



Orthographical Deviation in Hausa Outdoor Messages: A Study of Hausa Billboard Advertising in Kano Metropolis

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Abstract

This study focuses on the analysis of orthographical errors committed on outdoor messages. The study tries to determine whether the billboard advertising copies written in Hausa language found in Kano follow the conventional rules of Hausa orthography. To explore the orthographical errors found in the billboard advertising copies and to suggest the proper ways of writing billboard advertising copies. The data of this study comprises 20 billboard advertising copies written in Hausa language. A purposive sampling was used to select the sample. The researchers collected the data by taking the pictures of the billboards in different locations in the Kano metropolitan. The units of analysis in this study were the conventional rules often violated in 20 selected samples of Hausa billboard advertising messages. Many orthographical deviations were found, which include deviation from phonetic and phonological rules, spelling rules, merger and separation rules, capitalization, and punctuation rules. The paper recommends that all the companies involved in advertisement should use people who knows the language and its orthographical rules in order to avoid such deviations.

Keywords: Advertisement, Orthography, Billboard, Deviation, Kano

Introduction

The issue of bridging between linguistic performance and communicative competence is enshrined in the conventionality of language use. As a convention, the orthographic system of a given language is the result of certain, at times, controversial principles and/or rules. Most written languages develop codified systems of spelling and/or writing known as “orthography” (Franklin, 2014). Then, what is orthography? The term orthography originated from the Greek word which means ‘correct way of writing’ (Franklin, 2014). According to Microsoft Encarta Dictionaries (2009) orthography refers to the study of established correct spelling; or how letters of alphabet of a particular language occur sequentially in words. In a narrower sense, it refers to the way letters and diacritic symbols represent the sounds of a language in spelling.

Different researchers defined advertising in different ways, for instance Asemah (2010) defined advertising as any form of communication that is paid for, identified by a sponsor, directed at a target audience through the mass media like radio, television, newspaper, magazine and billboard with the aim of creating awareness about goods and services. To Kotler (2007) advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, good or services by an identified sponsor. Richards and Curran (2002) see Advertising as the strategy through which information about the product and service is delivered to the customers (Anusree and Lynch, 1995) and it also recognizes unspoken needs and wants in existing and potential customers (Galbraith, 1958). Main objective of advertiser is that they want to reach towards their existing and potential customers and make available information about the products and the services, attitude and buying behavior of the customers (Abideen and Saleem, 2011; Adelaar et al., 2003; Ayanwale et al., 2005).

The aim of this study is to find out the orthographical deviation in the billboard advertising copies written in Hausa language in Kano metropolis and to suggest the way forward for the writers of Hausa billboard advertising messages on how to avoid orthographical errors when writing advertisement messages.

Significance of the Study

Advertising messages play significant roles to persuade potential consumers to patronize a product or service. The advertisers usually employ advertising strategies to attract attention, create interest, stimulate desire and promote action using a clear and simple language that the general public can easily understand (Baran, 2009). However, Hausa being the major spoken language in Northern Nigeria and of course in Kano state, is therefore imperative for the outdoor advertising practitioners in the region to create advertising messages in Hausa language. The practitioners believed that using the familiar language would enable the target audience to understand the communication messages from the billboards. Unfortunately, most of the outdoor advertising messages written in Hausa language found in Kano metropolis were not written correctly as they deviate from the conventional Hausa orthography in so many ways. Probably as a result of the engagement of unprofessional translators to translate the existing English outdoor advertising copies to Hausa language. With regard to misuse of language, Asobele (1984) pointed out that if communication language is not correct, then the motive behind the communication is defeated because what is said is not what is meant. The main purpose of this study is to analyze the contents of Hausa billboard advertising messages found in Kano metropolitan with a view to identifying the orthographical deviation in these messages.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. Do the billboard advertising copies written in Hausa language found in Kano follow the conventional rules of Hausa orthography?
- ii. What are the orthographical errors found in the billboard advertising copies written in Hausa language in Kano metropolitan?
- iii. Does the orthographical deviation found in the billboard advertising copies written in Hausa language found in Kano distort the initial meaning of the communication?

Related Literature Review

Historical Development of Hausa Orthography

The Hausa writing (rubitun boko) originated from the Roman Alphabets and is currently being used by the mass media at national and international level as well as in the educational institutions. Rubitun Boko was first introduced in Northern Nigeria by the British government few years before the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914. Initially the Arabic was the major written language of Islamic West Africa including northern Nigeria until the early twentieth century when the colonial government of Northern Nigeria tried to get rid of the use of Arabic letters (Ajami) and subsequently replaced it with the current Roman Alphabets in Hausa version (Dobronravine and Philips 2004:86). Today there is a great development in Hausa written literatures as many books of poems, drama and prose were written in Hausa Rubitun Boko (Aminu, 2017). Similarly, Galadima 2004 is of the view that, the Hausa orthography flourished as a result of the efforts made by the British administration agencies such as the Translation Bureau (1929) and subsequently the Hausa Language Board (1955-1966).

The problematic Hausa orthographic system and its standardization have come to being resolved through various stages beginning from 1912 as it was triggered by Mr. Hans Vischer (alias Dan Hausa) (see Hassan 2011:193). According to Newman (2000:726) and Jaggat (2001:698) the system is in use since 1930's in schools, prints, signposts, advertising boards, magazines and major newspapers as well as in local and international radio and TV broadcasting. Therefore, there are certain principled constraints for which Hausa system of orthography was laid. The following are the main contentions for scholastic considerations:

a) Phonetic/phonological principles: -That is, those principles that focus on the agreed standardized phonetic transcriptions. For instance /hw, lw, sw/ and /hy/ are not recognized among the standard Hausa phonetic transcriptions; likewise in Hausa alphabet 'p' and 'ch' are only accepted, especially in certain non-native Hausa words like Panshekara, Pantami, Potaskum etc., and in some proper name of places like Bauchi, Dapchi, Bichi etc.

b) Spoken/written principles:- That is, some situations where what is said differs entirely in written form but both are semantically the same. For example, *iya zuwa, inai muku addu'a, ca.* (spoken); *yana zuwa, ina yi maku addu'a, cewa* (written), meaning 'he is coming', 'I pray for you' and 'that'.

c) Spelling rules:- These are preoccupied with how correctly certain words should be written, especially geminate digraphs and genitive linkers as well as the so-called online-chat Hausa writing style. E.g. *gasasshe* not *gasashshe* 'roasted' and *rigar nan* not *rigan nan* 'this shirt', *lafiya* not *lapiya*, 'health' *kaza* not *kaxa* 'hen', *sai* not *se* 'then' etc.

d) Merger and separation rules:- These are very critical areas of Hausa orthographic system and are so problematic that if not carefully handled the deviation/error leads to the change in meaning of the word(s) in question.

e) Non-native Hausa rules:- These centered on what is pejoratively termed as *gwaranci*. This is a kind of interference that causes grammatical absurdity of word order and difficulty in order to pronounce certain letters correctly and gender incongruity by non-native speakers. For example, *baki* for *baki* may mean ‘mouth’ instead of ‘black’; *wayana* instead of *wayata* ‘my phone’ etc;

f) Capitalization and punctuation principles:- Under these principles there are certain mechanical errors such as writing small letters instead of capital letters as in proper names of people and places; names of days of the week, months of the year etc., as well as a correct use of punctuation marks such as full stop, comma, colon, semi colon etc.

Despite the series of standardization and harmonization exercises one could realize with dismay how authorities and companies make use of poor, incorrect Hausa orthography on billboards and other communication messages. (See Galandanci 1977:160-7; Hassan 2011: 192-202; Aminu 2017:348-354; Rabi’u 2011:1-10).

Orthographical Error

Orthographical errors according to Franklin (2014) refers to the cognitive errors consisting of the substitution of a deviant spelling for a correct one when the writer simply doesn’t know the correct spelling of a particular word or forgot it or misconceived it. Orthographical errors also deals with deviation of all conventions for writing a language including the rules and standards for spelling, hyphenation, punctuation, capitalization and word breaks. Franklin (2014) identified two important characteristic features of orthographic errors which include:

- i. They generally result in a string which is phonologically identical or very similar to the correct strings.
- ii. Proper names, infrequent words (uncommon words) and borrowed words are particularly prone to orthographic errors.

People usually make orthographical errors during both written and verbal communication in the following levels: lexical, syntactic, semantic, and contextual. With regard to Hausa orthography scholars have extensively discussed the phenomenon in books, conferences, meeting proceedings and guidelines/legislation as well as articles such as (Vischer 1912), Literature Bureau (1933), Bargery (1934), the Hausa Language Board (1955), ABU Conference (1970), BUK Conference (1972), Jinju (1980), Newman (2000), Bunza (2002), Abubakar et al (2010) orthography. This study is aimed at showcasing the orthographical deviation in Hausa billboard advertising messages and suggests the ways to avoid orthographical errors.

Billboard Advertisement

Billboard is one of the successful and effective outdoor advertisements which can easily attract the attention of the large, anonymous and heterogeneous audience. It is worth noting that billboard is any advertising or display board used as a medium of disseminating public enlightenment, information and business. Billboard advertisement usually erected by the road sides or attached to a building or wall or as inscriptional on vehicles. Through billboard advertisement, advertisers can catch the attention of the customers to their product or service at particular location. Lichtenthal, Yadav and Donthu, (2004) as cited in Iqbal & Batool (2016) said that, through outdoor advertisement people come across with different outdoor advertising messages not knowing that they are targeting by the advertisers. Billboards advertising message remain among the leading forms of advertisements in the Nigeria and by extension in northern Nigeria. Today most big multinational companies such as Tecno, Infinix, Coca Cola, Malta, etc have invested huge money on outdoor advertising with a view to maintaining their brand

names and remain on top for several years. Cat Chien (2011) & Taylor et al. (2003) outlined some of the benefits and functions of Billboards as follows:

- A. Billboard advertising messages deliver and circulate information to the target customers.
- B. Billboard advertising messages arouse thoughts and opinion about the products or the services offered.
- C. Billboard advertising messages increase understanding about relevant product or service offered.
- D. Billboards communicate appropriate information at reasonable cost.
- E. Billboards draw attention of the customer towards the product and service that advertiser or the marketers are offering.
- F. Billboards attack the customers that advertisers really want to target it.
- G. Advertisers can place the billboards where they think it is easy for them to deliver their product to the customers.
- H. Billboards attract existing as well as potential customers (Taylor, Franke and Bang, 2006).
- i. Enhancing sales (Taylor *et al.* 2006)

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on two theories – the Information processing theory and the theory of deviation – since it is dealing with both outdoor messages and orthographical deviations.

Information Processing Theory

The Information processing theory according to Anaeto and Anaetor (2010) as cited by Asemah (2011:205) was founded by Williams J. McGrire in 1968. This theory holds that the attitude change in individual could be achieved through the following six key stages:

- A. Persuasive message must be communicated: This is to say, the communicator must endeavor to pass across messages that will influence the receiver. The major aim of every communication is to persuade the receiver, thus attitude change can only occur when the source send out a persuasive message.
- B. The receiver will attend to the message: When a message is persuasive it draws the attention of receiver. The audience must expose themselves to the message. The individual must receive a persuasive message or else the attitude change is not possible.
- C. The receiver will comprehend the message: The individual has to fully understand the message so as to know why he needs to accept it. The receiver tries to rationalize the message to provide evidence why the message will be accepted or rejected. This is why the clarity is important when disseminating information so that the receiver will understand what is being passed to him.
- D. The receiver will yield to and is convinced by the by the argument presented.
- E. The new adopted position is retained and the desire behavior takes place.

The application of Information processing theory in this study is justifiable due to the fact that, for any billboard advertising message to be accepted by the audiences it must meet the information processing theory's criteria. In other words, the communication message must be persuasive, coherent, clear and understandable so that the target audiences of the advertising message will be fully convinced to patronize the product, idea or service.

Theory of Deviation

The theory of deviation emerged from the work of Geoffrey Leach in 1966 and inspired many researchers in linguistics, literatures and advertisement (Garba, 2017:276). Applying the concept of deviation to poetry Leech (1969) sees the linguistic deviation as a creative kind of language in which a writer creates a new language deviated from the norms of the literary convention or every day speech. According to Leech (1969) as cited in (Garba, 2017:276) it is very general principle of artistic communication that a work of art in some ways deviates from the norms which, as members of society, we have learnt to expect in the medium used. Leech (1969) equally introduces eight types of linguistics deviation in poetry which include; lexical deviation, phonological deviation, graphological deviation, Semantic deviation, dialectical deviation, deviation of register and deviation of historical period. At the beginning, Leach used the theory of deviation to examine only the poetic language in Western linguistic field, since linguistic deviation goes beyond the poetic language, as it is also be found in non-poetic language including the media. Hence, Leech's theory was adopted to analyze linguistics features and language of advertising as used by many scholars such as Budiharto (2016) who studied the language deviations in a popular novel and Ren and Yu (2013) who jointly examined the language deviation in English advertising. Applying the theory of deviation this study is focusing on orthographical deviations that are found in billboard outdoor advertising messages written in Hausa language. Garba (2017:278) is of the view that the graphological deviation deals with the orthography of the text and is closely related to the writer's disregard of the rules of writing. This deviation, however, occurs when a writer writes without any recourse to convention of the language in which he or she writes. Therefore the areas of consideration in this study encompass all instances in which the Hausa orthography and other conventional rules are violated by the writers of Hausa outdoor messages. The conventional rules include; phonetic/phonological rules, spelling rules, merger and separation rules, capitalization and punctuation rules.

Methodology

The study employed the content analysis to investigate the orthographical deviation in the billboard advertising copies written in Hausa language in Kano metropolis. The content analysis is the systematic method of analyzing message content which is appropriate when one's aim is to examine the manifest content of communication message (Umar &Dango 2020). Stacks and Hocking (1992) defined content analysis as a research method or a measurement technique that involves the systematic study of content of communication messages. Asemah et al, (2012) viewed content analysis as an analysis based on the manifest content of the mass media message. The sample of the study data consists of all billboard advertising messages written in Hausa language found in Kano metropolis. To this end, a purposive sampling was used to select 20 billboard advertising copies written in Hausa language. The researchers collected the data by taking the pictures of the billboards in different location in the Kano metropolitan. The units of analysis in this study are the conventional rules often violated in 20 selected samples of Hausa billboard advertising messages. They include phonetic and phonological rules, spelling rules, merger and separation rules, capitalization, and punctuation rules. A coding sheet was equally developed based on the content category to record all deviation and errors made in the selected Hausa billboard messages.

Data presentation and analysis

Data used for the study

Table 1. Hausa Billboard Advertisement and their Sponsored Company/Organization

S/No	Advertisements	Companies/Organizations
1	Kiyaye Musabaka da marasa lafiya (beware of shaking hands with sick ones)	Aspira Nigeria Ltd.
2	Ku maido da sachet 50 na kowanne nau'rohin garin Onga (return 50 sachets of any kind of Onga seasoning)	Onga Seasoning
3	Kula da tsaftar jiki data iyali (take care of body and family hygiene)	Kano state taskforce on Covid-19
4	Taliyar Cherie zabin iyali na (Cherie noodles my family choice)	Cherie Noodle
5	Ku yada sahihin labari wanda jami'an lafiya suka tabbatar dashi . (Spread authentic news which is confirmed by the health personnel)	Kano State Government (Ukaid)
6	Ke Da Babu Irinki (you that have none of your kind)	Indomie Noodle
7	Taliyar Crown, ba ta chabewa . Dai-dan farashi (Crown spaghetti is never being watery cooked. Affordable price)	Crown Spaghetti
8	Rufe hanci da baki idan fita ya zama dole (Cover your nose and mouth, if you ought to go out)	Kano state taskforce on Covid-19
9	Saba sabulu, cuta hanna yenka (Scrub soap, wash your hands)	Aspira Nigeria Ltd.
10	Kyakkyawan haske ba karni (Good sparkling without odour)	Viva Plus Detergent
11	Karin haske, kamshimaiarmashi (Extra bright, fresh fragrance)	Good Mama Powder Detergent
12	Babu kudin ruwa (No interest)	Taj Bank
13	Kyakkyawan haske ba karni (Stunning brightnessn without odour)	Viva Powder Detergent
14	Yanayin sanyi. Sanya tufafi mai dumi da Custard mai zafi (Cold weather, wear sweater and use warm custard)	Checkers Custard
15	Mace maitafiya da zamani (A women with modern outlook)	Dawavita (Golden Penny)
16	Sabon Galan (New gallon)	Ammasco International Ltd
17	Ingantacciyar fasahar kariya daga wari (ultra odour protect)	Klin detergent
18	Yana dahuwa a cikin minti 15 kacal (it gets cooked within 15 minutes only)	Dawavita, Golden Penny Foods
19	Kare kanka da Masoyanka daga Coronavirus (prevent yourself and loved ones from Coronavirus)	Aspira Nigeria Ltd.
20	Cononavirus gaskiyace (Coronavirus is real!)	Kano state taskforce on Covid-19

Table 2. Shows the percentage of Hausa Billboard Advertising Copies with and without orthographical errors.

Billboard Advertising Copies	Frequency	Percentage
Billboard advertising copies with orthographical errors	17	85 %
Billboard advertising copies without orthographical errors	3	15 %
Total	20	100

Findings and Discussions

The raw data for this study was discussed based on content analysis with a view to identifying the places where the orthographical deviations are manifest. The units of the analysis are as follows:

Phonological Deviation

Under phonological deviation we observed that in (7) there is an orthographic violation of standard phonetic representation of /tʃ/ which is written as a single letter 'c' not as digraphs 'ch' as in word **chabewa**. The word should be written as **cabewa** which is acceptable instead of **chabewa**. Phonetically speaking, in (2) 'sachet' as well as in (19) and (20) the use of word 'Coronavirus' are a typically complete adoption, or rather direct borrowing from English instead of using adaptation i.e. to adjust phonetic alphabets to meet Hausa phonotactics. Hence **Kwaronabairas** or **Koronabairas** or using hybrid form like **Cutarkwarona/korona**. Ideally,

should the language have such a word in its lexicon; so having an equivalent word in a target language is even much better, hence the term *mashako*.

Non-native Interference

Here, what is observed regarding orthographic deviation is the issue of hook letters *ɓ*, *ɗ*, and *ƙ*, instead of *b*, *d*, and *k*. For instance, from the data in (4) **zabi** instead of *zabi* ‘choice’; in (5) **yada** instead of *yada* ‘spread’; in (7) **chabewa** instead of *cabewa* ‘being watery cooked’; in (9) **saba** instead of *saba* ‘scrub’, (10) **karni** instead of *karni* ‘rank’; in (11) **kari(n)** and **kamshi** instead of *kari(n)* ‘extra’ and *kamshi* ‘fragrance’ (12) **kudi(n)** instead of *kudi(n)* ‘money’ (13) **karni** instead of *karni* ‘odor’ and (14) **dumi** instead of *dumi* ‘warmth’. The interference of non-native letters over Hausa hooked letters is the most rampant orthographic deviation that are common on outdoor messages and most of the time this hinders readily accessible information. Often times, if not because of the context in which the words are used, native speakers may assume different meaning of some words that happen to be found in the language in such form, most especially when they are said to have the same tone pattern without the hook. For example, in (9) *saba* ‘be frequent’; in (10, 13) *karni* ‘dermis’; and in (12) *kudi* ‘a piece of red cloth with black frilly pattern’. In (8) there is what is termed ‘gender incongruity’, that is where **ya** is used instead of *ta* which will logically be in a grammatical concord with *fita*.

Spelling Mistake

There are also some spelling mistakes here and there. One can imagine with such spelling mistakes in (1) **musabaka** instead of *musabaha* ‘handshaking’; in (2) **nau’rohin** instead of *nau’o’in* ‘kinds of’ and in (9) **cuta** instead of *cuda*.

Merger and Separation Rules

The most widespread orthographic deviation in Hausa writing is merger and separation problems. Users find it difficult sometimes to write Hausa free from such errors. The complication with these aspects of Hausa orthography is that, where users supposed to merge letters or words to being one word, they separate them and vice vicar. From the data above it is noticed that there are number of places on the billboards where the violation of merger and separation rules occurred. With regard to merger see, for example, (4) **iyalina** instead of *iyalina* ‘my family’; (7) **dai-dan** instead of *daidan* ‘equal’; and (9) **hannayenka** instead of *hannayenka* ‘your hands’. And as for separation consider, for instance, there are mergers in (3) **data** instead of *da ta*; in (5) **dashi** instead of *da shi*; in (6) **dababu** instead of *da babu*.

The study’s findings reveals that most of the billboard advertising copies written in Hausa language found in Kano do not follow the conventional rules of Hausa orthography which sometimes distort the initial meaning of the communication messages.

Conclusion

This paper studies orthographical deviation on Hausa advertisements on billboard within Kano city. The study found many errors are committed which termed as orthographical deviations. The orthographical deviations found from the data include deviation from phonetic and phonological rules, spelling rules, merger and separation rules, capitalization, and punctuation rules. However, this is not the final one; future study is to be carried out to find other deviations, courses and how to minimize or eradicate them.

Recommendations

The paper gives the following recommendations:

- 1- Since the purpose of advertisement is to communicate effectively to the target audiences, there is need for government to provide a board which should take care of all issues that relate to advertisements.
- 2- To achieve the (1) above, there is need for Hausa and communication scholars to play their role by engaging government and companies on how the companies advertising their products should use the correct form of Hausa language.
- 3- Outdoor Advertising companies should employ those know the language very well or give them to edit any copy means for advertisement.
- 4- From time-to-time, the companies should be organizing workshops for those writing the advertisement.

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