

**Situating language in the centre of journalism training: The case for
broadening the spheres of English teaching and learning in
Journalism training institutions in Ghana**

By

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Abstract

This paper derives its impetus from the consensus today that the media play an indispensable role in democratic governance for sustained development. The media foster accountability, transparency, rule of law, respect for human rights, civic participation, among others, which are vital in securing the economic well-being of a people. In this, language, as the main vehicle that drives communication or journalistic imperatives to the 'consumer', becomes a critical factor. This work focuses on the effective and appropriate use of English (Ghana's official language) in newspapers in Ghana. It argues that the majority of newspapers display linguistic ineptitude thereby weakening their capacity to package and make development-oriented messages accessible to the reader. Specifically, the majority of newspapers present news in grammatically faulty and semantically confusing constructions that blur meaning. Thus through a comparative study of the English and English-related courses in four journalism training institutions in Ghana and the English provisions in the latest UNESCO journalism curricula for Africa (2007), as well as a pilot interview, the study shows that English competence appears to be underrated and taken for granted in the training institutions. This paper thus argues for journalism education in Ghana to centre on helping trainee journalists to acquire English language competency. A more worthwhile complement will be to de-emphasise the 'core' journalism or media knowledge and skills students are made to focus on in the schools and emphasise English use and usage. The paper suggests a reorganization of English studies by way of institutional structure, curriculum and syllabus development, infrastructure, teaching and learning methodology, among others, as ways of broadening English language pedagogy to produce the calibre of journalists who can really champion the democratic and developmental aspirations of Ghana and Africa.

Introduction

This paper sets forth from a development perspective and accepts unequivocally that the media have a crucial role to play in a democracy to enhance socio-economic and political development. The apparent consensus today that participatory democracy is a more rewarding way of governance is because the system is open for everybody within a community or country to contribute to decisions that affect all. But how would people outside the circles of the executive, legislature and judiciary stand in good stead to participate actively in the governance of their societies? The answer lies largely with the media. The UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education (2007, p. 6) captures the Media's role more succinctly 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.

This paper posits that national development should be the ability of a nation and its people to position themselves to take full advantage of the opportunities within the nation and beyond for progress. This position derives impetus from development communication, particularly, the theories of development and social change. The ultimate aim of these theories, not disregarding the criticisms against them, is to help solve the challenges associated with the lack of development (compared to developed nations) in underdeveloped societies since the 1950s (Inkeles & Smith, 1974).

The modernisation or development theories championed by scholars such as Lerner (1958), Schramm (1964), Rogers, 1962, 1983, etc.) see the media as engendering social transformation and development by dint of their very information dissemination functions. It is this perspective that has motivated UNESCO, for example, to be interested and involved in media education and practice in the world (www.unesco.org). The media's role in development and social change as espoused by the Habermas's principles of the public spheres (Kellner, <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/kellner.html>, p. 5) finds expression in their capacity to gather and make development-oriented information available to the people. With the relevant information, the people become discerning and get enlightened to engage in "discursive argumentation" on issues of general concern and make constructive decisions and choices that positively affect their lives. Nonetheless, the above is possible only if the media do their work well and reach the majority of the people.

The Ghanaian media today comprise of approximately 70 registered and active newspapers (National Media Commission, Ghana, 2009), 171 radio stations, and 15 free-to-air and encrypted

TV stations (National communication Authority, Ghana, 2009) scattered all over the country. Apart from being the most credible historical and social mirror of a people (because of the daily record of happenings), the media also command a great influence. That is why the media's language ought to be apt and accessible to compel listening to and reading. This work focuses more on media writing and thus tilts towards newspapers. This is not to disregard the aptness of English on the electronic media. Indeed, newspapers have the benefit of the production chain like editing, proofreading, etc., but the radio, for example, is often an instantaneous occurrence; recurring language errors can lead many listeners into fossilised assimilations that would be difficult to correct even in school.

Language is central to journalism as it serves as the main vehicle that drives communication or journalistic imperatives to the 'consumer'. Indeed, any definition or description of communication or journalism cannot be complete without implying language. The linguistic situation in Ghana presents an interesting scenario; in spite of the about 54 indigenous languages in Ghana, English remains the official and national language. Remarkably, almost all the newspapers in Ghana are in English (Ghana Media Commission, 2009). The implication is that if Ghanaians have to get informed through newspapers, then they must be able to read and understand English. This issue is the genesis of the problem that has provoked this paper.

The Ghanaian demography educationally and economically is typically a depressed one. Presently, the literacy rate stands at approximately 60%ⁱ 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) (Awidi, 2008). Moreover, of the number of candidates who complete the SHS in Ghana, only about 3% are admitted to tertiary level education (Awidi, 2008). Thus, in reality, the "reading" Ghanaian, the one who is enlightened and can appreciate complex

information in complex sentences, constitutes a very insignificant number of the population. 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.

English in the Media

Media freedom and pluralism today have been unparalleled in the country's history. This should be good news for Ghana, a nation, like many of her neighbours in Africa, in need of economic and political advancement. Nevertheless, the question remains as to how effectively the media are using language to perform this journalistic function.

The problem has been that newspapers in Ghana appear not to really communicate. Almost all the papers display linguistic ineptitude in English, thereby weakening their capacity to appeal to and reach their supposed readers. News is often presented in grammatically faulty and semantically confusing constructions that blur meaning (Fosu, 2009: Unpublished CAJE Presentation). The academia and media in Ghana have been replete with complaints of poor and/or inappropriate English in the media. An article by Nii Moi Thompson, (*Daily Graphic*, October 27, 2008) sums up the numerous cries against poor English in the media. He noted that,

For the print media, overall writing quality is poor ... most other journalists seem contend with their own badly written stories, thus repeating common mistakes in grammar and spelling and pushing the profession further down the tubes.

The writer cited some of these “common mistakes” and offered some remedies. But the situation has not changed; it appears to get worse by the day.

It would appear that Anglophone Africa is homogeneous on this worrisome issue of poor English in the media. Edward Chitsulo (2009) of the University of Malawi has made a similar assessment of Malawian newspapers. In a paper presented at the Conference of African Journalism Educators (CAJE) in Johannesburg, South Africa, he gave some startling examples of such faulty and often confounding English expressions. He emphasised that, “The media industry in Malawi has lately manifested a degree of malaise in delivery—especially in writing in English and Chichewa, the official languages” (<http://www.journalism.co.za./image/april2009/languages>).

Additionally, the issue of poor English among students and graduates from tertiary institutions in Ghana has received wide scholarly attention. Dako, Denkabe and Forson (1997) in a study of university students’ knowledge of English grammar noted that their work was prompted by “... our observation over the years of a steady decline in the English competence of products of our schools and universities. This has caused concern to be expressed especially among experts and the general public” (p. 53). Fosu (2009, 22), in an article on English in tertiary institutions, categorised some of the problems as follows:

- Grammatical shortfalls such as faulty application of concord, tense use, pronoun and prepositional use, article use, among others, in speaking and writing.
- Wrong spelling
- Wrong pronunciation and intonation
- Ambiguous sentences that do not communicate well
- Faulty sentence structures
- Wordiness, verbosity, redundant vocabulary, etc., that inhibit effective communication
- Faulty punctuation use
- Misplaced pragmatics, i.e. using contextually inappropriate linguistic forms

- Dangling modifications
- And many more

The following are sample sentences taken verbatim from some ‘serious’ Ghanaian newspapers:

1. Headline: What about Ghana Institute of Journalism?

Sentence: In the speech read by the deputy minister of education responsible for tertiary education , Dr. Joe Annan on behalf of the minister of education, Mr. Alex Tetteh-Enyo, during the launch of the fiftieth anniversary it was mentioned that the Institute has one of the best libraries in Ghana which is not the truth because out of the ten computers in the library only four are really functioning and the rest are just white elephants in the library. (*The Statesman*, April 24, 2009)

2. Headline: NPA dragged to court for illegal fuel prices

Sentence: They are claiming against Defendant jointly and severally, a declaration that the ex-refinery differential component of the ex-refinery price imposed by the first Defendant on June 5, 2009, was illegal and that the ex-pump prices announced by the first Defendant on June 5, 2009, on the basis of the ex-refinery prices referred to, were not in accordance with prescribed petroleum pricing formula and therefore unlawful. (*The Chronicle*, September 30, 2008)

3. Headline: AMA boss must be focused and resolute

Sentence: As the ultimatum issued by the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) to squatters at Sodom and Gomorrah to provide evidence of legal occupation or vacate the area expired early this week with none of the squatters complying, there have been various news articles, press releases and statements from people whipping sentiments for the AMA to abort the eviction. (Lead, *Daily Graphic*, Friday October 9, 2009).

4. Headline: IGP outlines vision

Sentence: Key among these interventions, which aim to significantly improve the maintenance of law and order as well as the protection of life and property is to lead the Police Service to undertake a major internal restructuring and capacity-building in order to utilize to maximum benefit, the limited

human and logistic resources of the Service. (*Ghanaian Times*, Wednesday May 5, 2009).

These examples, few though they may be, present a bird's eye view of the general writing style of almost all newspapers in Ghana. The first example is a mixture of errors involving capitalization, punctuation, tense, wordiness and redundancy. The grammatical errors aside, it becomes difficult to understand the import of the author's message. The second example typifies a very technical legal rendition, which even this writer, with his level of education, found difficult to understand. The media is expected to mediate between specialized vocabulary and/or jargons and ordinary people. But in this example under question, the journalist appears to be writing to impress instead of making sense to the reader. The third and fourth examples are also dotted with abstract and 'high' or difficult words and expressions, which will undoubtedly defy immediate understanding. Indeed, a major linguistic characteristic of the majority of Ghanaian newspapers is the use of long, winding, jargon-riddled, abstract and very complex words and sentences.

Meanwhile, it is not for nothing that all worthy journalism or communications textbooks have, at least, a language section or chapter. This (language) section exhorts students as to the type of language expected of the field. 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 argue for news writers not to make news stories indigestible. Mass media writing should be clear, concise, simple and to the point. These writers emphasise modest 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. This issue finds strength in Wood & Barnes (2007), who argue that the media should target and inform a wide range of audiences on human centred issues for development.

The question the Ghanaian newspapers appear to ignore is, “Who is the reader?” Do the newspapers have a concept of the “average Ghanaian reader?” It is becoming more and more crucial to consider the imperatives of development and the fact that almost everybody needs to get informed, understand national issues and participate constructively in national discourse and activities. This paper has conceptualised the “average” reader as a Junior High School (JHS) leaver, who, at 15, deserves to understand what is happening in his or her country to prepare him or her for democratic participation at any level of his or her development.

But this paper wonders if the sentences in newspapers are accessible to even the SHS leaver. In October 2009, there was a remarkable news headline in the *Ghanaian Times*, a state-owned newspaper. The headline read, “Pupils Fail BECE: They Can’t Read.” The lead of the story was,

The Adentan Municipal Director of Education, Rosemond A. Aduku, has blamed pupils’ poor performance in the Basic Certificate Examination (BECE) on their poor reading and writing ability. (Monday, October 1, 2009, p. 15)

The implication is apparent for the media.

Another dimension of the language problem that has remained either unnoticed or has not received attention is style in writing. The plurality of the Ghanaian media transcends ownership,

print and electronic, etc. to cover type of story orientation such as sports, entertainment, social, and all-purpose. However, no paper has yet demonstrated any uniqueness regarding language style to show the specific readership being targeted. As gleaned from the examples above, all the papers have the same writing style, a style that appears not to target any specific reader, implying curiously that all the papers target every Ghanaian.

Therefore, though there has not been much research on newspaper writing style and its impact, the media language (as seen above), and the educational realities in Ghana support the position that the newspapers just do not have the language ability to compel reading and to suit a specific readership. In other words, news writers lack the language capacity to manipulate language to serve their purposes. How do we account for this, and how do we deal with such a situation? The onus lies with Journalism training institutions in the country. Therefore, this paper calls for a second look at the English education given to students in journalism training institutions.

The objective of this paper is in two parts. The first is to emphasise the continuous occurrence of poor English usage in the Ghanaian newspapers (which has been done), and the second, to argue for a reorganisation of English training in journalism schools.

Thus, the paper has examined the English language courses in four journalism training institutions in Ghana, as well as the English provisions in the latest UNESCO journalism curricula for Africa (2007), covering diploma and undergraduate programs. The idea is to determine the adequacy or otherwise of English studies in the schools to prepare students for the journalistic work. In-depth interviews of 10 final year students of the Ghana Institute of Journalism on English studies in their school were done with insightful results. And finally, the

Heads of English / Language Department of the institutions under question were interviewed for their opinions on the matters raised in this paper.

English education in Journalism Training Institutions in Ghana

Universities and their equivalents in Ghana admit regular students based on their performance at the now West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE). One criterion for admission is a pass in English (and other 'core' subjects). The assumption is that a student who passes the WASSCE English has the language competence to study at the university level. This also means that such a student can function effectively in English upon completion of his / her course. The grades at the above examinations range from A, B, C, D, E, and F, the interpretation being Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Pass, and Fail respectively (The old grading system for SSSCE has been used for convenience as it has the same equivalents in the new WASSCE system) . The pass grades are A, B, C, D, and E. Apart from GIJ, which pegs its English requirement both undergraduate and diploma admission at D or better, the rest put theirs at E. However, the fallacy of this assumption is the manifestations displayed in the media. The admission criterion above could account for why particular attention is not paid to English studies in tertiary institutions in spite of the clamour about poor English of students and graduates.

Obviously therefore, students who enroll in the journalism institutions still have serious English problems irrespective of the WASSCE English grades they came with. Hence, it is imperative that all tertiary students of any programme take intensive and adequate English studies to prepare them for the communicative aspect of whatever job they leave school to perform.

The four institutions used for this study are Ghana Institute of Journalism, Accra (GIJ); African University College of Communications, Accra (AUCC); Jayee University College, Accra (JUC); and Institute of Business Management and Journalism, Kumasi (IBM & J)ⁱⁱ. Of the four, GIJ is the only public institution; the rest are privately owned.

GIJ is (now) a public university established in 1959 purposely to produce media professionals in journalism, communications and public relations. It runs diploma and undergraduate courses in communication studies and short courses in the same field. AUCC, founded in 2001, also currently runs diploma and undergraduate programmes in journalism and communications including short refresher courses in communications and media studies. JUC runs diploma and undergraduate programmes in journalism. Finally, IBM & J is a business institution that recently began a course in journalism. As such, the institution runs only a diploma course in journalism.

The programmes have the objective of producing professionals who have the requisite knowledge and skills in media and communications to function as journalists and communication professionals or executives and to contribute to the democratic and socio-economic development of Ghana. As such, the institutions have an array of similar specific courses within broad subjects such as mass communication, news writing, broadcast journalism, print journalism, public relations and advertising, media and communication theories, TV and radio production, media law, among others. These are designed uniquely to produce the calibre of journalists they hope to produce within the four and two-year durations. The courses at the undergraduate levels are too many and varied to contain here. Therefore, since the study is focusing on English, it will be more helpful to focus on English language courses and other courses not English language per se but related to English. The courses are classified as “core” and “elective and/or ancillary” either

directly or impliedly. English is classified as an ancillary. This categorization has some implications.

Core courses are supposedly very important and key to the qualification and later performance of the student. However, the elective and/or ancillary ones, being outside the inner circle of the programme, are by implication less vital so could even be optional. Thus, elective and/or ancillary courses are perceived as peripheral and appear not to be treated with seriousness.

English Language for the BA programmes

In the three (3) institutions that offer the BA, all the English or English-related courses fall among the elective and/or ancillary courses. Even though students have to pass them to graduate, everybody knows that they are not key courses and are not used in the computation of a student's final class. The table below gives graphic details of this for comparative convenience.

Table 1: Table 2: undergraduate English Courses in the Institutions

GIJ	AUCC	JUC	IBM & J
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and Study Skills (a level 100 course for 2 semesters) • Precision Language (a level 100 course for only the 2 semester) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation of grammar (a level 100 course for the 1st semesters) • Foundations of writing (a level 100 course for the 2nd semesters) • Lab. Work (all the four years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Grammar • Creative Writing 	<p>IBM & J</p> <p>N/A</p>

Sources: **GIJ:** GIJ Students Handbook, 2008

AUCC: Interview with Head of English Department, AUCC.

JUC: Components of Courses for all Programmes, (brochure, 2008)

From the table above, it is evident that GIJ does not run any pure English language course for the four-year undergraduate programme. Language and Study Skills (LSS) or Academic Writing does not really teach English; it teaches students the language-related skills such as note taking/making, outlining, paragraphing, composition writing, documentation, etc., which are competencies needed for tertiary level studies. Precision Language also essentially revises correct usage of the parts of speech, tenses, preposition, etc.

AUCC has two English related courses—Foundations of Grammar and Foundation of Writing, which just revise some aspects of the SHS English much the same as the two courses at GIJ. The courses take place only at level 100. Additionally, AUCC has a course, Laboratory work, which is English based and runs each semester of the four years. This course does not have any systematic outline; it only aims at strengthening the students' English ability. Thus, the content at each level and semester depends on the lecturer. The lecturer gives random English usage exercises and takes the students through identifying their errors and correcting those errors.

JUC has one English course, Grammar, which runs during the two semesters of level 100. Creative Writing, taken in the Department of Journalism, treats the art of writing and literature.

English Language for Diploma Programmes

The diploma programmes in the cited institutions provide a rather interesting dichotomy. Subjects are not classified in terms of core and ancillary in all the institutions; students have to pass every course in order to graduate. Additionally, students study English each semester of the two years. The table below shows the distribution of English language and English-related courses at the diploma level.

Table 2: Diploma English Courses in the Institutions

GIJ	AUCC	JUC	IBM & J
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Grammar and Usage (for each of the 4 semesters) • English Writing Skills (for each of the 4 semesters) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundations of Grammar • Foundations of Writing (for each of the 4 semesters) • Lab. Work (runs the 4 semesters of the 2 years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Grammar (only the 1st semester of Dip. 1) • Comprehension & Summary (only the 2nd semester of Dip. 1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication Skills (Grammar) (for both semesters of Dip. 1) • Communication Skills (writing) (for both semesters of Dip. 2) • English for Journalism (for both semesters of Dip. 2)

Sources: **GIJ** - GIJ Students Handbook, 2008
AUCC - Interview with Head of English Department, AUCC.
JUC - Components of Courses for all Programmes, (brochure, 2008)
IBM & J - Institute's Programme flier

Of the institutions under study, GIJ and AUCC teach four hours of English per week for the diploma programme. In addition to the English courses, AUCC again runs the laboratory work course for the four semesters the way it does for the undergraduate programme. JUC, however, has only two courses, which take place only at diploma 1: Grammar is taught during the first semester while Comprehension and Summary takes place in the second semester. IBM & J, teaches Communication Skills (English Grammar and Writing) throughout the 2 years of study, Grammar in year 1, and Writing in year 2. This School also teaches English for Journalism, which covers journalese, in both semesters of diploma 2.

It has to be said that the institutions run other courses such as feature writing, creative news writing, writing for the radio and TV, reporting and writing, etc. at both undergraduate and diploma levels, which look like English. However, their contents depict otherwise, and departments other than the English run the courses. This opens up an unexplored avenue for collaboration between the English departments and the departments concerned to reinforce the students' language, as in journalism language is not used for its own sake but for specific purposes.

Implication

The question to ask is whether the English studies displayed above are adequate in terms of perception, content and duration to prepare students with English challenges for a job in journalism. One point is clear: the classification of English as an elective or ancillary subject or course means that school authorities do not regard language as crucial in the training process. It follows therefore that students too think of it as a course to pass in order to graduate and not something to waste time on.

Each course normally runs for two hours per session. This means that GIJ and AUCC have four hours of English studies per week for the diploma. This is commendable; it shows that the two institutions reckon with the importance of English and are taking steps to address the problem. This is particularly so for AUCC because of the Laboratory Work course. JUC however teach two hours of grammar in the first semester of diploma one, and two hours of comprehension and summary in semester two, which is not adequate for the diploma programme. Interestingly, JUC's comprehension and summary is unique because of the language benefits to be derived in

such a course if it is effectively taught. And IBM & J's grammar and writing courses have the same content as the other institutions.

However, the situation is generally grim for the undergraduate programmes. GIJ does not teach any outright English course. Even if we take the LSS and Precision Language as English courses, they together produce just about 84 hours of English studies for the whole of the four yearsⁱⁱⁱ not discounting lost days through sickness of the lecturer, holidays, etc. The situation is the same for JUC and almost the same for AUCC. AUCC's Laboratory Work course gives an indication that this school is taking some measures to combat the challenge.

It is clear that the Institutions emphasise English in the diploma programmes much more than in the undergraduate ones. Why is it so? This occurrence could imply that authorities consider the undergraduate students better than the diploma students because of the weight of the respective qualifications. This could be the case in general aptitude, but the argument is not sustainable in terms of English due to the discussions above on English studies in pre-university education. Therefore, going by the paucity of English studies at the undergraduate level, and the fact that all English courses at both the diploma and undergraduate levels only revise what student should have perfected at SSS, one can conclude that the institutions underrate language in the training process. What is more, none of the institutions has a language laboratory for language studies. This writer being a tertiary-level English teacher has a fair idea of the constraints in English teaching in tertiary institutions in Ghana.

The UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education

The UNESCO Model Curricula is a unique and seminal document that covers journalism training at the postgraduate, undergraduate, diploma levels

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001512/151209E.pdf>). The aim of the curricula is to produce journalists with the desired knowledge, skills and tools of journalism for them to engender development in their communities. The document covers 2-year master's, 3-yr and 4-year undergraduate, 2-year and 1-year diploma programmes and provides options for arts and science backgrounds.

Importantly, the document does not just acknowledge the importance of language competence in journalism; it actually demonstrates this in the language and language-related courses advocated at all levels and semesters of the undergraduate and diploma programmes. The introduction to the curricula stipulates that:

In each of the model curricula below, we propose that reporting and writing courses develop through a number of tiers in each semester of the program. As we will see, these courses constitute a curricular core or spine, which promotes the refinement of writing and craft skills, ...towards specialization in a single field such as politics, economics, arts and culture, social issues, international relations, and natural and physical science and associated subjects (p. 9).

The document also details the language skills expected of a journalist:

- An ability to write accurately, clearly, correctly, concisely and engagingly, in journalism story forms, with attention to subject matter and intended audience, always making clear the source of a disputable item of information, idea or direct or indirect quotation (p. 9).

The document has ample language provision spread for grammar and syntax, narrative, descriptive and explanatory methods, among others tailored to produce an individual with the requisite English and writing skills to write across journalistic purposes.

Report of an in-depth Interview of Ten Students

This researcher conducted unstructured interviews of 10 final year students of the 2008/2009 academic year at GIJ and presents here an abridged version of the results. The respondents were made up of six females and four males, five diplomas and five undergraduates. They all agreed that journalists in Ghana have serious English problems judging from what they read in the newspapers and error analysis of newspapers done in class. To a specific question as to whether the English they had studied was beneficial, all the diploma students answered in the affirmative but added that the time was too short since there was more they could have studied. However, the undergraduate students lamented their not studying enough English. They referred to the little they had studied under LSS and Precision Language and rue that they needed English language. Indeed, all the undergraduate students, except one, said they knew their English was not the best. And to another question on what they thought ought to be done in the circumstances, all were unanimous that there should be more room for English studies throughout the programme period. When asked about the LSS course, most of the undergraduate students said they did not take the course seriously while at level 100 since they knew it was “non-scoring”. On hindsight, they said they regret that.

Results of interviews of Head of English Departments

The Heads of Department (HODs) of English of GIJ, AUCC and JUC were interviewed. Among others, the structured interview posed questions such as:

- What is your opinion of English in the media?
- What do you think of the English ability of students of your institution?
- How do you account for this situation?
- What can be done to stem the tide of poor English in our journalism schools?

The responses were remarkably similar though the interviews took place separately. All the HODs expressed grave worry about the poor and steady decline of English in the media, especially the print. Their worry stemmed from a view shared by this writer that the mass media have the biggest number of “students” and so if bad English continues in the newspapers in an educationally challenged country like Ghana, the educational function of the media becomes compromised. The HODs were again unanimous on the poor English of the students in their respective schools. On the cause of this situation, the HODs blame the admission process of their respective institutions arguing that, “garbage in, garbage out.” Some blamed the students and the schools. They said students were not reading enough to boost their English, and the schools too have not provided appropriate opportunities such as adequate contact hours and teaching and learning facilities for language learning.

On ways of improving on the situation, some called for stringent admission processes to ensure that quality students are enrolled, some also suggested remedial classes for weak students. In fact, at JUC, the HOD had already started efforts to improve the situation. He told this writer of new English-related courses — academic writing, writing skills, — to be introduced for both diploma and undergraduate programmes. They also suggested practical opportunities such as college newspapers, writers’ clubs, etc. Some confided in this writer that their university authorities ignored or paid little attention to their suggestions on steps to improve language teaching and learning because language is not a key component.

Implications for journalism education

The aim of any journalism education is to train students to acquire the requisite journalism knowledge and skills as well as the tools to perform their expected functions in their societies.

This objective and competencies expected of products of journalism schools are best summed up in the following considerations that informed the UNESCO Curricula (2007, p. 7):

Journalism education in universities is normally organized around three curricula axes or lines of development:

- i. An axis comprising the norms, values, tools, standards, and practices of journalism;
- ii. An axis emphasizing the social, cultural, political, economic, legal and ethical aspects of journalism practice both within and outside the national borders; and
- iii. An axis comprising knowledge of the world and journalism's intellectual challenges.

The UNESCO document further clarifies that graduates of journalism schools should have:

- An ability to think critically, incorporating skill in comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of unfamiliar material, and a basic understanding of evidence and research methods.
- **An ability to write clearly and coherently using narrative, descriptive, and analytical methods.** (Bold portion, my emphasis).
- A Knowledge of national and international political, economic, cultural, religious, and social institutions.
- A Knowledge of current affairs and issues, and a general knowledge of history and Geography

Of the above expected knowledge and skills, this paper (without being accused of exaggeration) argues that the cardinal competency should be par excellence in linguistic competency, ere English. The point is that a person who graduates as an accountant and has English problems may still perform his accounting functions well even if in bad language. Therefore, unlike other professions like engineering, agriculture, etc. it is only through language that the journalist can

manifest the knowledge and skills learnt; it is only through language that the journalist can present information he or she used his knowledge and skill to garner to a targeted audience.

English Studies in Journalism Education: The Way Forward

It is the considered opinion of this paper that the way forward lies in journalism training institutions following curricula along the lines of the UNESCO model emphasizing the language and language-related courses. This should pave way for journalism education in Ghana to revolve around language as a search for linguistic competence in journalistic practice. A more worthwhile complement will be to de-emphasise the ‘core’ journalism or media knowledge and skills students are made to focus on and rather emphasise language studies for journalism. Society does not ‘consume’ the knowledge and skills the journalist studied; society, from my preliminary research findings, rather depends on linguistically well-packaged information (that the journalist used his or her knowledge and skills to garner). This is not to devalue the “core” courses; the idea is to ensure that the skills and knowledge the would-be journalist gains in school find practical expression and come to life through language. But how do we broaden the spheres of English in the teaching process?

There is the need to ensure that schools do not limit English studies to diploma programmes. Undergraduate students should also study English or an English-related course at least each semester of the four or three years to guarantee adequate student-teacher contact hours.

Journalism schools ought to stop treating English as a peripheral or ancillary course to prevent the disincentive to students taking it seriously in school. English should be made, thought of, and given attention as a core journalism course and should contribute to a student’s final academic class.

Teaching in the schools should adopt an integrated approach where courses involving writing would be handled collaboratively by teachers from the English department and those from the department of the courses. This would make students understand the direct and practical relevance of language the journalistic work.

This paper argues that the content of the English courses in the schools is inadequate to produce an individual who understands the workings of language to apply it in journalistic writing. In a paper presented at the Conference of African Journalism Educators (CAJE), Edward Chitsulo (2009) argued that, “where possible, the study of language as a science should not be an option.”

This paper agrees that journalists in training should study English areas such as

- language levels (formal and informal)
- stylistic implications of grammatical forms
- general stylistics
- linguistics
- semantics
- varieties of English
- sociolinguistics
- the new Englishes (Ghanaian English, Nigerian English, etc.)
- literature and creative writing
- etc.

Regarding teaching methodology, it is becoming increasingly clear that the lack of a systematic approach to teaching English in our schools is not helpful, especially in a situation of large classes. Thus, efforts should be made to develop an English teaching method of teaching for journalism schools to cover the following:

- 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.

In terms of facilities, it is suggested that each training institution establishes a well-equipped language centre. The centre should be well resourced to run various language courses throughout the year. Some of the courses could merge into the mainstream journalism programmes while others run parallel to the regular journalism courses. Thus, students can have remedial brush ups on their own or register and take courses to beef up their language. The schools should also make idea-generating equipment such as cameras available for students to have opportunities to practise writing. Additionally, the institutions should provide outlets such as institutions' own newspapers, writers' clubs, school magazines, etc. for students to write and have their stories published. Such activities will motivate writing and provide material for class discussions, which will straighten rough edges before the students begin to work.

English Teachers in Journalism Schools

It would also be a great idea for English teachers in journalism schools to have periodic conferences to brainstorm on fruitful ways of teaching to maximise students' learning. Additionally, English teachers should also take up journalism courses to understand the nature of the profession and be in a better position to guide students in the language. Opportunities should be explored for English teachers in journalism in Ghana and Africa to meet periodically and strategise towards achieving better outcomes on the job.

Area for Further Research

This paper's position is for journalism training to focus on English competence. This position follows the continuous baggage of erroneous, confounding and inaccessible constructions in the

media borne out of linguistic incompetence. However, there is paucity of specific research on the language patterns of journalism. Moreover, the language implications of the emergence and proliferation of the new media, especially, online journalism cannot be ignored as many radio stations and newspapers are online.

This paper thus calls for further study into the nature of the language of journalism of both the traditional and new media. The studies should provide information to help strengthen journalism education and media practice in Ghana and beyond.

Conclusion

This paper examined the writing style of some Ghanaian newspapers and discovered serious English problems, which impede communication. This was what motivated the study of the English courses of the four institutions. The paper opines that English studies in the institutions is inadequate, especially at the undergraduate level. There is thus the need to revolutionise English teaching and learning the country and beyond.

The desire is to produce journalists with a writing style that will attract reading and is accessible to the “average” reader. This ability is crucial in the scheme of Ghana’s budding democracy. For example, it is common knowledge that politicians and other public officials take advantage of ignorance in the Ghanaian society to manipulate people during elections, etc.

The English in the Ghanaian media speaks volumes about the state of our education and development more than by any other means. But importantly, the media is the most important “teacher” in our societies because of their reach. Many people consciously or unconsciously learn English in the media. Thus, our journalists must be good English educators through their language. According to the UNESCO documents, “Students should emerge from a diploma

program well versed and practiced in the basic techniques and forms of journalism reporting and writing” (p. 32).

Therefore, to put Ghanaian and African journalism on the world map and for journalism to live up to its functions, journalism institutions ought to refocus and restructure their curricula to emphasise English usage and thus empower and inspire journalists to champion the cause of democracy and development.

NOTES

ⁱ The 60% literacy rate includes anyone who enrolls in the basic school, even those who drop out before Primary 3.

ⁱⁱ For more information about the institutions visit their websites:

- Ghana Institute of Journalism : www.gij.edu.gh
- African University College of Communications : www.aucc.edu.gh
- Jayee University College : www.jayeeuniversity.com
- Institute of Business Management & Journalism :

ⁱⁱⁱ That is, 2 hrs of LSS for 14 contact hours per semester for two semesters, and 2 hrs of Precision Language for 14 contact sessions for one semester.

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