

Journal of African Media Studies
Volume 12 Number 1

© 2020 Intellect Ltd Article. English language. https://doi.org/10.1386/jams_00008_1

Received 18 April 2019; Accepted 23 December 2019

**AUDREY GADZEKPO, ABENA ANIMWAA YEBOAH-BANIN
AND SARAH AKROFI-QUARCOO**
University of Ghana

A case of double standards? Audience attitudes to professional norms on local and English language radio news programmes in Ghana

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of radio stations across Africa has engendered an increase in local language radio stations and fuelled culturally-rooted practices of news delivery considered by many media professionals as sub-standard. This article explores the reception practices of multi-lingual audiences in Ghana, focusing on their views on the different norms and approaches of local language and English language radio newscasts. Using data from a convenience sample of 1000 radio listeners in five Ghanaian cosmopolitan cities the study finds that audiences prefer more performative modes of news delivery on their local language stations. It was also evident that radio audiences are discerning and make distinctions between what is acceptable on local language versus English language radio. These results call for a reconsideration of western-influenced standards of news delivery and the development of professional standards more accommodating of the inflections of culture.

KEYWORDS

radio
audiences
local language
culture
news
Ghana

1. Afrobarometer self describes as 'a pan-African, non-partisan research network.' It conducts public opinion surveys on democratic governance and related issues in 37 African countries. The survey on Ghana was conducted in 2018.

INTRODUCTION

Africa's transition to democracy in the last few decades, the resultant liberalization of the airwaves, and developments in information and communication technology have dramatically altered the contemporary media ecology on the continent. Nowhere is this more evident than in the broadcast sector where radio still dominates even in the wake of increased consumption of other mass media forms such as television and digital media (Afrobarometer 2018).¹ The explosion of privately-owned commercial and community radio stations across Africa has revived local language radio in many countries where previously monopolistic state broadcasting systems have privileged colonial languages (primarily English, French, Portuguese) over indigenous language broadcasts. Today, across countries such as Ghana, there is a plethora of radio stations broadcasting in the primary languages of their audiences and competing with English language stations for attention. To appeal to audiences, local language stations are distinguishing their content and style of broadcasting to reflect traditional norms of storytelling and conversation. An example is the generous use of proverbs in local language newscasts, which western-driven conceptions of journalistic practice discourage.

Western-style journalism practices are still the preferred norm across the continent, including in Ghana where attempts have been made to address professional standards in local language radio by media non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associations as well as the regulatory authority, National Media Commission (NMC). The NMC's guidelines on local language broadcast, for example, instruct that 'proverbs, anecdotes and other linguistics devices that have the potential to embellish news stories are not permitted in local language news' (Section 2.3.5 of NMC guidelines, 2009). The guidelines also warn that traditional literary art form(s) of spontaneous composition and performance in oral literature are 'not suitable for news' (NMC guidelines, 2009).

Objectivity and neutrality are valued principles in journalism schools. The model of news delivery taught to students and mostly conformed to in mainstream newsrooms, directs the use of plain straightforward language devoid of embellishments that might misrepresent the views of newsmakers. For example, commonly-used journalism texts warn against the use of hyperboles in broadcast news writing (e.g. Boyd 2001), and scholars such as Allan (1999) argue that because of the 'expressive nature of radio news [...] radio news workers' choice of descriptive words', may 'lead to an immoderate degree of persuasive influence being imposed on the listener' (1999: 26).

On the other side of the debate are advocates of integrating aspects of culture in journalism practice to appeal to local audiences (Ansah 1979; Kasoma 1996; Adeduntan 2017) and to avoid the difficulties journalists confront in translating English broadcast content into indigenous languages. Garrett (2000), who studied Kwéyòl language on radio in the Caribbean country of St. Lucia, argued that because of the narrative structure of Kwéyòl, modes of organising and presenting information in English do not translate very well into indigenous languages and tend to come off as inauthentic during broadcast.

The angst over standards of news has been largely expressed by academics, regulators and media professionals, not necessarily by audiences who account for the popularity of local language radio. Beyond the anecdotal, a review of radio literature suggests there is little empirical information on local

Delivered by Intellect to:

University of Ghana, Legon (id22333050)

IP: 197.255.69.36

On: Thu, 19 Oct 2023 14:28:10

language radio audiences about their attitudes on local language news vis-à-vis English language news. There is even less empirical knowledge on the attitudes of such audiences to the more culturally-inflected formats of news delivery emerging as a consequence of the transformations in the broadcast sector. This article fills a gap in knowledge by exploring the reception practices of multi-lingual audiences in Ghana, focusing in particular on their views on the differing norms and approaches of local language and English language radio newscasts. By asking listeners to compare local language radio news practices to English language ones, we intervene in ongoing debates on acceptable formats and professional standards of news delivery on radio. We aim to provoke a more nuanced assessment and debate on more 'professional' ways of delivering radio news to local audiences.

Accordingly, the study sought answers to the following questions:

- How accommodating are audiences towards emerging formats of news presentation which differ from conventional forms of news broadcast on English language radio stations?
- Do audiences have different tolerance levels for 'professional breaches' on local versus English language news casts?
- How do audiences perceive the credibility and professionalism of radio news in general and in particular local language radio news?

These questions, while critical in understanding the factors underpinning audience preference for local language radio news, remain largely unaddressed. We have taken this audience-centred approach to the larger question of professionalism because it allows us to interrogate patterns of linguistic accommodation that have evolved around local language news broadcasts as compared with English language radio news. The approach also allows insights into the (dis)consonance between ordinary people's perceptions of professionalism in news delivery and that of the professionals. By professionals we mean academics, formally or informally trained media practitioners, media regulators, etc.

RADIO AND LOCAL LANGUAGE BROADCASTING: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Long defined by their colonial legacies African broadcast cultures have only recently given prominence to local language broadcasting. Throughout the colonial period state-controlled radio ceded limited airtime to programmes in local languages because the colonial intent was to use radio to perpetuate imperial privilege, not popular participation. Even in South Africa, where African language radio was permitted to operate, the apartheid government used the airwaves to popularize their self-serving Bantustan ideology (Lekgoathi 2011). The idea of propagating African language radio, according to Lekgoathi (2011), was to foster the major African ethnic identities in order to form separate ethnic 'nations', to reinforce ethnic separatism. Black announcers were employed to prosecute this agenda but kept on a tight leash through policing of the translation of news and editorial content from English to local language out of fear that announcers might broadcast subversive information in the thicket of the medium of language. In colonial Ghana editorial content produced by so called 'vernacular announcers' was similarly closely monitored (Akrofi-Quarcoo 2015), especially during the Second World War years when

local language broadcasts became a matter of urgent necessity for communicating with the masses (unpublished memoir of Ben Gadzekpo).

Post-independence, many governments expanded local language broadcasting as part of nation-building projects, while at the same time restricting the use of indigenous languages through the amount of air-time allotted to them and the narrow selection of languages allowed on air. In Ghana for example, the main state-owned broadcasting station (Ghana Broadcasting Corporation) aired news in only six of the more than 250 local languages and dialects spoken in the country. Indeed, as noted by Blankson (2005), long after independence and until 1999 when the Akan radio station Peace FM went on air, none of the radio stations in Ghana's capital, Accra, was broadcasting solely or predominantly in any indigenous Ghanaian language.

The deepening of radio pluralism in recent times and the resultant growth in local language stations in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, has validated indigenous languages, which, as Prah (2001) contends, 'about 90 per cent [of Africans] speak and transact their daily lives' in (2001: 10). This has not only led to the revitalization of these languages (Agyekum 2000; Yankah 2004), but impacted freedom of speech as well. As Prah (2001) argues, 'freedom to express one's view, in or out of the media, with regards to social, cultural or political issues, goes with the right to receive information on these issues in the primary language/mother tongue' (2001: 17). Local language broadcasting has been credited for empowering social groups and marginalized communities by enabling them to participate in democratic culture (Akpojivi and Fosu 2016). These factors, coupled with radio's fluidity and convergence with new media, have fostered greater interactivity with audiences, increased their dependence on radio for news and information programmes in their own languages, and enabled radio to function in both cosmopolitan and remote communities (Gunner et al. 2012).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL LANGUAGE AUDIENCES

Radio historians have argued that the presence of radio in Africa has always involved the creation of new publics through the shifting and contested use of both metropolitan languages and the language of the indigenes (Gunner et al. 2012). Willems (2014) argues that the colonial project imagined a particular kind of audience when modern mass media was introduced – an audience connected to the motherland (i.e. Britain, France, etc.) – and provides partial explanation for why radio is implicated in the institutionalization of English. While in places such as southern Rhodesia there was complete disinterest in the African audience, in Northern Rhodesia where African audiences were targeted, colonial authorities used radio primarily for pedagogical purposes. The result was that indigenous languages had low status in official public discourse in both South and North Rhodesia.

The literature on radio also reveals the role language has played in forming radio communities and creating publics by carrying news and programmes in multiple languages into streets and bringing new publics into being. Leguy and Mitsch (2007) assert that in Mali, although the introduction of transistor radio sets allowed for the development of radio audiences, it was the establishment of local stations using local languages that induced inhabitants of rural areas to listen to radio. Chibita (2011), who studied Ugandan audience attitudes towards the use of different languages on radio, notes the efficacy of the indigenous language. She argues that local language radio enabled a majority

Delivered by Intellect to:

University of Ghana, Legon (id22333050)

IP: 197.255.69.36

On: Thu, 19 Oct 2023 14:28:10

of people to access accurate information in languages they could understand and to participate through radio on issues that concerned them, while giving them a sense of relevance and belonging. Chibita (2011) suggests that majority of ordinary audiences in Africa pay more attention to local language radio because they see its role more in terms of identification, cultural expressions and cultural preservation. Other scholars have argued that radio and the languages in which it broadcasts is able to tap from cultural knowledge and able to 'create new and sometimes unruly publics' (Gunner et al. 2012: 6).

2. See, for example, results of Geopoll audience surveys in Ghana over the last five years.

LOCAL LANGUAGE RADIO IN GHANA

The dominance of local language radio in Ghana is evidenced in data from the National Communication Authority (NCA), which indicates that at the end of 2018 there were 487 authorized radio stations across all ten regions of the country broadcasting in ethnically diverse languages. Of these, 358 were classified as commercial radio, 71 as community radio, 31 as public radio, 22 as campus radio and five as foreign public radio (NCA Fourth Quarter Statistics 2018). This numerical plurality is supported by high audience patronage for local radio even at a time when other media provide options for news and information. As is the case in many African countries radio remains the most dominant news and information source in Ghana. According to a recent Afrobarometer survey, more than half of respondents (56%) listen to radio news every day and a further 29 per cent use radio 'a few times' a week or a month (Isbell and Appiah-Nyamekye 2018). Significantly, the report notes that '[...] community radio stations and a rising number of local language stations help make news and public discourse accessible to rural and uneducated citizens'.

Other audience research in Ghana has consistently shown that the most listened to stations in the capital Accra, where there are now some 50 radio stations, are the Twi language stations Peace FM and Adom FM.² In addition, a majority of stations located outside Accra broadcast either almost exclusively in the local languages of the communities in which they operate or combine local language with English language broadcasts. It must be noted, however, that English remains a significant part of Ghana's radio culture mostly because it is the official language of the country and the language of power and privilege.

The profusion of local language radio in Ghana has resulted in a redefinition and transformation of the broadcast audience and fuelled new journalism practices in response to their needs and the cultural context and specificities in which radio now operates (Hanusch 2013; Bird 2010). Local language stations have evolved a style quite different from English language stations, which is more accommodating of indigenous forms of communication and information sharing. For example, where conventional English language journalism practices prescribe mostly straightforward, systematic and scripted news presentation styles, widespread practices on local language radio present the news in a more ad-libbed storytelling format. Typically, local language broadcasters roughly translate news from English scripts to local languages during live presentations of news bulletins, embellishing content with proverbs and asides that provide a dramatized form of news delivery (Boachi 2010; Wiafe-Akenten 2015; Opere-Henaku 2016). Local language newscasts have consequently become distinct from English language forms of news presentation in their use of traditional forms of

orature such as idioms, proverbs, anecdotes, euphemisms, humour, hyperbole, innuendos, ideophones and onomatopoeia.

In his paper on oral literature and media in Ghana, Agyekum (2000) argues that media professionals are catering to the sensibilities of audiences who are culturally rooted and at the same time urbane, necessitating more indigenous formats of programming. Agyekum asserts that since such audiences are

Contemporary folk, performers try to design their performances to suit the taste of the modern person. They are faced with the challenge of combining cultural preservation and continuity on one hand, with cultural modernization on the other hand, and must work out the nature of cultural compatibility.

(2000: 15)

While Agyekum was not specifically referring to news, the same can be said of listeners of news programmes in Ghana where local language radio stations are cultivating audiences away from English language stations by adapting news presentation to indigenous storytelling styles infused with proverbs, embellishments and other cultural linguistic devices.

A study by Boachi (2010) examining Akan language news on two radio stations with different orientations found that commercial local language stations were keenly aware that their culturally-rooted style of news broadcasts was what drew audiences to them. Boachi (2010) quotes the head of news at *Peace FM's* as follows:

We take our newsreaders as the linguists in the chief's palace (Okyeame, as we call them). Even though the chief is there, whatever the chief tells him, he has the expertise to put it in as an acceptable a manner as everyone will understand and enjoy. In doing so, sometimes there may be a little exaggeration here and there, but what is important is to get the facts right so that whatever embellishments you are adding; whatever proverbs and idioms you are adding must not detract from what the news wants to portray – the truth within the news. I cannot say that we always achieve a hundred percent, but we're working towards it and I know that sooner or later we will get there.

(2010: 54)

Opare-Henaku (2016) also observed in her case study on an Akan and an English language radio station belonging to the same media group that journalists with the Akan language station *Adom FM* justified the use of proverbs in their news stories by arguing it was necessary for news to be packaged and presented in conformity with Akan tradition. Opare-Henaku quoted journalists as explaining that they use anecdotes, euphemisms and even songs to punctuate the news in order 'to paint a mental picture' in the minds of audiences. Such insights into the news cultures of local language radio inform new understandings of programming targeted at local audiences, but do not provide enough information on the differing uses and gratifications multi-lingual audiences derive from local language vis-à-vis English language radio and their attitudes towards new formats of news delivery.

The evolution of new, more performative styles of news presentation has prompted concerns about the deviation of local language news from

normative standards. Local language news delivery is often accused of lowering broadcast standards as illustrated by the following quote from a listener:

I want to deal with radio news broadcast in Twi. News is a serious business and must be presented as such. News should not be presented in a flamboyant or colourful language. I stand for correction, but I think news should be devoid of literary devices such as proverbs, similes, idioms, humour, and what have you [...] Sometimes I listen to radio news in Akan on some radio stations and I cannot tell whether it is news or comedy. Just compare the radio news in English on Radio Ghana, Joy FM, CNN, BBC or any other network with radio news in Akan on some radio stations and you will see a very big difference.

(Essien 2015)

Such comparisons between western-centric norms of news production and evolving practices of local language radio news resonate with old debates on western journalism models and the need for more contextually-appropriate African models of journalism.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS LOCAL VS. ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEWS: A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS APPROACH

The uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is a theoretical lens for explaining how and why individuals use different media (Blumler and Katz 1974). It posits that audiences choose media deliberately, in search of certain gratifications. It views audiences as non-passive receptors of media. The tenets of UGT position audiences as active agents in pursuit of idiosyncratic needs that drive their behaviours and choices. UGT scholars argue that, for example, a seemingly casual act of listening to a music rather than talk programme on radio is evidence of a conscious choice made and enacted by the audience member. Seen this way, media choice becomes an enactment of a drive to improve knowledge, be entertained, express identity or even relax (Hanjun et al. 2005).

Premised on this notion of individuals as active agents in media use, contemporary UGT research focuses on both media content-based issues (e.g. Malik et al. 2016; Dolan et al. 2016) and media technology-based issues (e.g. Hanjun et al. 2005; Hamari et al. 2019) with particular emphasis on emerging information and communication technologies. Prior to this technology-driven research interest and tradition, however, UGT has had a long history of applicability to traditional media. Early UGT scholars have explored such issues as TV viewing (Rubin 1983), radio listenership (Towers 1987) and newspaper consumption (Elliot and Rosenberg 1987).

While such earlier UGT research is clearly biased towards American, and at best European samples, there also exists a critical mass of UGT research about African media and audiences. For example, Jere and Davis' (2011) analysis of South African women's magazine and internet consumption demonstrates the theory's applicability here. Saleeman et al. (2015) have also used the theory to show evidence of cross-ethnic group news consumption differences. In Kenya, similar evidence has been found by Wekesa (2016) as to the stability of UGT. Wekesa explored young people's evaluation and selection of radio content and found that youth's radio consumption habits are driven by a quest for entertainment and news affecting them.

In spite of the rich tradition of UGT research and the validations they bring to the theory, the theory's applicability to media audience choices when language is a variable is unclear. Most UGT research takes language for granted and focus instead on other variables such as media use habits and drivers of media use. However, Africa is rich in linguistic diversity, which importantly is complicated further by the often-dominant presence of colonial legacy languages, which have historically dominated the airwaves. Consequently, in many African countries, legacy media such as TV and radio are largely consumed in a multi-linguistic context which has yet to be factored into UGT research. In this study, we extend the applicability of the theory to the domain of language, media and audience research by exploring the language-driven choices of radio audiences in Ghana.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study sought to gauge the attitudes and habits forming around local language news among cosmopolitan audiences in Ghana. The choice of cosmopolitan audiences was informed by the availability of diverse local and English language radio stations in such areas. In exploring their consumption choices and habits, it was critical that the audience sampled had the options of radio in different languages from which to make their choices. We therefore selected five cosmopolitan cities – Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast, Ho and Tamale – as empirical settings. These cities each have multiple radio stations broadcasting in English and a variety of local languages spoken by indigenes and residents. Accra, the nation's capital has 50 authorized radio stations, broadcasting in both English and local languages, such as Ga, Akan and Hausa. Although the indigenous language of the locality is Ga, Akan is commonly spoken and Akan language stations are dominant. Majority of the stations are private commercial stations, operating alongside public service and campus radio stations. Much like Accra, Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city, has a vibrant radio landscape with about 44 authorized radio stations. Most of the radio stations are commercial and predominantly Akan-speaking. English is spoken on some commercial, campus and the public service radio stations. Cape Coast has nine radio stations, including public service radio, two campus radio stations as well as commercial radio stations. The predominant local language spoken is Fanti, which belongs to the Akan group of languages, although radio stations broadcast also in Twi and English.

The fourth cosmopolitan city sampled, Ho, has seven radio stations, including a public service station, campus radio and commercial radio stations. The Ewe language is the most spoken local language in the municipality, followed by Twi. Ewe, English and Twi are mostly used on radio. Finally, like the other cities, radio is vibrant in Tamale, which has about 24 authorized radio stations comprising a public service station, campus radio and several commercial radio stations. The city has a mixture of both local and English language stations and the local languages predominantly used on air are Dagbani and Hausa.

Sampling was restricted to the main metropolitan or municipal area in each of the cities. Across the cities, 200 respondents were sampled. Sample size determination was guided by Isreal's (1992) direction that a sample size of at least 200 is suitable for populations above 100,000 (with 10 per cent room for error). Data from the Ghana Statistical Service shows that each of the cities selected has a population higher than 100,000, justifying our choice of sample size. We recognize the huge disparities in population sizes and dynamics

across the cities. For instance, both Accra and Kumasi have over two million people while a place like Tamale has less than 300,000 residents. However, given that most existing local scholarship on radio audiences are centred in Accra and Kumasi, our sampling approach was deliberately non-proportional. This was to ensure that the less studied domains in Ghana are given a strong representation in the study.

A convenience sampling approach was used in selecting respondents. While a more systematic and random-based approach would have been ideal, the absence of a reliable sampling frame (e.g. database of residences and inhabitants) precluded us from this approach. For this reason, we used the mall intercept technique, a convenience approach to administer the questionnaire. Individuals were intercepted in markets and other congregating points, prequalified by age (18+) and invited to participate following which they were administered the questions (Bruwer and Haydam (1996). This approach to sampling is quite common to audience studies in Africa (see Schliep et al. 2018; Van Rooyen 2018). Trained field workers (Master of Philosophy Communication Studies) assisted with data collection.

The instrument contained questions that explored listener habits and preferences between English and local language radio news; attitudes and views on standards 'breaches' in English versus local language news presentation and differential tolerance levels for such breaches. The term 'professional breaches' was used loosely to indicate a departure from western normative practices of journalism rather than to render any value judgement on such practices. In doing this, we took cognisance of the contestation between mainstream positions on practices which consider indigenous linguistic devices such as proverbs, anecdotes, dramatizations etc., as professional breaches (e.g. NMC guidelines), as well as counter viewpoints of scholars such as Kasoma (1996) and Adeduntan (2017) that argue for more culturally appropriate adaptations of news presentation.

Constructs were generally measured at the nominal level with the exception of those exploring attitudes and tolerance levels, which were measured numerically. To make sense of the data collected, we computed descriptive statistics such as frequencies, mode and standard deviation. This was because the nature of measurement of most of the constructs of interest (nominal) precluded us from inferential analysis. In a few instances, however, enabled by the availability of numerical measures (of attitude and tolerance constructs) we deployed an inferential statistical tool, the independent samples *t*-test to test differences in group means on issues under exploration.

The study sample size was 1000 with a 58%:42% male–female ratio. Respondents were relatively young with more than 60% falling in the 18–29 age band. Most respondents had formal education with less than 2% having no formal education at all. Respondents were made up of formally and informally employed persons as well as students.

FINDINGS

Consistent with the dominant literature and our assumptions about the high relevance of radio in people's lives in Africa, our survey shows high radio listenership in Ghana as nearly all respondents sampled (97%) indicated that they listen to radio, albeit with varying degrees of frequency. As shown in Table 1, close to 30% listen to radio for two hours or more a day, while slightly more than 30% (32.2%) listen for at least an hour or more. Most respondents

Radio listening?	Frequency	%
Yes	975	97.5
No	25	2.5
Total	1000	100
Hours of listening		
Less than one hour	379	38.0
Between one and two hours	321	32.2
Between two and four hours	146	14.6
More than four hours	151	15.1
Total	997	100

Table 1: *Radio listenership.*

(69%) listen to radio at home; 26% listen to radio at work and in the car, while 9% listen while walking.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE FOR RADIO LISTENING

We found that slightly more respondents prefer to listen to radio in both local languages and English (38.6%) than English alone (34.4%) or a local language alone (27%). These preferences cut across sexes given that an independent samples *t*-test conducted returned a non-significant *T*-value ($t=1.15$; $p=.25$). Reasons for listening to radio in local languages included the opportunity to understand things better, the fact of their indigenous language being used, content variety and the playing of local music. These factors were also listed as what makes local language radio characteristically different from English language radio (see Table 2).

We also sought to probe whether the language variable had any implications for preferences for specific news content types. As shown in Table 3, the majority of respondents preferred news-based content to be delivered with a mix of local and English languages. Nearly half of the respondents (46%) preferred to listen to news bulletins presented with a mix of English and local languages. But if they had to choose between English only and local language only, respondents would much rather listen to news in English (36%) than in the local language (17%).

A similar pattern is replicated in preferences for listening to news magazine shows (e.g. morning shows). It is important to note that the pattern of dual linguistic preference reflects linguistic norms in the country, as most Ghanaians communicate in multiple local languages in addition to English, the official language (Yeboah-Banin et al. 2018). It is common to hear people in the streets of Ghana mixing local languages with English in conversation.

Preferred language	Frequency	%
English	342	34.4
Local	268	27.0
Both English and local	383	38.6
Total	993	100.0

Table 2: *Preferred language for listening to radio.*

Delivered by Intellect to:

University of Ghana, Legon (id22333050)

IP: 197.255.69.36

On: Thu, 19 Oct 2023 14:28:10

Preferred language for:	English		Local		Both English and local		No preference		Total
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
	News bulletins	359	36.1	174	17.5	453	45.6	8	
News magazine shows	362	36.5	217	21.9	384	38.7	30	3.0	993

Table 3: Language preference for listening to news programmes.

AUDIENCE ATTITUDES TO CULTURAL INFLECTIONS IN NEWS PRESENTATION

It is important to recognize that professional judgements of news are not based on popular opinion, although one can argue that audience notions of professionalism (however ill-defined) would likely influence their tolerance for certain breaches. The study examined whether common journalistic notions that ‘news must be objective and separate fact from opinion’, etc. would raise audience concerns when breached? As indicated earlier local language radio in Ghana continues to accommodate the use of proverbs and other cultural storytelling devices to embellish news presentations despite criticisms that the practice prejudices news content. Specifically, we asked respondents to indicate the extent of their satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the practice where local language news presenters insert cultural inflections such as proverbs and dramatized story telling into the news during delivery. Figures 1 and 2 show the finding relative to this.

Irrespective of the language they prefer to listen to the news in, two-thirds of the sample appear to be satisfied with proverbs being inserted into local news bulletins. This indicates that they saw nothing wrong with local language radio news embellished to reflect indigenous communicative styles. As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, there was not much variability in the scores on this (standard deviation = 0.679), suggesting that the respondents tended to agree in their positions.

While respondents were generally comfortable with using proverbs in news presentation, the study finds that they were less accommodating of news dramatization. Figure 2 shows that nearly 50 per cent of those sampled said they were dissatisfied with the dramatization of the news content. When news is dramatized in presentation, the events may be embellished, news presenters may assume the character of news actors and act out the story etc. Consequently, what should be serious issues can be rendered trivial as presenters improvise ‘interesting’ ways of telling the story. It appears that respondents are generally dissatisfied with this dilution of the news. There was no significant difference between the responses of male and female respondents as shown by the test score for difference in means between the two groups ($t = -.17$; $p = .07$). At best, one could argue of a partial difference between men and women given the p -value.

Interestingly, the study finds that even among the two-thirds of the sample that are satisfied with proverbs being inserted in the news, the tolerance is exclusive to local language news. An assessment of how accepting people are of proverb use during English language newscasts suggests that people have more stringent expectations of English language news. As the information

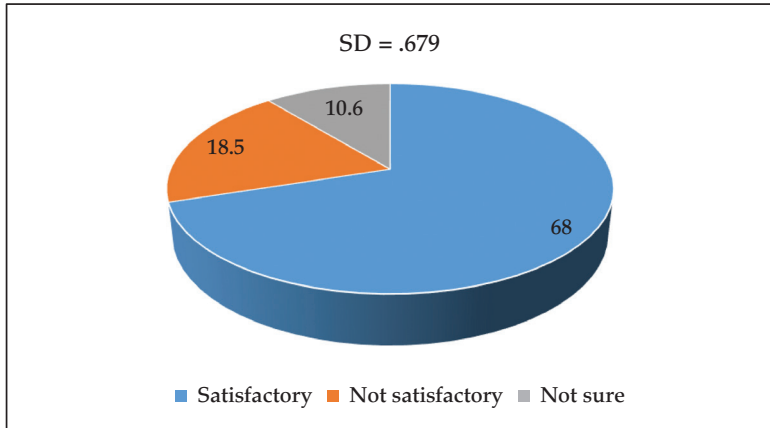


Figure 1: Satisfaction with proverbs in news.

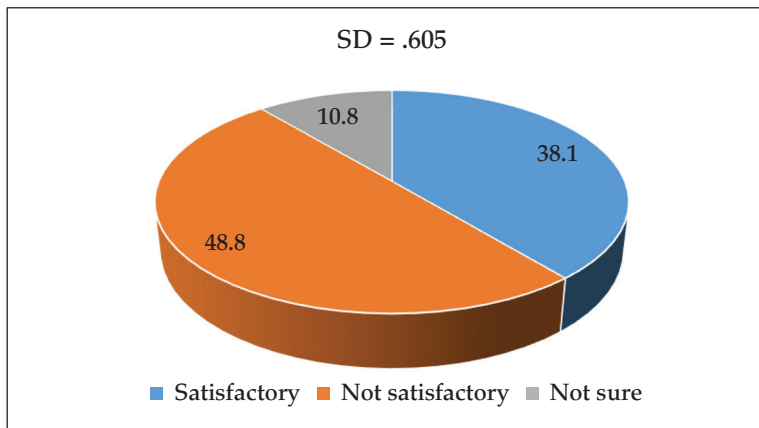


Figure 2: Satisfaction with dramatization in news.

in Table 4 shows, respondents that were satisfied with proverb use in news delivery, were generally more willing to accommodate it if it happens on local language rather than English language news bulletins.

This evidence is even clearer when observed from the point of view of those who expressed dissatisfaction with the practice of inserting proverbs into news casts. Table 4 shows that nearly 6 per cent more of those dissatisfied with proverbs in the news said they will be more willing to tolerate it if it happened on local language stations than English language stations.

A similar attitude pertains regarding audience tolerance for dramatizing the news. Again, even among the respondents (48.8 per cent) who are dissatisfied when news is dramatized, more than half were more willing to accommodate it so long as it only happened on local language rather than English language news bulletins. This is yet another indication that Ghanaian radio audiences hold English and local language news to different standards.

The study also explored the practice of mixing fact with opinion in news delivery. Conventional journalism holds that people trust news when it is

Willing to forgive 'professional breaches' if happening on local than English language news	Satisfaction with use of proverbs in news presentation			Total
	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Not sure	
Agree	429	80	48	557
	63.70%	44.90%	44.90%	58.10%
Disagree	187	70	30	287
	27.80%	39.30%	28.00%	30.00%
Not sure	57	28	29	114
	8.50%	15.70%	27.10%	11.90%
Total	673	178	107	958
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 4: Tolerance for use of proverbs in local vs. English language news.

Willing to forgive 'professional breaches' if happening on local than English language news	Satisfaction with dramatization of news			Total
	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Not sure	
Agree	256	251	52	559
	68.10%	52.20%	48.60%	58.00%
Disagree	88	174	29	291
	23.40%	36.20%	27.10%	30.20%
Not sure	32	56	26	114
	8.50%	11.60%	24.30%	11.80%
Total	376	481	107	964
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 5: Tolerance for dramatization in local vs. English language news.

perceived as objective (devoid of opinion), unbiased, fair, balanced and accurate. However, increasingly in local as well as English language (albeit not as frequently) news bulletins, presenters offer their views on news items. The study explored attitudes towards this to see whether they differ, depending on the language of broadcast.

Our findings suggest that Ghanaian audiences seem to expect news to be delivered devoid of presenters' opinion. Dissatisfaction with opinionating in news delivery was the most recurring choice among the sample (47%). This figure is 10% higher than those who expressed satisfaction with it. The finding discriminates further in respect of tolerance levels depending on the language of broadcast. A majority of respondents (58%) agreed that they will be willing to overlook it if the occurrence is on local language rather than English language news. This finding adds to the earlier evidence suggesting that audiences use different yardsticks for local language and English language news. As it appears, the standards expected of English language news are more stringent.

Willing to forgive 'professional breaches' if happening on local than English language news	Satisfaction with mixing fact and opinion			Total
	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Not sure	
Agree	261	235	62	558
	71.90%	51.90%	42.20%	57.90%
Disagree	76	171	44	291
	20.90%	37.70%	29.90%	30.20%
Not sure	26	47	41	114
	7.20%	10.40%	27.90%	11.80%
Total	363	453	147	963
	37.69%	47.04%	15.26%	100.00%

Table 6: Tolerance for mixing fact and opinion in local vs. English language news.

Willing to forgive 'professional breaches' if happening on local than English language news	Satisfaction with decency in news			Total
	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Not sure	
Agree	343	166	47	556
	68.30%	48.30%	40.90%	57.90%
Disagree	114	135	42	291
	22.70%	39.20%	36.50%	30.30%
Not sure	45	43	26	114
	9.00%	12.50%	22.60%	11.90%
Total	502	344	115	961
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 7: Tolerance for non-decorous language in local vs. English language news.

Different standards were also observed with regard to language and decorum in news presentation. Within Ghanaian culture there is the expectation that individuals exhibit decency in communicative situations. For example, issues relating to sex are generally perceived as taboo subjects in the public sphere. Insults and insolence in communicative situations are also frowned upon. Where that is deemed unavoidable within the context of communication, cultural convention is for speakers to preface statements with disclaimers such as 'sebe taflatse' (excuse me to say/pardon me for saying). On Ghanaian radio, particularly local language radio, presenters have often been criticized for using language that flouts norms of decency (e.g. the NMC has on several occasions issued public statements decrying indecent language on radio).

Our findings show that tolerance for non-decorous radio language is substantially less when it occurs on English language than on local language news. Almost half the number of respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with non-decorous language on radio expressed a willingness to forgive such infractions if they occurred on local language stations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The study set out to explore audience attitudes, preferences and tolerance for emerging radio news practices in Ghana as set within the country's multi-linguistic media culture. It examined how accommodating audiences are towards emerging formats of news presentation that differ from conventional expectations. It also explored whether audiences have different tolerance levels for 'professional breaches' on local versus English language news casts and how audiences perceive the credibility and professionalism of radio news in general, and in particular local language radio news.

Our findings generally show that audiences are conscious of and informed by language-based considerations in their radio news consumption. For example, there is a general preference for radio news delivered with a mix of English and local language as opposed to that delivered solely in either of the two languages. This is in consonance with everyday code-switching practices common with many Ghanaians. Importantly, the findings also suggest that Ghana's radio audiences do not consume local and English language radio in a vacuum nor on an equal footing. Rather, they appear to be selective in what they consider to be 'the good way of doing radio', when judging emerging radio news presentation formats. For example, while the majority of respondents frowned on the dramatization of news, they tended to be accommodating of the use of proverbs in news delivery. In addition, we find also that expectations differ in tolerance levels for so called 'professional breaches'. Across the issues of proverb insertions in news, dramatization and opinionating in news presentation, respondents are more willing to tolerate the occurrence of such 'breaches' on local language than on English language stations.

These findings validate the claims of the UGT by showing that audiences make media choices, and that these choices may be informed by linguistic considerations. We find that our respondents actively make language-driven decisions in their everyday radio consumption. We also find that not only might multi-linguistic audiences who have the option of different radio languages choose what to listen to based on the language of broadcast, but that they also develop different standards for judging what is right or wrong, depending on the language variable. This resonates with Chibita's (2011) point that African audiences perceive the role of local language broadcasts in terms of identification, cultural expressions and cultural preservation. Such findings open up interesting avenues for further UGT research, including whether these results would hold across countries and whether the linguistic underpinnings we found in our study would be confirmed in contexts where the multi-lingual context of radio is not influenced by the historical privilege of colonial over indigenous languages?

Kasoma (1996) and Adeduntan (2017) have accused news professionals in Africa of privileging western paradigms of news delivery and treating them as more serious and credible than the more culturally-inflected forms of news. Emerging literature suggests however, there has been a shift to more indigenous modes of news delivery on local language radio, which is quite different from what is commonly considered as professional journalism (Boachi 2010; Wiawe-Akenten 2015; Opare-Henaku 2016). The findings from this study complement this body of knowledge by shedding light on audience reception of these alternative afrocentric models of news presentation. They do not settle the contentious issue of appropriate news delivery styles, which motivated the study in the first place. However, the findings do show evidence that

audiences prefer more culturally-rooted performative modes of news delivery on their local language stations.

In showing preference for more culturally-inflected journalism styles, radio audiences appear to be in consonance with local language journalists in challenging notions of what constitutes acceptable ways of doing radio news. As the evidence in our study suggests, discerning radio audiences have embraced and accommodated culturally-inflected news and can make distinctions between 'what is fit to air' on local language versus English language news. These audiences have no problem with journalism being infused with cultural norms of storytelling and yet recognize that news is factual, not fictional storytelling. They do not want their news dramatized even if they want it to feel authentic. Clearly then authenticity is not only important to journalists, as Boachi (2010) and Opere-Henaku (2016) found in their research, but to audiences who now expect local language news in formats that most approximate their cultural experiences of information delivery.

If we accept this assertion, then what might we make of findings that show when forced to choose between language genres of news, audiences signalled a preference for news in English over local language news? Considering the positive attitude audiences demonstrated towards local language news in this study, this finding seems contradictory, but it may also be an indication that perhaps the conventions of English news bulletins make them more credible than local language ones, although further data on audience perceptions of credibility is needed to validate this claim.

Similarly, contradictory attitudes to professional breaches on local language vis-à-vis English language news warrant closer scrutiny than the data allows. This also points to the need to deepen research on more culturally-relevant paradigms of news delivery that can inform a better understanding of audiences' choices. Radio audiences may have little grounding in the formal practices of journalism, unlike media scholars, practitioners and regulators, but the findings suggest that in fact their sense of journalism standards is quite similar to that of professionals. The departure point however, is the willingness of ordinary, but discerning audiences, to accommodate cultural appropriations in news casts perhaps because like novelist Chinua Achebe (1958) famously stated, they believe 'proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten' (1958: 74).

Finally, the findings provoke a re-think as to whether news broadcasts targeted at local language audiences ought to conform to conventional thought about normative ways of delivering radio news or develop their own professional ways of casting the news. Given the prevailing news culture and as demonstrated from the views of audiences in this study, superimposing western journalism paradigms on African broadcast practices is an exercise in near futility. A more promising pathway would be for media professionals, regulators and scholars to adopt a less rigid stance on professional news delivery, and to seek to observe, learn from and appropriate existing cultural mores and injunctions about style and decorum on local language radio in order to shape the development of professional standards that both the audience and content producers can live with.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was made possible with financial support from the University of Ghana Research Fund.

Delivered by Intellect to:

University of Ghana, Legon (id22333050)

IP: 197.255.69.36

On: Thu, 19 Oct 2023 14:28:10

REFERENCES

- Achebe, C. (1958), *Things Fall Apart*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Adeduntan, A. (2017), 'Truth, nothing but the performative truth: Yoruba radio review of English newspapers', *Journalism Studies*, 19:12, pp. 1712–29.
- Afrobarometer (2018), 'Radio Remains the Most-Used Source of News in Many African Countries', press release, 13 February, <http://afrobarometer.org/press/radio-remains-most-used-source-news-many-african-countries>. Accessed 13 February 2019.
- Agyekum, K. (2000), 'Aspects of Akan oral literature in the media', *Research Review*, 16:2, pp. 1–18.
- Akpojivi, U. and Fosu, M. (2016), 'Indigenous language broadcasting in Ghana: Retrospect and prospect', in A. Salawu and M. Chibita (eds), *Indigenous Language Media, Language Politics and Democracy in Africa*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 121–50.
- Akrofi-Quarcoo, S. (2015), 'Women's engagement with radio broadcasting in post-colonial Ghana, 1960-1975', Ph.D. thesis, Accra: University of Ghana.
- Allan, S. (1999), *News Culture: Issues in Cultural and Media Studies*, London: Open University Press.
- Ansah, P. A. V. (1979), 'Problems of localising radio in Ghana', *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)*, 25:1, pp. 1–16.
- Bird, S. E. (ed.) (2010), *The Anthropology of News & Journalism: Global Perspectives*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Blankson, I. A. (2005), 'Negotiating the use of native languages in emerging pluralistic and independent broadcast systems in Africa', *Africa Media Review*, 13:1, pp. 1–22.
- Blumler, J. G. and Katz, E. (eds) (1974), *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research*, Sage Annual Reviews of Communication Research, vol. III, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Boachi, H. (2010), 'Broadcast news in Ghanaian languages: A comparative study of Akan news on Uniiq Fm and Peace FM', master's thesis, Accra: University of Ghana.
- Boyd, A. (2001), *Broadcast Journalism: Techniques of Radio and Television News*, 5th ed., Oxford, Auckland, Boston, MA, Johannesburg, Melbourne and New Delhi: Focal Press.
- Bruwer, J. D. W. and Haydam, N. E. (1996), 'Reducing bias in shopping mall-intercept surveys: The time-based systematic', *South African Journal of Business Management*, 27:½, pp. 9–16.
- Chibita, M. (2011), 'Multiple publics, multiple languages: Radio and the contestations of broadcasting local language policy in Uganda', in L. Gunner, D. Ligaga, D. Moyo, T. Bosch, M. B. Chibita and D. B. Coplan (eds), *Radio in Africa: Publics, Cultures, Communities*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp. 270–85.
- Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Fahy, J. and Goodman, S. (2016), 'Social media engagement behaviour: A uses and gratifications perspective', *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 24:3&4, pp. 261–77.
- Elliott, W. R. and Rosenberg, W. L. (1987), 'The 1985 Philadelphia newspaper strike: A uses and gratifications study', *Journalism Quarterly*, 64:4, pp. 679–87.
- Essien, P. (2015), 'Radio broadcast in Akan', *Daily Graphic Online*, 27 February, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/opinion/radio-broadcast-in-akan-by-peter-essien.html>. Accessed 23 January 2019.

- Gadzekpo, B. (1972), *Ghana Muntie: From Station ZOY to the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation*, unpublished Manuscript.
- Garrett, P. B. (2000), "'High" Kweyol: The emergence of a formal Creole register in St. Lucia', in J. H. McWhorter (ed.) *Language Change and Language Contact in Pidgins and Creoles*, Creole Language Library, 21, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 63–102.
- Ghana Statistical Service (2019), 'Demography: population projection', http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/nationalaccount_macros.php?Stats=MTA1NTY1NjgxLjUwNg==/webstats/s679n2sn87. Accessed 28 December 2019.
- Gunner, L., Ligaga, D., Moyo, D., Bosch, T., Chibita, M. B. and Coplan, D. B. (2012), *Radio in Africa: Publics, Cultures, Communities*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Hamari, J., Malik, A., Koski, J. and Johri, A. (2019), 'Uses and gratifications of Pokémon Go: Why do people play mobile location-based augmented reality games?', *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 35:9, pp. 804–19.
- Hanjun K., Chang-Hoan C. and Roberts M. S. (2005), 'Internet uses and gratifications: A structural equation model of interactive advertising', *Journal of Advertising*, 34:2, pp. 57–70.
- Hanusch, F. (2013), 'Charting a theoretical framework for examining Indigenous journalism culture', *Media International Australia*, 149:1, pp. 82–91.
- Isbell, T. and Appiah-Nyamekye, J. (2018), *Ghanaians Rely on Radio and TV, but Support for Media Freedom Drops Sharply*, Afrobarometer, Dispatch No. 250, <http://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad250-ghanaians-rely-radio-and-tv-support-media-freedom-drops-sharply>. Accessed 9 November 2019.
- Jere, M. G. and Davis, S. V. (2011), 'An application of uses and gratifications theory to compare consumer motivations for magazine and internet usage among South African women's magazine readers', *Southern African Business Review*, 15:1, pp. 1–27.
- Kasoma, F. P. (1996), 'The foundations of African ethics (Afriethics) and the professional practice of journalism: The case for society-centred media morality', *Africa Media Review*, 10:3, pp. 93–116.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G. and Gurevitch, M. (1974), *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Leguy, C. and Mitsch, R. H. (2007), 'Revitalizing the oral tradition: Stories broadcast by radio Parana (San, Mali)', *Research in African Literatures*, 38:3, pp. 136–47.
- Lekgoathi, S. P. (2011), 'Bantustan identity: Censorship and subversion on Northern Sotho radio under apartheid, 1960s–80s', in D. Ligaga, D. Moyo and L. Gunner (eds), *Radio in Africa: Publics, Cultures, Communities*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp. 117–33
- Malik, A., Dhir, A. and Nieminen, M. (2016), 'Uses and gratifications of digital photo sharing on Facebook', *Telematics and Informatics*, 33:1, pp. 129–38.
- National Communication Authority (NCA) (2018), 'FM Authorisation', <https://www.nca.org.gh/industry-data-2/authorisations-2/fm-authorisation-2/>. Accessed 4 March 2019.
- National Media Commission (NMC) (2009), *Guidelines for Local Language Broadcasting*, Accra: Pagelinks.

- Opore-Henaku, J. (2016), 'An exploratory study of news routines of local and English language radio stations: The case of Adom FM and Joy FM', Masters thesis, Accra: University of Ghana.
- Prah, K. K. (2001), *Language and Freedom of Expression in Africa*, Accra: Media Foundation for West Africa.
- Rubin, A. M. (1983), 'Television uses and gratifications: The interactions of viewing patterns and motivations', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 27:1, pp. 37–51.
- Saleeman, I. G., Budiman, A. M. and Ahmad, M. K. (2015), 'Uses and gratifications of news among ethnic groups in Nigeria', *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6:3, pp. 178–186.
- Schliep, M. E., Feinglass, J. M., Cameron, K. and Sorensen, J. (2018), 'An assessment of radio-based education about female genital cutting and health and human rights issues in Douentza, Mali', *Northwestern Public Law Research Paper No. 18-23*, 17 September, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3250840>. Accessed 12 February 2020.
- Towers, W. M. (1987), 'Radio listenership and uses and gratifications: A replication', *Communication Research Reports*, 4:1, pp. 57–64.
- Van Rooyen, M. (2018), 'Investigating translation flows: Community radio news in South Africa', *Across Languages and Cultures*, 19:2, pp. 259–78.
- Wekesa, E. (2016), 'The radio programming and the youth preference in Nairobi, Kenya', *Scholars Bulletin*, pp. 436–40.
- Wiafe-Akenten, E. N. A. (2015), 'Sedee Wode Akan Kasa Di Dwuma enne Mmerɛ Yi Wɔ Radio Ne TV So', Ph.D. thesis, Accra: University of Ghana.
- Willems, W. (2014), 'Provincializing hegemonic histories of media and communication studies: Toward a genealogy of epistemic resistance in Africa', *Communication Theory*, 24:4, pp. 415–34.
- Yankah, K. (2004), *Language, the Mass Media and Democracy in Ghana*, vol. 4, Annual Lecture in the Humanities, Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Science.
- Yeboah, I. (2016), 'NMC damns Ken Agyepong, Afia Schwarzenegger (statement)', Graphic Online, 10 February, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/nmc-damns-ken-agyepong-afia-schwarzenegger-statement.html>. Accessed 30 May 2018.
- Yeboah-Banin, A. A., Fosu, M. and Tsegah, M. (2018), 'Linguistic complexity and second language advertising audiences: Is there a case for linguistic exclusion?', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 42:1, pp. 70–90.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Gadzekpo, Audrey, Yeboah-Banin, Abena Animwaa and Akrofi-Quarcoo, Sarah (2020), 'A case of double standards? Audience attitudes to professional norms on local and English language radio news programmes in Ghana', *Journal of African Media Studies*, 12:1, pp. 3–22, doi: https://doi.org/10.1386/jams_00008_1

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Audrey Gadzekpo, Ph.D., is an associate professor at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana. She has more than 25 years of experience in teaching, research and advocacy on media, gender and

governance, and 30 years practical experience as a media practitioner. Her latest publication is titled 'Glocalising radio during empire' (*Obsidian*, 44:2, 2019).

Contact: Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, P.O. Box LG 53, Accra, Ghana.
E-mail: audreygadzekpo@gmail.com; agadzekpo@ug.edu.gh

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7461-2980>

Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin is a senior lecturer at the Department of Communication Studies of the University of Ghana where she teaches advertising, gender and communication, communication research methods etc. Her research interests lie broadly in the field of marketing communications and have spanned topics in advertising, personal selling, media, gender and media and audience engagement.

Contact: Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, P.O. Box LG 53, Accra, Ghana.
E-mail: AYeboah-Banin@ug.edu.gh

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6947-0452>

Sarah Akrofi-Quarcoo, Ph.D., is a lecturer at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, Legon. She teaches broadcast journalism in addition to elective courses in gender and communication and international communications. Her research interests span social history of radio and radio audiences focusing on women and children as well as gender and mass communication research.

Contact: Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, P.O. Box LG 53, Accra, Ghana.
E-mail: saroaq2000@yahoo.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6330-8836>

Audrey Gadzekpo, Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin and Sarah Akrofi-Quarcoo have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.
