

COGNITIVE RELEVANCE OF TELEVISED NARRATIVES TO THE NDEBELE CHILD IN BULAWAYO











INTRODUCTION

- The main thrust of this paper is on how folktales from SABC television contribute to the cognitive growth and development of Ndebele children in Bulawayo with particular focus on language and culture.
- The main area of scrutiny is on the extent to which Zulu culture and language is relevant to a child who uses Ndebele as first language.
- The paper was motivated by the shifting on from ZBC to SABC television by the majority of households in Bulawayo.

SABC TELEVISION AND ITS POPULARITY IN BULAWAYO

some facts about television and storytelling include the following:

- Television particularly in urban areas has taken the role of socialisation of children away from parents.
- Knowing the limits and advantages about television may be the first steps towards studying television narratives from a critical standpoint (Samaniego and Pascual, 2007).
- A storytelling project in Thailand that was introduced by Wajuppa Tossa in 1992 to revitalise language and culture that was lost through the adoption of western languages and culture yielded positive results.
- Storytelling is important in preserving language and culture (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004; Tossa, 2005; Akpınar and Öztürk, 2009; and Marzolph, 2012).



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- The Popularity of SABC television in BYO was necessitated by the following:
 - The popularity of SABC in Bulawayo is rooted in a variety of historical encounters that fall under political, social, cultural and linguistic factors.
 - The Ndebele still have that identity with South Africa mainly with Zulu
 - Of the Nguni dialects which include Zulu, Xhosa, Southern Ndebele and Northern Ndebele, it is only Northern Ndebele that is spoken outside the Borders of South Africa.
 - The mutual intelligibility that exists between the Zimbabwean Ndebele and Zulu undoubtedly proves that the Ndebele people are the descendents of Zulu



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- In 2001, the Zimbabwean government through the ministry of Information and Publicity introduced the seventy five percent (75%) local content on Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) which entailed that 75% of the programmes to be aired on both television and radio were supposed to be locally produced.
- Mda in Nwokeafor and Langmia (2010) points out that people around the world have expressed an increasing desire to protect their national identity, values, and beliefs through a range of policies one of them being the introduction of the local content in the media.
- Moyo (2013) argues that broadcasting in Zimbabwe has always been a contested terrain since its introduction in the 1930s in the then Rhodesia.



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- According to Mda in Nwokeafor and Langmia (2010) and Rohn (2010), local content is common in the world over especially in America, Europe and Asia but it is mainly there to promote the local products, the local languages and the local cultures of those nations.
- Singham (2007) notes that despite considerable state ownership of media channels and the implementation of local content, many developing countries have not produced much programmes for broadcasting in their channels



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- The Chronicle on 13 November 2013 reported that one of the managers of a national broadcasting station pointed out that most of the locally produced programmes are of poor standard.
- The free to air satellite receivers such as Wiztech, Philibao, Fortech Star, Supertech and Vivid saw almost all households in Bulawayo shunning ZBC television and opting for SABC from 2007 up to date.
- SABC television disconnected its services to the free to air channels in July 2013 but most people resorted to Digital Satellite Television (DStv) so that they could continue accessing SABC television.



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- Results of the interviews with parents showed that the Ndebele people of Bulawayo strongly feel that SABC television is offering high quality programmes as compared to the local ZBC television.
- Mda in Nwokeafor and Langmia (2010) highlights that South Africa came up with a broadcasting policy in 1999 with the aim of fostering local content which had two goals which are social and economic in nature aimed at empowering the South African nationals and redressing the imbalances that were created by the apartheid system.



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- The search for greener pastures also resulted in most Zimbabweans especially from Matabeleland migrating to South Africa. Migration for search of employment dates back to the colonial period when a number of men moved to South Africa in large numbers through an agency called Witwatersrand native Labour Association (WNLA now known as WENELA) to work in the mines (Nyandoro in Guild and Mantu, 2011).
- People in Bulawayo started to associate themselves with South Africa more than they did with Zimbabwe and thus they also bought and installed some satellite receivers. Having a satellite receiver became a sign of prestige.

METHODS, THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND SCOPE

- Forty children from two primary schools;
- Six teachers from two primary schools; and
- Ten adults who are parents.
- (All from Bulawayo were used as research participants.)
- Teachers and adults were interviewed while school children were given some Zulu words which have some orthographic similarity but different meanings and they were asked to give Ndebele equivalents of those words.



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- The cognitive theory which was propounded by Jean Piaget in the 1950s and further elaborated by Noam Chomsky in 1957 guided the study.
- According to Piaget, children develop through a series of four key stages which are the sensorimotor stage, from birth to age two; the preoperational stage, from age two to about age seven; the concrete operational stage, from age seven to eleven; and the formal operational stage, which begins in adolescence and spans into adulthood.
- Focus was on children between 7 and 13 years of age.



Narratives on SABC Television

- The most popular platform on SABC television that children like in Bulawayo is *Yotv Land* where there features their most favorite cartoon folktale film called *UGundi no Mazwi* on SABC1 on a daily basis. *Yotv* runs throughout the week from Sunday to Monday. From Monday to Friday *Yotv* is screened from 0630hrs to 0730hrs. On Saturdays the programme runs from 0730hrs to 0830hrs while on Sundays it runs for one hour thirty minutes from 0730hrs to 0900hrs.
- On Wednesdays there is a special edition where there features *Mvubu and Friends*, a cartoon film of animals where the main character is Hippopotamus. On Sundays there is also a special edition that is mainly devoted to the screening of fury tales.



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- Narratives are an important source of the society's history, morals and values. Samaniego and Pascual (2007) point out that narrative tales provide values and specific identity elements.
- However it becomes questionable whether those narrative tales that are broadcast on SABC television convey the morals and values of a Ndebele child in Bulawayo in the truest sense since they are designed to convey the Zulu morals and values.
- Theodosiadou and Markos (2013) have observed that a considerable body of research argues that television viewing has both a positive and a negative impact on children's learning.



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- As has been pointed out children learn a lot from television since they now spend most of their time on television when they are not at school.

Languages on the Cognitive Development and Growth of Children

- Zulu and Ndebele are perceivably mutually intelligible but however most of the terms between these two languages actually prove to be different in both structure and meaning.
- It came out clearly that children in Bulawayo do not understand some of the Zulu terms that are used in narrating folktales on SABC television.
- It was realized that this is due to semantic variations that exist between same terms that exist in Zulu and Ndebele.

Cultures in Conflict and Cognitive Growth amongst Children

- Through television according to Kapoor (2003:2):
The child develops abilities to go beyond the perceptual appearances, acquire information-processing skills to organize and use what he learns about his environment and develops a deeper understanding of interpersonal situations, which allow him to see the world through multiple perspectives during his stages of cognitive development.

It was realized that the Ndebele children in Bulawayo are exposed to two major institutions of socialization which are the school and the home. At home children are socialized by the parents, their peers and their siblings; and also through media particularly the television.



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- Samaniego and Pascual (2007) argue that folktales that are conveyed through television play a highly relevant role in the construction of young people's identity. However it becomes questionable as to how those folktales that are broadcast on SABC television create the identity of a child in Bulawayo who is Ndebele and not Zulu.
- This implies that if television is taken as an agent of socialization then the Ndebele children in Bulawayo now live with two identities. They become Zulu when they are watching television and then switch back to their Ndebele identity when they are at school and when they engage in formal conversation with their parents, their siblings and their peers.



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- In carrying out this research it also became unclear whether these children are aware that there is a distinction between the culture and language of Zulu and that of Ndebele.
- From this observation it became apparent that the exposure of children to two different but mutually intelligible languages and cultures has negative effects on their cognitive growth especially to those young children who are still not aware that they are viewing foreign media.



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- It also became clear that those children who are below the age of nine years could not notice the difference between cultures and languages. They did not notice that SABC was broadcasting in a foreign language and that the culture being conveyed on SABC was a foreign culture. However those who are nine years and above could notice that Zulu was a foreign language and it carried a foreign culture.
- Theodosiadou and Markos (2013) point out that it has been widely recognized that television viewing has primarily negative effects on very young school going children as far as cognitive and behavioural development is concerned.



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- What was also noticed about folktales that are narrated on SABC television is that some of them are also common in the Ndebele culture what differs is just some of the terms that are used in Zulu and Ndebele languages.
- It was realized also that with common folktales across cultures children watching and listening to these folktales can learn the language in which these folktales are being broadcast in especially where the two languages are mutually intelligible.



Television and Child Socialisation

- In African societies children used to be socialized by members of the extended family particularly grandmothers when it came to socialization through folktales.
- Today the television has taken over the role of grandmothers due to urbanization which favors the nuclear family as opposed to the traditional extended family.



Conclusions and Recommendations

- It is important for local television broadcasters to evaluate their programmes by seeking for opinions of the viewers.
- All languages that are deemed official by the national legal documents should have an equal representation in the programmes that are aired on national television.