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# Indigenizing radio in Ghana

## ABSTRACT

*Radio is hailed as Africa's medium of choice in the global communication age. Introduced as a colonial tool of information, education and entertainment in the early 1930s, radio broadcasting was mainly in colonial languages as colonial administrators perceived local language broadcasting a threat to their empire building and 'civilization' agendas. The fortunes of local language broadcasting did not dramatically change in the independence era when broadcast media were in the firm control of the state. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, mostly resulting from a more liberalized media environment, local language broadcasting has undergone unprecedented growth. Drawing on written archival material, including internal communication among policy-makers, audience letters, key informant interviews and findings from a recent audience study, this article charts the progressive development of local language radio broadcasting in Ghana, and engages with the role played by early audiences and broadcasters in indigenizing broadcast content.*

## KEYWORDS

Ghana  
colonialism  
African radio  
indigenization  
local language  
broadcasting  
audience

## INTRODUCTION

When Mano (2011: 102) described radio as 'Africa's medium of choice', the media scholar was not only celebrating the social importance of the technology in the daily lives of Africans but also its 'local uses' outside the original designs, ideologies and philosophies of metropolitan countries that introduced the technology to the continent. As a spoken communication medium, introduced to a predominantly oral and multilinguistic culture, radio has lent itself more ably than print to indigenous language use as Salawu (2006) asserts.

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The possibilities and prospects of local language radio were clear to colonial administrators during the experimental years of broadcasting. In her article on radio broadcasting in Africa, Hilda Matheson (1935: 387), an employee of the Empire Service Station of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that relayed programmes to the colonies, observed that radio was the ‘most natural of all means’ for educating ‘tribal society because it re-asserts [...] vernacular speech and oral tradition and also has the emotional appeal of the spoken word’. In the same article, Matheson described radio as ‘an important Imperialist asset’ for advanced administration. Essentially therefore, for purposes of advanced administration and empire building, the English language and European cultures were privileged over vernacular speech and oral traditions. However, the fortunes of local language broadcasting did not dramatically change in the independence era when broadcast media were in the firm control of the state. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, mostly resulting from a more liberalized media environment, local language broadcasting has undergone unprecedented growth.

This article explores discourses and some of the tensions around radio’s indigenization in Ghana and draws attention to some of the contestations as well as negotiations that have re-defined the missions of radio over time. Essentially, it charts the progressive indigenization of radio in the country’s colonization and decolonization processes and engages with the role played by early and present-day broadcasters and audiences in Radio Ghana’s indigenization. The trajectory provides historical context to the current upsurge of local language radio and the patterns forming around local language radio broadcasting culture in Ghana. The article is located within the new wave of scholarship on radio in democratic Africa, which has shifted radio historiography from a predominantly institutional, state-centric and technical account to radio’s presence in the everyday lives of listeners. As Silverstone et al. (1992) argue, communication technologies such as radio are central to the ways in which individuals manage their everyday life. Everyday life has resonance with indigenous cultures. Radio’s debut in colonial Ghana, like other African countries was hailed for its novelty and intimacy, and positioned as a modernization tool. However, scholars have also pointed out that Africans did not merely hail the technology as the ‘magic stone’ for transposing them from a state of backwardness to western civilization. As historical subjects, local populations engaged the medium to diverse ends (Gadzekpo 2018; Chikowero 2014; Lekgoathi 2011; Chibita 2011; Mano 2011). This study valorizes the agency of broadcast audiences and producers in radio’s indigenization.

It has been argued that radio provided the colonial project with an effective tool for the transmission of cultural imperialism (Chikowero 2014; Bloom 2014; Ansah 1985). Scholarship on indigenization of radio spanning communication and media, linguistic and cultural studies criticize the cultural imperialism missions of colonial radio. Prah (2001), for instance, argues that the promotion of English language over local language denied the citizenry of cultural self-expression. Yankah (2004) advocates that local language use helps to preserve a nation’s spiritual heritage. Chibita (2011) similarly points out that local language radio encourages broader diversity, enhanced public presence and citizen participation. Karikari (1994) attributes radio’s effectiveness in the development of rural communities to the use of local languages. A useful recent contribution to this scholarly trajectory is the study by Tietaah et al. (2019), which illustrates the enduring relevance of radio for development in colonial and post-colonial polity continuities in Ghana. These diverse positions foreground the present article.

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We make two arguments. The first is that radio's indigenization in colonial Ghana was contested and negotiated by the audiences. It was a contest between majority illiterate audience who did not own radio sets but desired to hear programmes in their own local language and a minority educated group who owned radio but cared little about local content.

The second is that colonial and post-colonial Ghanaian broadcast producers and presenters, as well as public personalities, were instrumental in indigenizing radio by subverting the broadcast of western cultural content for local language programmes.

In terms of methodology, the paper draws from written archival material obtained from the Balme Library of the University of Ghana and the Accra office of the Public Records and Administration and Archival Department (PRAAD). These include internal communication among policy-makers and colonial governors, annual reports on broadcasting in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Radio Ghana publications and government publications. These primary source materials are augmented by a text analysis of audience letters published in Radio Ghana journal and key informant interviews with two women conducted in 2013 and 2014. These interviews are part of a larger research project on Women's radio history in Ghana, in which another sixteen women were interviewed. Pieces of evidence from these sources are discursively analysed within the broader context of the related literature, and in so far as they help illuminate the central claims of the paper articulated above.

## THE BIRTH OF RADIO IN GHANA

At the official launch of radio in colonial Ghana, Gold Coast governor, Sir Arnold Wienholt Hodson on whose initiative radio was introduced to the colony in 1935, promised the people 'a new vista of life'.<sup>1</sup> Listeners would experience the new vista of life by listening to cultural programmes relayed from the BBC such fairy tales and orchestral music on the new radio stations. In a congratulatory message broadcast from the BBC studios as part of the formal inauguration, Secretary of State for the Colonies Sir Malcolm MacDonald underscored the principal objectives of radio as follows:

I should like to see the colonial broadcasting service used not only as an instrument of entertainment and recreation though that must remain the primary use but also as means of giving education both generally and in such important specialised fields as public health and agriculture. I have very much at heart the development to the fullest possible extent in the colonies of this powerful and miraculous instrument for increasing human knowledge, pleasure and well-being.<sup>2</sup>

The pronouncement clearly reflects the Reithian ethos that inspired the appropriation and application of radio by the colonial administration; namely, to provide information, education and entertainment 'for the lumpen masses', as media and cultural historian David Hendy put it (2003: 5). An important caveat, though, is that if radio was meant to function as a tool for social transformation, then it was only natural that broadcasting should accommodate 'vernacular speech' and oral traditions. As Bodomo (1996) rightly points out, social transformation can only be achieved through languages indigenously to the society. Salawu contends also that 'without using the language of the people, development will only be communicated *at* the people; not *to*

1. Hodson Governor Arnold Hodson (1935).
2. Sir Malcolm Mac Donald (1935).

3. PRAAD (Accra) CSO 7/5/98.
4. PRAAD (Accra) CSO 7/5/100 File 156/37.

the people and not *with* the people best suited for conveying any message' (2006: 9).

The first primary target audiences were the European settlers constituting 10 per cent of listeners, followed by the educated African (30 per cent) with the illiterate African trailing (60 per cent). As Willems (2014) has noted, the language in which audiences were imagined in the case of British Africa was English. News from the BBC was translated into four local languages of Twi, Fanti, Ewe and Ga and broadcast as a 15-minute package each day. From time to time, developmental talks on subjects such as health, nutrition and, agriculture, broadcast in English, were translated into those four major languages. Essentially, the local language translations were only intended to educate the people on government policies. However, in addition to regular programmes of concerts by the Gold Coast police in the early days, weekly programmes of African songs, and folk stories were broadcast on Friday nights for the entertainment of illiterate listeners.<sup>3</sup> Archival evidence indicates that the educated Africans, did not care much about local language programmes in the early days. In any event, literacy in the English language enabled them to signpost their exclusive 'comprador bourgeoisies' class status, as Nkrumah (1970) noted. Prah (2001: 10) has argued that the 'tradition of reviling African languages by African elites' affected the development of African languages as these were 'reduced to languages only fit for the lowly, poetry, ritual and village life'. Understandably therefore it was non-literate Africans who complained about the predominantly English content and called for an increase in indigenous programming beyond the small doses of folk music and traditional concerts that were being aired.

The 1936–37 annual report on broadcasting indicated that a local programme committee was set up in 1936 with the aim of improving standard and extending local programmes. The committee's report acknowledged improvement in standard but noted:

[i]t was not found possible to increase their length to any great extent especially in the entertainment field. However, a number of instructional talks was increased to a large extent and were well received. Most of the talks were repeated in the vernacular so that the illiterate as well as the literate African were able to follow them. The subjects were many and varied and included talks on health, Agriculture, Engineering, Scouting and Defence. In addition, the Attorney General and the Secretary for Native Affairs broadcast explanatory talks on the significance of certain ordinances which had been passed.<sup>4</sup>

Subjects such as engineering, scouting and defence may have been of interest and relevance to the elite class who were already mimicking such western lifestyles. The subjects may not have been of particular cultural interest and relevance to the non-literate populations who had called for expanded time for local language content. Failure to address this request continued to bring contentions between broadcast administrators and the non-literate populations.

### **COLONIAL POLICY ON LOCAL LANGUAGE USE**

Overall, British colonial policy on local language use was ambivalent and arbitrary. The use of local languages was defined by ideological imperatives,

primarily the acculturation and empire building objectives of the administration. In 1936, a year after radio debuted in West Africa, a memorandum further underscoring the ideological imperatives stated that radio was to serve as 'an instrument of advance administration [...] for the instruction and education of the more backward sections of the population'.<sup>5</sup> Some accounts of radio history in Africa have assigned diverse explanations to the objective of using radio for advanced administration, one being the promotion of Englishness and elocution (Bloom 2014). According to Bloom (2014: 143), an array of English language programmes on African radio stations served as 'the organisational core of the advanced administrative ethos'. Bloom also saw the English language as a voice of authority and control over the colony through the technology of radio. Explaining the social importance attached to Englishness and elocution, Prah states:

The closer one's usage was to the version of 'his master's voice', the higher one's position and status was in the social order. The principle ensured that many regarded their prosperity in a social and economic sense as requiring the most rapid removal and distancing of one's self from 'native languages' and their use. It was not alright simply to speak English or French correctly, it was even better to speak with the Queen's accent.

(2001: 6)

Being able to speak with the Queen's accent signalled class and qualified someone for radio work, particularly to perform on-air roles (Akrofi-Quarcoo 2015). Testimonies of female radio audiences suggest that most of them, as children, engaged with radio to learn English and to speak like the English. Parents, including the non-literate, encouraged their children to listen to radio in order to learn and speak good English (Akrofi-Quarcoo 2018) and become an *ewuraba* (a lady). As such, some listeners did not tolerate poor quality announcing in English and occasionally, Governor Hodson had to respond to complaints from the Legislative Assembly on the quality of announcing on radio.

The intention to promote English and radio as an elite medium demonstrated colonial ambivalence to indigenizing radio content. Correspondences between broadcast administrators and the governor suggest that considerations for expansion of local content were based on ownership of radio receivers (known as the rediffusion box), listening habits, class and the production cost of local content relative to ownership. In one such correspondence, Superintendent of Broadcasting F.W.K. Byron stated: 'We have already the cream of the populace connected to our system and I do not think that a reduction in fees would cause an increase in subscribers to any great extent'.<sup>6</sup> The intuitive intent to keep radio as an index of social class differentiation is implicit in Byron's disclaimer that the 'cream of the population' was already duly served.

Byron did not hide the colonial administration's commercial intentions for radio as an elitist medium. Responding to demands for increased indigenous content, he claimed that the 'illiterate man' generally went to bed at about 7:00 p.m. and argued that if the 'illiterate African' was given more local programmes, 'everything would have to be in vernacular and this would make things difficult'.<sup>7</sup>

5. PRAAD (Accra.) CSO 7/5/48, Broadcast Relay Service List of Subscribers. The circular was based on recommendations made by a committee on colonial broadcasting chaired by Lord Plymouth. See also Sydney W. Head (1979: 39-47).
6. PRAAD (Accra), CSO 7/5/80, 2 1939.
7. PRAAD (Accra), CSO 7/5/98 Report on Broadcasting Department, 1938/1939.



*Figure 1: Talking drums were used to precede news broadcasts.  
Source: Gold Coast Weekly Review, 2 January 1952.*

Thus, although local languages were not particularly encouraged, primary evidence shows that sounds of traditional instruments such as the talking drums, folk music and the few local voices accounted for the process of indigenization. For example, the opening signature tune of *Station ZOY* at 10:28 hours and 16.13 hours each day in the years before the war, was pealed by talking drums; not necessarily by a drummer, but by any member of the professional staff.

## **SECOND WORLD WAR AND LOCAL LANGUAGE EXPANSION**

A significant landmark in the trajectory of indigenizing radio can be traced to the Second World War in 1939, four years into broadcasting in colonial Ghana. In preparation for the war, 'Vernacular Announcers' were recruited to

translate war news to local audiences. The new employees, mainly teachers, were hired in 1942–43 and assigned to teach basic English words on body parts to local soldiers who were being prepared for the War and as part of the West African Frontier Force.<sup>8</sup> Hausa, a non-indigenous language widely spoken in Islamic communities in northern Ghana and also by soldiers recruited for the war, was added to the four languages (Twi, Ga, Fanti and Ewe) already being broadcast. After the war, the vernacular announcers were absorbed into permanent positions with new designations. However, before the war ended, local language broadcasts, largely news, music and greetings from relatives and friends, numbering about 300 recordings were transported abroad for Ghanaian soldiers in Burma, who wanted to hear news about their wives, children and relatives.

During the war, slots for indigenous content (entertainment programmes) were sometimes taken up for propaganda programmes including war news and the playing of martial music. Sir Alan C.M. Burns had directed services to concentrate more exclusively at delivering propaganda.<sup>9</sup> This was one of the ironies of the times which also demonstrates colonial ambivalence to local language.

Vernacular announcers played an important role in the indigenization processes. Primary evidence suggests that they defined the presentation style of local language radio. John Wilson, an employee of the Gold Coast Information Services, made the following observation at the Silver Jubilee of radio in Ghana that:

The African language broadcasters developed their own means of translating from English. Usually, they digested the English text and distilled its meaning. They then put the text away and built up a fresh broadcast in the African language; usually in dialogue with suitable local illustrations well understood by the listeners. Often, they used proverbs, fables and other indigenous wisdom to make their point.<sup>10</sup>

Wilson's statement on the use of proverbs in content may have been relevant with regard only to discussion and other programme genres but not the news. For, personal testimonies of some vernacular announcers indicate that indigenous broadcasters or vernacular announcers did not enjoy the kind of freedom his statement suggests. In his unpublished memoir, entitled *Ghana Muntie* (Ghana Listen): *From Station ZOY to Ghana Broadcasting Corporation*, Benard Gadzekpo, a vernacular announcer, recounts that translation of news and editorial content by 'vernacular announcers' was policed out of fear that subversive elements would be introduced into such content. This evidence was further supported in a key informant interview with Grace Amarteifio, a programme organizer who was one of the pioneering women in local language radio. Amarteifio said that translated versions of the news from English to local language had to be approved by colonial administrators before broadcast.<sup>11</sup> The practice of policing local language content was common in the processes of indigenizing radio in Africa (Lekgoathi 2011).

## POST SECOND WORLD WAR EXPANSION

After the war, the General Overseas Service programmes from the BBC were augmented with the Gold Coast programmes and both packages were aired at different times of the day. The Gold Coast Broadcasting System, as *Station ZOY* was now called, started to develop original local content. Airtime for local

8. Kobla Senayah (1960). He was a teacher recruited by the Gold Coast Army to teach soldiers who were preparing for the war, short sentences such as head, hand, feet, go, come, shoot, lie down go, march. See *Ghana Radio Review and TV Times*, (1960).
9. Gold Coast Colony Legislative Council Debates Session 1946, Issue No. 1. (21 March 1943), 29.
10. John Wilson's account on indigenous broadcasting style was published in *Ghana Radio Review and TV Times* (1960: 5).
11. Interview with Grace Amarteifio, Pioneer Guest Artist on Radio Ghana, at North Kaneshie on 31 July 2013.

language broadcasts was therefore increased slightly as programmes were designed also in local language targeting women and children in particular. Routinely however, transmission began and ended with Overseas Service programmes.

## **INDEPENDENCE PERIOD AND NKRUMAH'S UNITY AND INDIGENIZATION PROJECT**

After independence from the British rule in 1957, the first post-colonial government of the Convention People's Party (CPP) undertook the task of forging a united country with a common culture and identity. Consequently, the CPP government enlisted radio as one of the primary instruments for mobilizing the newly independent Ghana behind Nkrumah's ambitious plan of social development, national unity, integration and Pan Africanism. The concept of development was forcefully promoted. Local language content was expanded with programmes using different genres in local language. Dr Nkrumah relied on radio to advance his commitment to Africa's political integration and the concept of African Personality. The setting up of External Service Broadcasting in 1961 to broadcast to Africa and beyond provides evidence of radio's role in the decolonization process.

Between 1948 and 1956, the year before independence, the political landscape of Ghana underwent significant change, resulting from the uniting of the northern territories to the main Gold Coast colony. In addition to this, political parties such as the National Liberation Movement, which evolved from the United Gold Coast Convention and the Northern People's Party, merged to contest Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (Apter 2008; Kobo 2010). It must be noted, however, that from the late 1950s radio became more available, as relay stations had been extended to many more regions and districts. It was the expansions in local language broadcasting and the reach of national broadcasting that distinguished the post-independence era from the colonial era. This was also the critical period when radio listening became part of the everyday lives of the people.

The general policy on language use was not to push away English content but to increase indigenous programmes as a way of making radio accessible and available to all Ghanaians. It was also clear that, although there were as many as 79 indigenous languages in Ghana, the number of local languages officially used on radio would remain at six: Akan, Ga, Ewe, Nzima, Hausa and Dagbani. After independence Fanti was merged with Twi and named Akan, as speakers of the two languages have no difficulty understanding one another. Dagbani, a language widely spoken in northern Ghana, and Nzima were the last two additions to the original languages used on radio during the colonial period in regular programming. With the exception of Nzima, a government sponsored language (Bodomo 1996), these local languages are widely spoken by large populations in the country. The use of Nzima may have been because Nkrumah had been involved in the formation of the Nzima Literature Society, founded in 1933. The group aimed to unite educated Nzimas abroad and at home 'in the retrieval of the Nzima language from obscurity and unwrittenness' (Newell 2006: 225).

It appeared members of the public did not worry much about the choice of official languages on radio, as Kwabena Nketia's conversation with Smith (2018) suggests:

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[t]he fact that we had English programmes and then we had vernacular programmes meant that Radio Ghana was trying to reach the whole country. There was a selection of Ghana languages, so we had special programmes in the languages. And maybe some people didn't understand the language from one place, but they understood another, their own or their neighbours'.<sup>12</sup>

As selective as these languages were, given the number of languages spoken in Ghana, what was important was the awareness that radio Ghana created about local languages. Reminiscing about her experiences with radio Kate Bannerman, the other key informant interviewed for this paper, testified that her knowledge of languages other than her own, such as Dagbani, was through the agency of radio.

The most important landmark in Radio Ghana's indigenization was the establishment of a local-language-only station in 1961. Radio One used the six official local languages. Each language was given programme spots on the daily schedules and the local language unit was charged to produce programmes to fill the spots. This arrangement remained until the demise of Radio One (then broadcasting on shortwave), following the introduction of FM technology and regionalization of Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). The establishment of the rural broadcasting department in 1962 as an aspect of Radio One was another milestone in the indigenization of the public service radio. Rural broadcasting was important for two reasons.

Firstly, it targeted rural dwellers, farmers and fishermen, and moved radio into rural homes and communities, as until then broadcasting was largely an urban-based phenomenon. Rural communities could now enjoy long hours of radio, as rural broadcasting transmitted for eight hours daily starting from 15:00 hours to 23:30 hours, when the day's transmission ended.

Secondly, it promoted the participation of rural communities on radio, through UNESCO's rural farm forum model. Rural farmers had the opportunity to speak on radio through playback of recorded conversations with broadcasters and experts in the field. Radio listening clubs in native languages were also established to increase awareness among rural peasants of the new government and its development plans.

In 1960, when Radio Ghana celebrated its silver jubilee, Minister of Information and Broadcasting Kweku Boateng spoke about the nationalizing effects of radio:

For a country to know itself, for true patriotism to arise; for old fashioned ties of allegiance to village and tribe to be replaced by a spirit of devotion to our country [...] a radio service whose national programmes reach the remotest village can be a power for the good of all.<sup>13</sup>

By referring to national programmes, we can assume that the minister was alluding to radio's role in creating a national public of listeners by connecting them to different Ghanaian cultures and practices that resonated with them. The result of these expansions in local language broadcasting was a variety of discussion, drama, variety entertainment and music programmes, including the very popular *Music from the countryside*, which exposed the diversity of Ghanaian music culture. Drama programmes in English, for example *Ghana Theatre*, were, from time to time, translated and performed on radio in all the six local languages. Some of the drama scripts were written in local languages

12. Kwabena Nketia in conversation with Victoria Ellen Smith (2014). In *Obsidian Literature and Arts in the African Diaspora* (2018).

13. Kweku Boateng (1960: 4).

14. Letter by B. Y. Wusu (1960).
15. Letter by S. E. OseiBrekum (1960).

for direct performance and these were influential in bringing the customs and practices of the rich tapestry of Ghanaian cultures to the national space through live on-air performances.

As obtained during colonization, throughout much of the post-independence period radio remained a monopoly of the state and was used as a one-way medium by successive governments to reach people. In the years immediately following independence a new crop of radio actors emerged. Apart from invitations from the station to contribute to local content as guest artists, this new crop of people also engaged with radio on their own. Some of such personalities included acclaimed musicians like Philip Gbeho, Kwabena Nketia, Ephraim Amu and Guy Warren, who later became known as Kofi Ghanaba. Others included Alfred Entsua-Mensah, and Kwesi Baiden, whose names became household names, because they featured regularly on either local language or English language programmes. According to Nketia, 'there was a certain awareness of tradition and culture and the eagerness of people to build new traditions' (Smith 2018).

To better meet the needs of listeners, an audience research unit was established in the early 1960s and feedback obtained through letters enabled greater listener participation. Audiences registered overwhelming support for indigenous programmes and local language usage. Some of the letters demonstrated intolerance for English language content. This letter by B. Y. Wusu from Kumasi, titled 'Don't play records of classical music' is instructive:

Ghanaians are not only proud of but also enjoy guitar band music very much and have very little interest in classical music. It is therefore wrong to allot much more time to the playing of classical music which is foreign to us. As we wish to make Ghana heard and known abroad, it will be a good idea if records of our indigenous music are played by radio Ghana.<sup>14</sup>

Evidently therefore, the impact of radio's indigenizing effort was felt among the populations who were not only supportive of the process but held the station accountable. Radio audiences acted as monitors of content to ensure that local languages were not disadvantaged. Monitoring was detailed and nothing was taken for granted, as the following excerpt of a letter by S. E. Obeng from Brong Ahafo shows:

What happened to the programme *Abasosem*, an adult education programme in Twi? Many people are interested in it especially its signature tune. Could Radio Ghana re-introduce the programme again.<sup>15</sup>

Musical compositions in local languages were used as signature tunes not only for local, but also for English programmes as well. An example is 'Yaa Nom Muntie'. This composition by Kwabena Nketia was the signature tune for *The Singing Net* – a literary broadcast in English, started in 1955, renamed *Voices of Ghana* after independence in 1957.

Paradoxically, while it was common to use an indigenous musical tune for an English programme, the reverse was not particularly encouraged. In order to develop the local language and maintain standard of usage, content contributors were not allowed to mix English with local languages and vice versa. The rule was largely undocumented but strictly adhered to. It must be noted that local voices heard on English programmes added to the indigenizing process



*Figure 2: Kwabena Nketsia, a renowned musicologist, playing the 'Dondo' drums in Radio Ghana's programme, Studio Concert. Source: Radio Ghana and Television Times Review, 1960.*

as voice accents, tone and other voice textures exhibited Ghanaian-ness rather than Englishness.

Quite a number of local language programmes, notably entertainment and literary programmes, aired in the 1960s were adaptations and localizations of English programmes. Examples are programmes targeted at women and children. For example, *Children's Half Hour*, an English programme aired in the early 1950s was localized in terms of name change and content by early 1960. The local broadcasts were in all six languages, with titles reflecting the different languages.

### **MILITARY RULE AND INDIGENOUS BROADCASTING**

Further developments in the indigenization of broadcasting in Ghana were impacted by the country's unstable political environment, starting with the first military coup d'état against the Nkrumah regime in 1966. Under General Ankrah's National Liberation Council (NLC), which was the military successor to the Nkrumah government, broadcast administrators de-prioritized local language dominance when Radio Two was set up as the commercial wing of Radio Ghana. The station broadcast solely in English. Programmes like 'Lets

16. Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) checklist for starting a community radio station.

speak English' and School's Broadcasting (in English) were some of the flagship programmes.

But other military regimes, such as that of Flt. Lt. Rawlings, Head of State and Chairman of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) in 1979 and also Chairman of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) from 1981 to 1993, showed more interest in localizing radio. A policy of creating regional stations was implemented during this period and although this did not mean exclusive use of local languages in those regions, these regional stations created much more space for the use of dominant local languages in all ten regions of Ghana. The setting up of regional stations also encouraged the creation of programmes more specific and suited to the tastes of regional audiences. These stations however connected to the national network for English language news and other programmes.

### **RE-DEMOCRATIZATION, BROADCAST PLURALISM AND INDIGENIZATION**

State monopoly of broadcasting was finally broken in 1994, when the airwaves were liberalized and the first privately-owned commercial station, Joy FM, came on air. It was a hugely popular English language station located in Accra, which could be heard in many other parts of the country (though not nationwide). Significantly, too, media liberalization saw the establishment of rural and community radio stations in towns outside the capital whose reach, while limited, were broadcasting exclusively in local languages. One of the first of such stations was Radio Progress, located in Wa, in the Upper West Region of Ghana, which started broadcasting in late 1996 as a rural station administered by church interests but subsequently was restructured into a secular community station. The significance of Radio Progress is that it enabled the predominant languages of the area – Birifo, Sisale, Walewale and Dagaari – to be broadcast on air for the first time and in so doing extended the number of local languages being broadcast in Ghana.

Other community radio stations established in the late 1990s, notably Radio Ada (1998), which broadcasts in the Ga-Dangme language, and Radio Peace (1999), whose broadcasts are predominantly in Efutu, Awutu and Fanti, have served as the model for the growing numbers of community radio stations in the country. The guiding principles of community radio are predicated on the need to promote and sustain dialogue among the communities in which they operate and the desire to 'give voice to the experiences, concerns and aspirations of the voiceless and marginalized'.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, these radio stations use as many languages indigenous to their communities as possible. Such access to radio broadcasting in languages that people are comfortable with, has made radio an important factor in the lives of communities that felt marginalized in news and programmes on national radio, even when they were in local languages they could understand. Community radio stations typically originate and produce their own programmes, which comprise a range – news, current affairs, cultural programmes, indigenous music and theatre, advice on practical issues, health, education, civic education, children's programmes and vocation/trades/skills programmes, especially in agriculture. Stations with reasonable telephone access have call-in segments as well, which enable better participation.

The biggest boost for local language programming however has come from commercial radio stations such as the Twi language Peace FM stationed

in Accra, which came on air in 1999 and whose commercial success has encouraged many more local commercial language stations not only in Accra but across the country.

In 1993, with Ghana's new democratic dispensation, radio expanded so quickly that, by 2005, the number of stations operating alongside the state radio stations, *GBC Radio One* and *GBC Radio Two*, stood at 57 (Blankson 2005). Growth has continued exponentially and records from Ghana's National Communication Authority (NCA) indicate 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 (National Communications Authority 2018).

According to Yankah (2004), at first the language policies of most of the new private stations were anti-indigenous. It was a period of both 'linguistic liberation' and 'linguistic resistance', as many more radio stations started to broadcast in indigenous languages in resistance to the hegemony of English language broadcasting. The side-lining of English language on air has been largely evident on radio stations in the Ashanti region, specifically in Kumasi, where over 30 FM stations are located. Yankah provides this brief history to explain what he describes as linguistic nationalism and marginalization of English in Ashanti:

Even though it is cosmopolitan, Kumasi has retained its distinctive cultural outlook, not yielding as much to westernisation as the coastal regions of Ghana. Ashanti indeed resisted colonisation by the British until 1900 and was untouched by western education until the 1920s. This has nurtured in the Ashanti a strong sense of nationalistic pride in the Ashanti dialect which is liberally used in official circles despite the official status of English.

(2004: 11)

Geopoll audience surveys in Ghana over the past five years show that the most listened to radio stations in Accra are the Twi radio stations *Peace FM* and *Adom FM*, which are market leaders ahead of leading English language stations such as *Joy FM* and *Citi FM*. The upsurge of local language broadcasting is boosted further because most stations operating outside Accra broadcast either almost exclusively in the local languages of the communities in which they are located or combine local languages with English language broadcasts.

When one factors in also the 71 community radio stations listed by the NCA which broadcast in languages in the diverse communities in which they operate and GBC's regional and rural stations, we can safely conclude that the airwaves in Ghana are dominated by local languages rather than the colonial and official language of the country – English.

Media liberalization and broadcast plurality has not only valorized and revitalized indigenous languages but impacted freedom of speech (Agyekum 2000; Prah 2001; Yankah 2004). Local language broadcasting has been credited for enabling social groups and marginalized communities to participate in democratic culture (Akpojivi and Fosu 2016). Expansion of local language content has therefore fostered inclusiveness, participation and self-expression and more importantly, the creation of new publics for radio (Gunner et al. 2011).

An equally important outcome of the rise of local language broadcasting is how it evokes newer forms of indigenization, notably the use of cultural

devices such as proverbs, drama, idioms, anecdotes, euphemisms, humour, hyperbole, innuendos and ideophones in news presentation (Boachi 2010; Wiafe-Akenten 2015; Opere-Henaku 2016). While the innovation is credited for being more accommodating of indigenous forms of communication and information sharing, the practice has raised public concerns about standards of local language broadcasting and the tendency of broadcasters to perpetuate a culture of news embellishment that infringes on the ethics of journalism.

A recent study among cosmopolitan audiences (Gadzekpo, Yeboah-Banin and Akrofi-Quarcoo 2020) indicates respondents saw nothing wrong with the use of cultural inflections to reflect indigenous style. However, while respondents were comfortable with the use of proverbs, the study found that they were less accommodating of news dramatization. Indeed, 50 per cent of the sampled respondents were dissatisfied with the cultural device.

In response to criticisms of what media professionals and regulators consider as ethical and professional breaches in broadcasting standards by local language presenters, the National Media Commission (NMC) issued guidelines for local language news presentation. The guidelines spell out core journalistic principles underpinning local language broadcasting and signal a recognition of the influential role local language broadcasting now plays in the lives of ordinary Ghanaians and thus the need to better regulate it to safeguard the public interest.

## CONCLUSION

This article set out to document the trajectory of radio indigenization in Ghana, focusing on the social role of local language radio in the daily life of colonial, post-colonial and contemporary audiences. Our primary purpose was to provide historical context to the upsurge of local language radio in Ghana and also to engage with the role played by early and present-day broadcasters and audiences as historical agents in the indigenization processes. Grounded in the cultural imperialism framework, the article has provided evidence that colonial administrators supported an elitist culture by promoting English language broadcasting at the expense of local broadcasting. Indigenization was therefore a contest between a majority illiterate audience, who did not own radio sets but desired to hear programmes in their own local language, and a minority educated group who owned radio but cared little about local content.

By highlighting how they subverted the broadcast of western cultural content in favour of local language programmes, the article has also provided evidence to validate the argument on the centrality of broadcasters and audiences to the indigenization of radio. The post-colonial period under President Nkrumah enhanced greater interest in indigenous content. In the post-colonial period, the indigenization of radio occurred in the margins of the changing political fortunes of the country. Finally, the article has illuminated the role of radio in the colonization and decolonization process and the contestations and negotiations that have characterized radio's indigenization in Ghana.

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