far-fetched. Most reporters appear ignorant of the use of language in communication, particularly talking about the context, purpose and audience of the message. The lack of reading in Ghana and other developing nations is assuming crisis proportions requiring an “affirmative action to address. This is because of the connection between reading, knowledge acquisition and development. It is the considered opinion of this paper that the papers have to elicit reading not only through their stories but also through their language.

Meanwhile language experts such as Mckane (2006), Stovall (1990) and other writers on journalistic writing advise that news and mass media writing to be clear, concise, simple and to the point. These writers emphasise modest but expressive language, which should not draw attention to itself. Porter (2005), in a draft essay, argues for a redefining of the language of journalism and stressed “news as a conversation...which must remove the walls between the

‘producers’ of news and the ‘consumers’ of news (<http://www.timporter.com/firstdraft/archives>, accessed on April 14, 2010). In this essay, Roy Peter Clark is also quoted thus, “The most valued quality of the language of journalism is clarity and its most desired effect is to be understood.” Obviously, the point is for news to be as accessible as possible, linguistically and semantically

Pedagogical implications

In all the above, the buck stops at journalism training institutions, where those who write and produce the news are trained. To stem the anomaly, there is the urgent need for a review of English language teaching in journalism schools. This is because most of the journalism institutions in Ghana do not pay adequate attention to English usage and its teaching; some even think English is not a necessary subject in journalism training.

Needless to say, communication depends to a very large extent on language; without the necessary language skills, one cannot communicate all the knowledge gained and cannot even function effectively as a journalist irrespective of the scoop one has. Therefore, journalism institutions in Ghana should have a special place for serious English teaching and learning.

Consequently, the following proposals are put forward for consideration.

- Reviewing the curricula of journalism institution in the country for English to be taught in all programmes and at all the levels, throughout the student’s stay in school.
- In addition to the regular grammar and writing courses, the institutions should consider a course “the language of the media/journalism” under which there could be the language of newspapers, the language of the radio, and the language of television

- Under the language of the newspaper, Students should be made to adequately study the following style-developing areas with emphasis and practical application,
 - language levels
 - stylistic implications of grammatical forms
 - literary devices (irony, sarcasm, metaphor, etc.)
 - varieties of English
 - sociolinguistics
 - literature and creative writing

- Journalism schools in Ghana and journalist could have collaborative workshops with practitioners and other interest groups in the industry to brainstorm and discuss ways of dealing with the language problem in journalism.

Fortunately, UNESCO has recently produced landmark journalism curricula for journalism schools in Africa, which has provided for enough writing modules (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001512/151209E.pdf> (Accessed on 4 March, 2010))

This paper advocates the application of the curricula in Ghana but tailored to suit the country's peculiar context. However, the "language of journalism" course could go beyond helping students to acquire and use concrete, specific, active, clear, democratic, non-sexist, non-racist language in journalism to include real grammatical and communicative language study geared

towards writing to fit particular audiences. This will lead to a language policy in journalistic writing aimed at broadening semantic access to news to help deepen democracy in the country.

Teaching methodology

So far, the method of teaching English in the classrooms has followed entirely the unhelpful lecture pattern due to large student numbers and time constraints. This method of teaching just focuses entirely on grammatical competence, which even is not achieved satisfactorily. Due to the second language (L2) background of our students, this paper rather emphasises the communicative, skill-oriented method of English teaching which takes into account the sociocultural environment of the user (Canel and Swain, 1980; Dzameshie, 1997; Hymes, 1974).

This approach now emphasises five components:

- knowledge of linguistic features,
- knowledge of discourse rules,
- knowledge of language functions,
- knowledge of sociolinguistic factors, and
- knowledge of appropriateness, which enables a speaker to know whether the language being used is suitable considering the specific (socio-cultural) context and audience.

But this method is not without challenges; it is effective with few classes and the teachers should be well trained. The (English) language departments of the communication training institutions should be strengthened into autonomous schools with various courses and facilities to achieve language competence for students. Additionally, a workshop or conference for English teachers in journalism institutions should be planned for orientation into the communicative and other useful approaches to teaching English.

Conclusion

This paper has effectively revealed that newspapers in Ghana largely do not really communicate. This is on account of their unrewarding language style. It appears that the newspapers lack the English language capacity to specifically and consciously write for a wide readership. Therefore, the print media in Ghana are consistently practising “semantic exclusivism,” meaning they are inadvertently alienating and excluding the majority of the people from the political and social discourse.

The journalistic language situation thus presented may be similar to that of other Anglophone African countries. The findings mean that the print media ought to develop a language house style that consciously appeals to the broad spectrum of readers who need information and knowledge for development. This paper calls for more opportunities for journalism and language professionals to meet and brainstorm on the issue through symposia or conferences.

This paper has conceptualised the average reader (who should be targeted by the papers) as the Junior High School leaver. Such a person, at an average age of 15 should be exposed to and made to be interested in national and global matters even before they attain 18 years.

Needless to say, there is still the need for further, bigger and more intensive research into the specifics of the language problems of Ghanaian media writing, even from the psycho-linguistic perspective. Communication educators, especially those in the language departments, should, therefore, begin to think of some language guidelines in news writing beyond what pertains now. Definite rules should be considered regarding word choice, sentence length, paragraphing, number of words per sentence, etc. which should inform the language of journalism.

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