Abstract

This paper presents a largely ignored perspective of the language of the press in journalism and media studies: whether audiences really understand what they read or listen to in the press. In Ghana and most other emerging democracies in Africa, the press continues to be regarded as a relevant institution that has a crucial role to play in the quest for democratic consolidation as enshrined in the functional normative understanding of the role of the press in society (Voltmer ed. 2011). The press is expected to provide information to society for informed decisions and participation in the socio-political ‘public sphere’ (Nyamnjoh 2005), a platform, the same press is expected to engender. This paper investigates the issue of linguistic accessibility as it relates to exclusion or inclusion of audiences in the message of English newspapers in Ghana. Knowledge of the extent to which newspapers in Ghana are readable and understandable to their readers, I argue, is relevant to assess the effectiveness of the press in reaching its target and impacting on society. Therefore, as an ongoing research project at the University of Leeds and using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, this paper investigates the extent to which the newspapers use complex language in presenting their message.

The study used a corpus-based linguistic approach as one of the methods to investigate some aspects of the linguistic structure of the language of some prominent newspapers in Ghana.
This paper presents findings of the computational analysis. The presentation will specifically focus on challenges involved in assessing and describing the level of complexity of the language based on the results.