

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL (NON-) ACCOMMODATION IN YORÙBÁ LANGUAGE BILLBOARDS IN IBADAN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of orthographical errors, incorrect tonal marks, and missing diacritics in Yorùbá-language billboard advertisements in South-western Nigeria. Framed by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), it analyses how such linguistic inaccuracies diverge from audience competence, affecting comprehension and brand perception. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected via content analysis of flawed billboards in Ibadan and focus group discussions with native Yorùbá speakers. Findings reveal that these prevalent errors cause semantic ambiguity, significantly hindering clear communication and negatively impacting perceived brand professionalism and cultural authenticity. The research underscores the necessity for linguistic precision in Yorùbá marketing communications, providing a framework for advertisers and regulators to enhance message effectiveness and cultural resonance.

Keywords: Yorùbá Orthography, Billboard Communication, Cultural (Non-) accommodation, Linguistic Inaccuracies, Cultural (Non-) accommodation, **meta-communicative**, Yorùbá Language.

Introduction

The strategic use of indigenous languages in marketing has become a prominent tool for brands seeking to establish cultural resonance and connect with local audiences on a deeper level (Owoeye, 2023). In Southwestern Nigeria, this trend is visibly manifested in the proliferation of billboard advertisements designed in the Yorùbá language. Yorùbá, a tonal language with a complex system of diacritics, relies on precise orthography -including correct tonal marks, sub-dots under vowels, and accurate word segmentation—to convey unambiguous meaning (Bamgbose, 2020; Akinlabi & Liberman, 2021). As noted by Owoeye (2022), the absence or misuse of these critical marks in outdoor advertising is not merely a minor graphical error; rather, it constitutes a fundamental linguistic flaw. Such inaccuracies are capable of altering the semantic value of words entirely, leading to lexical ambiguity and a potential breakdown in communication between the brand and the consumer (Adegoju & Oyeboade, 2023; Ládípò, 2019)

However, while advertisers invest in Yorùbá billboards to build authenticity and trust, a critical concern is examining what portion of these billboards exhibit accurate compliance with the linguistic principles of the language. Such concern will help prevent potentially distortion of the intended message that could lead to semantic ambiguity and miscommunication. From a theoretical standpoint, such linguistic (in) accuracies are rooted in Giles' (2016) Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 2016) as a form of divergence from the audience's linguistic competence, which may negatively influence comprehension and brand perception.

Therefore, this study investigates the implications of these orthographical errors in Yorùbá language billboard advertising on the target audience. The research specifically examines how such linguistic inaccuracies affect comprehension rates, perceived brand credibility, and the

overall cultural authenticity of the advertisement. By identifying and analyzing this gap between marketing intent and linguistic execution, this study aims to underscore the critical need for orthographical precision in enhancing the effectiveness and cultural resonance of Yorùbá marketing communications.

Statement of the Problem

The proliferation of Yorùbá-language billboard advertisements in Southwestern Nigeria represents a strategic shift by brands to forge deeper cultural connections (Owoeye, 2022). However, this potential is undermined by pervasive orthographical inaccuracies, including misspellings, incorrect tonal marks, missing diacritics, and erroneous word segmentation (Adegoju & Oyebode, 2023). These are critical errors in Yorùbá, a language where diacritics and tones are phonemic and fundamental to semantic meaning (Akinlabi & Liberman, 2021).

This presents a threefold problem. First, a clear gap exists between standardised Yorùbá orthography (Bamgbose, 2020) and its erratic application in the commercial advertising sphere, creating a public landscape filled with erroneous linguistic exemplars. Second, the empirical impact on the audience is not fully understood. While research indicates typographical errors damage brand credibility (Sánchez & Pérez, 2021), and in indigenous marketing such errors may signal cultural disrespect (Mbaeze & Ani, 2022), few studies specifically examine how orthographical flaws in a tone-based language like Yorùbá affect comprehension, brand perception, and attitude formation. Third, a theoretical gap exists in explaining the processes triggered. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) frames linguistic adjustments as convergent or divergent acts that significantly influence social distance (Dragojevic, Gasiorek, & Giles, 2025). In modern marketing, precise linguistic execution functions as a convergent act that reduces cognitive friction and builds brand trust (Palomba, 2024). Conversely,

orthographic inaccuracies constitute a divergent act—a form of non-accommodation—that signals a lack of cultural respect or professional competence, leading to diminished source credibility (Lasisi et al., 2023; Knowledge Words Publications, 2024). Despite these advancements, the specific application of CAT to written orthographical errors in outdoor marketing, particularly within multilingual emerging markets, remains a critical area for empirical investigation.

Consequently, this study systematically investigates the implications of these orthographical errors in Yoruba language billboards in Ibadan metropolis. It addresses these gaps by providing empirical evidence on how such linguistic flaws hinder communication and damage brand image, framed as acts of linguistic divergence. It ultimately examines how these inaccuracies impact audience comprehension and perception, and what this means for the efficacy and cultural integrity of indigenous language marketing in South Western Nigeria.

Research Objectives

1. To identify and categorize the predominant types of linguistic inaccuracies in Yorùbá language billboard advertisements in Ibadan.
2. To measure the impact of identified linguistic inaccuracies on audience comprehension, perceived brand credibility, and cultural authenticity.
3. To explain the audience's perceptions and attitudes through the lens of Communication Accommodation Theory, analysing how inaccuracies constitute linguistic (non-) accommodation.

Research Questions

1. Which orthographical errors (incorrect tonal marks, spelling and missing diacritics) are common in the selected Yorùbá billboard advertisements?

2. To what extent do linguistic inaccuracies in Yorùbá billboards affect native speakers' comprehension rates, perception of brand professionalism, and sense of the advertisement's cultural authenticity?
3. How does Communication Accommodation Theory explain the relationship between linguistic inaccuracies (as divergence) and the formation of negative audience attitudes towards the advertisement and brand?

Review of Related Literature

The Linguistics of the Yorùbá Language: A Foundation in Orthography and Diacritics

The efficacy of written communication is predicated on a consistently applied orthographic system, a requirement of notable complexity for Yorùbá, a major language spoken by over 50 million people (Bamgbose, 2020). Establishing the foundational principles of standard Yorùbá orthography, which elucidates the phonemic necessity of its diacritics and tones, provides the essential linguistic benchmark for measuring contemporary inaccuracies in billboard advertising. The standard Yorùbá alphabet is a Latin-based script of 25 letters, defined by critical diacritical marks. It contains consonants, including one with a sub-dot (*ɓ*), and a vowel inventory bifurcated into five plain vowels (a, e, i, o, u) and their counterparts with sub-dots (*ẹ*, *ọ*). This distinction is phonemic, differentiating otherwise homographic words. For instance, *sh* represents a voiceless palato-alveolar fricative distinct from *s*, while *ẹ* and *ọ* are produced with a closer vowel quality (Akinlabi & Liberman, 2021). Beyond the sub-dot, the orthography employs tonal marks: an acute accent for high tone, a grave accent for low tone, with an unmarked vowel typically indicating mid-tone. This creates a finely-tuned system where every segment and suprasegmental mark carries functional load (Bamgbose, 2020).

This precision is necessary because Yorùbá is a tone language where these marks are phonemic constituents, not optional embellishments. As Akinlabi and Liberman (2021) state, "in tone languages, pitch is a property of the lexical item, and changing the pitch can change the lexical meaning completely" (p. 45). This phonemic role makes orthography the primary determinant of semantic meaning, underscored by examples where the lexeme *ígbá* can signify "calabash", *ígbá* "time", or *ìgbá* "garden egg" depending entirely on its tonal pattern (Adegoju & Oyebode, 2023). Similarly, the difference between *òkò* (husband) and *òkò* (farm) hinges solely on the sub-dot. Consequently, the omission or misuse of these marks constitutes a fundamental linguistic flaw that eviscerates semantic integrity, leading directly to the message distortion identified as a core problem in commercial advertising (Owoeye, 2022).

The journey to this standardized orthography provides critical context. Initial 19th-century codification by missionaries like Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther was inconsistent, but 20th-century efforts by Nigerian linguists and the Yoruba Orthography Committee formalized the alphabet and standardized diacritics (Bamgbose, 2020; Olatèjú, 2005). While schools establish a clear linguistic benchmark, the public sphere often exhibits a persistence of inconsistencies. Analyzing this gap, Bello (2021) examines public signs in Lagos to demonstrate how billboards misrepresent the community's linguistic standards. Such discrepancies reflect a failure in knowledge transfer, transforming the linguistic landscape into a frontier where documented standards are used to identify and measure public inaccuracies

The study of linguistic landscapes (LL) is concerned with the "visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs" (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). Public signage is a powerful discursive site where language ideologies and social identities are negotiated (Shohamy &

Gorter, 2009). Billboard advertising constitutes a pivotal component, functioning as a potent commercial text that shapes public language use and attitudes. As top-down, commercially motivated signs, billboards reveal corporate calculations regarding which languages possess symbolic capital. Their efficacy is linked to unique media constraints - brief exposure time, necessity for immediate comprehension, and reliance on visual-linguistic synergy - which demand exceptional clarity (Tan, 2009; Bhargava & Donthu, 1999). Any linguistic ambiguity is thus magnified, potentially undermining persuasive intent and perceived credibility.

Consequently, strategic language choice in advertising is a central concern. Globally, research identifies a tension between using a global lingua franca like English for prestige and leveraging local languages for authenticity (Kelly-Holmes, 2005). In Nigeria, a nation of extreme linguistic diversity, this dynamic is complex. Studies indicate a strategic deployment of major indigenous languages and Nigerian Pidgin English in billboards to target mass audiences and evoke cultural identity and trust (Opeibi, 2009; Awonusi, 2004). The motivation is to resonate with local sensibilities and leverage the affective power of the "mother tongue."

However, this strategy is frequently marred by practical challenges. A primary issue is reliance on non-native copywriters lacking requisite sociolinguistic competence, leading to grammatical interference and unnatural phrasing (Opeibi, 2009). This is often compounded by a lack of rigorous proofreading for local language content, resulting in persistent orthographic errors that can render campaigns ineffective (Bello, 2021). Such infelicities are often perceived not as simple mistakes, but as a sign of disrespect (Piller, 2017). This is particularly damaging as the perceived quality of marketing communications is a direct antecedent to brand authenticity (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2020). Consequently, errors can trigger a backlash, negating intended localization benefits (Krishna & Ahluwalia,

2022). When a brand fails to align with cultural nuances (De Mooij, 2019), it provides inauthenticity cues that consumers use to form negative judgments (Beverland & Farrelly, 2019). Therefore, linguistic infelicities can counterproductively signal a lack of genuine commitment, negating the very authenticity the localized approach sought to achieve.

Audience Perception and Information Processing in Advertising

The efficacy of any written advertisement is contingent upon the audience's seamless processing of its message, a process fundamentally governed by theories of reading comprehension and cognitive load. Effective comprehension occurs when a reader can efficiently decode textual symbols and integrate them with prior knowledge to construct meaning (Kintsch, 1998). However, linguistic inaccuracies disrupt this automated process, forcing the audience to engage in conscious "problem-solving" to decipher the intended message. This remedial decoding imposes an extraneous cognitive load, diverting limited mental resources away from deeper semantic processing and brand engagement towards resolving basic textual ambiguities (Sweller, 2011). In the context of a tone language like Yorùbá, where a single omitted diacritic can alter lexical meaning, the reader must expend significant cognitive effort to disambiguate words, a process that significantly increases the risk of misinterpretation or even total non-comprehension (Eberhard et al., 2020). This cognitive strain is antithetical to the goals of advertising, which relies on immediate and effortless comprehension to facilitate positive brand associations.

Beyond the immediate comprehension barrier, the presence of linguistic errors exerts a powerful influence on the audience's perception of the brand itself. Synthesis of literature from marketing and communication establishes a robust link between executional elements, such as typographical errors, and judgments of brand credibility and professionalism. Theories such as Integrated Information Response Model

suggests that audiences use all available information in an ad, including its executional cues, to form inferences about the advertiser (Mick, 1992). Consequently, an error-ridden advertisement is rarely perceived as a minor oversight but is, instead interpreted as a meta-communicative signal of a company's carelessness, low competence, and general untrustworthiness (Wang & Chen, 2019). This erosion of perceived quality and professionalism can directly undermine the persuasive intent of the advertisement, as consumers are less likely to place their trust in a brand that appears to neglect the fundamental details of its public communication.

Furthermore, when advertising employs a local language like Yorùbá, the discourse moves beyond mere information transfer into the complex realm of cultural authenticity and attitude formation. The strategic use of a community's language is often intended to forge a connection and signal cultural respect, leveraging what is perceived as an authentic identity (Kelly-Holmes, 2005). However, the inaccurate use of that language can have the opposite effect, being interpreted as a superficial, tokenistic, or even exploitative attempt to connect with a target market without investing the necessary effort to do so correctly. This perceived inauthenticity, as Puntoni et al. (2011) posits, can trigger a negative backlash, influencing audience attitudes not merely towards the specific advertisement but towards the brand itself, which may be accused of cultural insensitivity.

The Nigerian Socio-Linguistic Context

The Nigerian sociolinguistic context is fundamentally shaped by a complex multilingual landscape, encompassing over 500 languages where the official status of English coexists with the national prominence of major indigenous languages like Hausa, Igbo, and Yorùbá (Eberhard et al., 2020). This linguistic hierarchy, a legacy of colonial history, ensures the continued dominance of English as the primary language of bureaucracy, formal education, and corporate enterprise, according it significant symbolic capital

and an association with modernity and prestige (Adegbija, 2004). Consequently, while indigenous languages serve as vital markers of ethnic and cultural identity, English often remains the default language for national communication. This linguistic ecology provides a critical framework for understanding the pragmatic challenges in advertising. Marketers are recently incentivized to use a language like Yorùbá to forge cultural connection and target mass audiences in the South-western region, yet the execution is frequently imperfect. This imperfection often stems from the educational and professional background of copywriters who, though potentially native speakers of Yorùbá, are typically more literate and professionally fluent in English. This often leads to challenges in the accurate application of Yorùbá's standardized orthography, including its essential diacritics and tonal marks (Bello, 2021; Opeibi, 2009).

An examination of Yorùbá in the broader media and public sphere offers a pertinent baseline for assessing the prevalence and nature of these orthographical issues. The language maintains a vibrant and dynamic presence in certain media domains. Particularly in private Yorùbá-language radio and television broadcasting, it is used extensively for news, political commentary, drama, and musical programming, often in a predominantly oral format bypassing written standardization (Salawu, 2006). Similarly, a limited number of Yorùbá newspapers and digital news platforms strive to promote its written use. However, scholarly analysis indicates that the orthographical challenges observed in advertising are not an isolated phenomenon but rather symptomatic of a systemic issue across public texts. Research into these media reveals widespread inconsistencies in tone-marking, vowel articulation, and word segmentation, pointing to a broader societal challenge in transitioning from oral fluency to consistent standardized written literacy (Ládípò, 2019). Therefore, while orthographical inaccuracies are common across various platforms, the commercial billboard constitutes a uniquely potent genre within the

linguistic landscape. Its static, public, and mass-disseminated nature, coupled with the commercial imperative for clarity and positive brand perception, as noted by Blommaert, (2013), magnifies the possible consequences of these errors, transforming a common literacy issue into a significant problem of marketing communication and cultural representation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), a sociolinguistic framework explaining the social consequences of linguistic adjustments (Giles, 1973; Giles & Powesland, 1975). CAT posits that individuals strategically use language to manage social distance, primarily through convergence (adapting style towards an interlocutor to gain approval or clarity) or divergence (accentuating linguistic differences to express identity or disapproval).

While originating from spoken dialogue, CAT's principles apply to text-based communication (Walther, 2019). In marketing, an advertisement is a one-sided communicative act where a brand accommodates its audience. Using Yorùbá is a macro-level convergence, aligning with the audience's cultural identity to foster trust (Adegoju, 2022). Conversely, orthographical accuracy in diacritics, tones, and segmentation constitutes a critical micro-level accommodative signal.

Following CAT, strategic convergence predicts positive outcomes like enhanced comprehension, increased brand credibility, and stronger cultural authenticity (Giles, 2016). Conversely, unintended divergence via linguistic inaccuracies triggers negative social judgments (Dragojevic et al., 2016). This study hypothesizes such divergence may lead to semantic ambiguity, hindered comprehension, and perceptions of the brand as unprofessional, inauthentic, and culturally disrespectful. Thus, CAT provides the explanatory mechanism framing orthographical errors not as

mere technical mistakes, but as potent social cues that may undermine communicative efficacy.

Methodology

This qualitative study employed a combination of qualitative content analysis and focus group discussion, design to comprehensively address the research problem, allowing for the simultaneous collection and integration of data to provide a critical understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The research was conducted in Ibadan, an ancient Yoruba city, and major Yorùbá-speaking community in South-western Nigeria, providing a rich context for recruiting a relevant participant pool and documenting authentic billboard advertisements.

The research unfolded in two primary phases. The first phase involved a qualitative content analysis of Yorùbá language billboards within the Ibadan metropolis. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify and photograph billboards that exhibited the linguistic inaccuracies under investigation. Purposive sampling was used to deliberately choose billboards writing in Yoruba language or a blend of Yoruba and English with or without intonation. This created a corpus of materials for analysis. Each billboard was analyzed to document and categorize the specific types of orthographical errors present, such as misspellings, missing diacritics, incorrect tonal marks, and erroneous word segmentation, following established protocols for linguistic landscape analysis (Neuendorf, 2017).

The second phase focused on data collection from the target audience. Using a purposive sampling technique, 40 native Yorùbá speakers were recruited from diverse demographic backgrounds (age, gender, education) in Ibadan. As a qualitative study utilising FGD as method, the sampling is both purposive and convenience. five FGD sessions involved eight participants each, who are literate in Yoruba language and were willing participated in the study. The researchers stopped at five FGD session when

saturation had started in the session and the fifth session was used to ascertain the saturation. Five focus group discussion (FGD) sessions were conducted to collect data on the opinions of the target audience of the billboards. During the FGD sessions, participants were shown selected images of the flawed billboards. The FGD protocol was designed to elicit thematic opinions yielding qualitative data. It included direct questions to measure comprehension rates, to gauge perceived brand credibility and professionalism, and to explore nuanced interpretations, attitudes, and perceptions of cultural authenticity. This approach allowed for data interpolation where FGD participants' comments about specific confusing errors were used to explain the implication of linguistic errors found through content analysis on strategic impact of a billboard message.

The qualitative data from FGD were transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis alongside the content analysis data, underpinned by the principles of CAT, to identify recurring patterns in how linguistic inaccuracies influenced perception, and were interpreted as accommodative or non-accommodative acts (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The two streams of data were then merged to provide a coherent explanation of how orthographical flaws impact semantics and audience perception. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and anonymity of participants, were strictly adhered to throughout the research process.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Guided by the three research questions, the analysis adopts a thematic approach, interpreting qualitative content analysis data from selected flawed billboards and FGD participants' narratives through the lens of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and contextualizing the findings within the established literature. The analysis followed thematic patterns tailored to the objective of the study.

Analysis of Prevalent Orthographical Errors

Selected Yoruba language billboards were content analysed qualitatively to examine the presence of orthographical errors and how they impaired the intended strategic meanings.



Plate 1: Wrong tonal and punctuation marks

The Yoruba word, *ànfààní* in that billboard is supposed to be written as *ànfààní*, with a low tonal mark on the letter *n*. The omission of that tonal mark changes the pronunciation and meaning to that of a non-existing word in Yoruba language. That omission further suggests that the letter *n* has the middle tonal mark which is usually represented by no mark in Yoruba language. With this, meaning is lost causing divergence (Giles, 1973; Giles & Powesland, 1975) with the audience and affecting the aim of the message. Subsequently, the focus group data reveals that participants, consistently identified specific types of orthographical errors that align with the complexities of the Yorùbá language as outlined by Bamgbose (2020), and Akinlabi & Liberman (2021). This misuse and omission of diacritics and lexical errors were frequently noted by the FGD participants identifying incorrect spelling and inappropriate word choices in the sampled billboards.

For instance, in reference to a billboard on the coronation of *Olubada* (The traditional title for the king of Ibadan), which exhibits an error of parallelism and chorenance, Respondent 3, FGD 1 said:

"won se wa ko 'E yi owu awi ti oluwa lase'... oye ki won so pe a ku oriire ti Oba titun. Ki won sese waa ko 'Eyi owu a wi, ti olorun lase'... ohun ti won ko o correct."
('Why did they write 'E yi owu a wi ti oluwa lase'... it would have been better to say 'congratulations on the king's coronation' then, 'Eyin oun awi ti olorun lase'... but what they wrote is not correct.")

Furthermore, Plate 2 is another flawed billboard that exhibits diacritics errors.



Plate 2: Missing tonal marks on Yoruba word amidst English headline

This indicates a failure to use the correct sub-dots, leading to a semantically awkward message. The wrongly spelt word, "pon" in the Trophy billboard, suggesting that the missing sub-dot in the context creates ambiguity. Respondent 4, FGD 2, critiqued: "pon yen kò n se Gbogbo eyan ló yẹ" ("That

word 'pon' is not clear to everyone"). This highlights issues with vowel sound choice that may stem from a lack of deep orthographical competence, as noted by Opeibi (2009). This is similar to what is found in the Regal Gin billboard using archaic orthography.



Plate 3: Spelling and lack of commitment to linguistic accommodation

Spelling and code-mixing errors were noted in Plate 3 above. The use of archaic spelling of *jaiye* instead of *jaye* as well as mixing English with Yoruba was considered by the FGD participants as major flaws deviating from deliberate intention to use the language as a source of appeal to the local audience. Respondent 1, FGD 1 criticized the phrase "*Jaiye ori e*" in the excerpt below:

'Jaiye Ori e' ki n se bi won se ma spell Jaye ni yen... eniti ko ba mo Yoruba Ka lee pe ipekupe." ('Jaiye Ori e' is not how to spell 'Jaye'... someone who is not versed in Yoruba literacy will pronounce it wrongly.)

This points to a failure in adhering to standard modern Yoruba orthography, exhibiting linguistic non-accommodation (Giles, 1973; Giles & Powesland, 1975). Furthermore, Respondent 2, FGD 1 questioned the use of the English word "Solution" in an otherwise Yorùbá message of a political billboard ("Solution ti de si ipinle Oyo"), asking: "Kilode ti won o fi wa Yoruba 'Solution' ki won fi kun?" (Why didn't they use the Yoruba version of the word 'Solution'?). Although the researchers consider the choice of the English

word which is the brand name of the political candidate appropriate in that context, the excerpt from FGD data reveals that the code-mixing could constitute semantic and psychological noise to larger portion of the audience (Bello, 2021). Similarly, omission of tonal marks as identified in the data such as acute (´) or grave (`) accents was also indicated by the respondents' struggles with comprehension and their need to disambiguate words based on context implicitly confirm the problem of tonal mark omission. This resonates the finding of Akinlabi and Liberman (2021) that tone is phonemic, and its absence forces cognitive "problem-solving" (Sweller, 2011) on the audience. The data confirms that the common orthographical errors in Yorùbá billboards are precisely those that literature identifies as most critical: inappropriate lexical choices, incorrect spelling, and code-mixing. These, according to Opeibi (2009), are not random errors but systematic failures to implement the standardized orthography, often stemming from a reliance on copywriters without sufficient expertise.

Impact of Linguistic Inaccuracies on Comprehension, Professionalism, and Authenticity

The FGD participants' responses provide rich, experiential evidence of the tangible consequences of the errors found in the sampled billboards, affecting all three domains outlined in the second research question. Firstly, impaired comprehension and increased cognitive load were observed during the FGD sessions. The most immediate effect reported was on comprehension. Participants described a conscious, effortful disambiguation process that aligns with Sweller's (2011) concept of cognitive load:

It (orthographical errors) breaks the flow of reading. Instead of just getting the message, my brain has to stop and solve a puzzle. By the time I figured it out, I'd have forgotten the brand's name. (Respondent 2, FGD 1) Ti ami ori re ko ba correct, message ti brand yen fe deliver, ko nii ri achieve. (If the tonal marks are not correct, the message the brand wants to deliver will not be achieved.) (Respondent 3, FGD 1).

This "problem-solving" mode is antithetical to the brief-exposure and immediate-comprehension requirement of billboard advertising as noted by Tan (2009). The errors impose an "extraneous cognitive load," hindering the seamless construction of meaning (Kintsch, 1998).

The flawed billboards also exhibit erosion of perceived brand professionalism and credibility. The data strongly supports the link between executional cues and brand perception underscored by scholars (Mick, 1992; Wang & Chen, 2019). Errors were overwhelmingly interpreted by FGD respondents as a sign of carelessness by the brand:

If they can't get simple things right in the advertisement, how can I trust them to get the important things right in their product or service? It makes them look sloppy." (Respondent 2, FGD 1).

"I feel they are not perfect." (Respondent 3, FGD 2).

"It makes them look unprofessional." (Respondent 6, FGD 2)

This audience perception directly undermines the brand's credibility (ethos as it's regarded by Aristotle) considered as a persuasive tool. The advertisement, intended to build trust, instead functions as a meta-communicative signal of the company's low competence. In addition to the foregoing, the billboards examined undermined cultural authenticity and triggering offense among the target audience. Perhaps the most profound impact was on the perception of cultural authenticity. The choice to use Yorùbá was recognized as a positive step, but its inaccurate execution was often seen as tokenistic and disrespectful among the audience, echoing Piller's (2017) argument considering the errors as a sign of disrespect to the audience. Respondents reveal:

It feels like they are just using our language to sell to us without truly understanding or valuing it. It's insulting. (Respondent 2, FGD 1).

Gege bi omo Yoruba, inu mi o nii dun... nigbati won fe deliver nkan ni Yoruba sugbon ko wa authentic... (As a Yoruba person, it makes me sad... when the message they want to deliver is not authentic...) (Respondent 4, FGD 1).

It makes me feel disrespected. (Respondent 6, FGD 2).

This highlights the critical link between linguistic quality and perceived authenticity as reported by Dwivedi and McDonald (2020). The intended convergence through language choice is nullified by the divergence in its execution, leading to a backlash that negates the intended benefits of localization (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2022). The study findings also demonstrate a clear causal chain from orthographical inaccuracies to increased cognitive load and comprehension difficulties to negative inferences about brand professionalism and to a perception of cultural inauthenticity and disrespect. This confirms that linguistic errors have significant and multi-layered negative consequences that extend far beyond simple misreading.

Explaining Audience Attitudes through Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication Accommodation Theory provides a powerful explanatory framework for the participants' reactions. The data clearly illustrates the theoretical sequence where linguistic divergence triggers negative social judgments (Dragojevic et al., 2016). Initial convergence via language choice was observed across the FGD respondents. Participants acknowledged that the mere use of Yorùbá was initially appealing. This aligns with CAT's premise that choosing a local language is a "macro-level act of convergence," signalling an effort to build rapport and shared identity (Adegoju, 2022). This was expressed in the FGD as follows:

I am always happy to see our language on big billboards. It makes me feel seen and valued as a Yorùbá person. (Respondent 7, FGD 1). It is encouraging that our language is also improving. (Respondent 4, FGD 2)

However, this initial positive feeling was consistently undermined by divergence through orthographical inaccuracies exhibited by the errors,

which participants interpreted as a form of linguistic divergence. The inaccuracies were not seen as neutral mistakes but as social cues indicating a lack of effort and respect on the part of the concerned brand. For instance, respondents said:

I feel like it's an (*sic*) half attempt... if they know that they don't understand Yoruba why attempt it at all; they were now like rubbish our own culture, our language to us. (Respondent 1, FGD 1). To me they are just doing it anyhow because if they want to do it genuinely they suppose (*sic*) to try all their possible best that all they do is good. (Respondent 8, FGD 2)

This "half attempt" is a perfect metaphor for failed accommodation. The brand signals a desire to converge (language choice) but simultaneously diverges through a lack of linguistic precision and care. This automatically result in audience formation of negative attitudes as a consequence of the unintended divergence. Following CAT's propositions, the perceived unintended divergence directly led to the formation of negative attitudes. The data shows that participants made attributions about the brand's character and intentions. Respondents react:

It makes me not want to buy from them. If they don't respect my language, why should I respect their brand? (Respondent 2, FGD 1). O maa je ibanuje okan fun mi nitori wipe won ba ede Yoruba je osi le je ki n ma sun mo company rara. (It makes me feel sad because they have bastardised Yoruba language, and it can make me not to patronise the company at all) (Respondent 3, FGD 1).

This is a direct expression of the negative social judgment predicted by CAT. The linguistic divergence fosters intergroup distinctiveness, making the audience feel their cultural identity has been marginalized. In contrast, the study found some positive outcomes of successful cultural convergence in the sampled billboards. The participants' reactions to the prospect of accurate Yorùbá further reinforce CAT's principles. They stated that correct usage would lead to positive feelings and brand attachment.

O maa je iwuri fun mi lopolopo (It (Using Yoruba language in billboards) would be a great pride for me) (Respondent 1, FGD 1). O ma mu inun mi dun wipe won lo ede Yoruba dada (It would make me happy that they used Yoruba language correctly) (Respondent 4, FGD 1). I will feel extra ordinary happy (Respondent 4, FGD 2).

This desired outcome is precisely the "social approval and enhanced clarity" that CAT predicts from successful convergence (Giles, 2016). The data robustly supports the application of CAT is strategic message construction. The theory successfully moves the analysis beyond cataloguing errors to explaining the socio-psychological mechanism behind the audience's reaction. The sequence is clear: Intended Convergence (Yorùbá language choice) → Actual Divergence (orthographical inaccuracies) → Negative Audience Attitudes (perceived disrespect, inauthenticity, and brand aversion). This message processing sequence, frames the errors not as technical glitches, but as powerful social signals of non-accommodation.

Conclusions

This qualitative analysis, synthesizing content analysis and focus group data with theory and literature, conclusively demonstrates that orthographical inaccuracies in Yorùbá billboard advertising are a critical failure in marketing communication. The errors identified—inappropriate lexical choices, incorrect spelling, diacritics omission and code-mixing—are precisely those that the standardized orthography deems essential for meaning. The impact of these errors, as articulated by native speakers who participated in the FGD, is severe and multi-faceted. They disrupt comprehension, damage perceptions of brand professionalism, and, most significantly, violate the sense of cultural authenticity that the use of Yorùbá was intended to foster.

Finally, Communication Accommodation Theory provides the explanatory power for these findings. The errors are interpreted by the audience as a strategic divergence, a sign of disrespect and a lack of genuine effort to connect. This perceived non-accommodation triggers a negative evaluative response, turning a potential tool for building brand loyalty into a source of brand aversion.

The implications are clear for advertisers, aligning with the participants' direct advice that experts should always be engaged for indigenous advert message construction. Investing in native-speaking linguistic experts and rigorous proofreading is not a minor editorial task but a core component of brand strategy. It is essential for achieving genuine accommodation, avoiding the negative social judgments that arise from linguistic divergence, and ultimately, for ensuring that the brand's communicative convergence is perceived as authentic and respectful.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to guide advertisers, marketers, and policymakers.

To avert the significant communicative and reputational damage documented in this study, a fundamental shift in the approach to Yorùbá-language advertising is imperative. The findings compel a move beyond treating Yorùbá as a mere stylistic element and towards recognizing its deployment as a specialized professional practice requiring expert involvement. Consequently, it is recommended that

1. Brands and their advertising agencies institutionalize the involvement of certified Yorùbá creatives and cultural consultants at every stage of the creative process, from conceptualization and copywriting to final proofreading. This practice would directly address the root cause of the prevalent orthographical and lexical errors identified, ensuring that diacritics are correctly applied, word

choices are contextually and culturally appropriate, and the pitfalls of awkward code-mixing are avoided.

2. Furthermore, it is crucial that brands implement a multi-layered quality assurance protocol specifically for indigenous language content. This protocol must be as rigorous, if not more so, as that applied to English-language campaigns. Such a process would involve mandatory back-translation checks and pre-publication reviews by a panel of native speakers who are also literate in the standard orthography. This serves as a critical safeguard against the "half-hearted attempts" that audiences readily detect, thereby protecting the brand from the severe perceptual consequences of linguistic divergence.
3. Ultimately, advertisers must reconceptualise their strategy: the accurate and authentic use of Yorùbá is not a peripheral cost but a core strategic investment in brand-culture alignment. By heeding the participants' advice to "give the work to someone who knows the job well," brands can transform their communications from a source of cultural offense into a genuine point of connection, fostering the deep-seated loyalty and positive brand associations that effective marketing seeks to achieve.

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