

BLOG APPROACH TO LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGE BLOGS

By

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Abstract

Blogs and blogging, which are now common in contemporary media culture, have changed the way people communicate. There are an estimated 521 languages that have been spoken in Nigeria and some of these are now extinct, while others may be on their way to extinction without some drastic intervention. This study attempts to understand the ways in which blogging can promote language acquisition, training and other information dissemination purposes by examining indigenous language content on Nigerian language blogs. The SECI (socialization, externalization, combination and internalization) model and functional-notional approach to language acquisition provided theoretical framework for this paper. Within a purposive sample selection of 5 Nigerian language blogs, a content analysis was conducted to demonstrate the language spread, visibility, interactivity and magnitude of Nigerian language contents on these blogs. Gathering of data was based on a three-month blog posts and audience comments from selected blogs. Results provide insights into the role of blogs in diffusing language acquisition in an online environment. Findings show that most of Nigerian language contents on the blogs represent only the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba) and Pidgin English and the blogs lack interactivity and multimedia content. The study concludes that the spread of Nigerian language content on blogs could be improved if a significant number of bloggers representing various languages integrate a basic language literacy multimedia component on their blogs to attract more speakers of those languages and prevent further extinction of some Nigerian languages.

Keywords: Content analysis, blog, blogging, language, acquisition, Nigeria

Background of the Study

Language is an important part of human communication and existence. According to Lemetyinen (2012), “Language is a cognition that truly makes us human.” The possibility of an imminent or actual a language loss or decline challenges the one thing that makes us truly human. Although Blench (2012) notes that West African languages were not amongst those facing high levels as a result of extinction compared to those of Eastern Africa and Southern Africa, interest in language endangerment has become a highly significant topic in recent times. Gordon (2005) and Wikipedia (2016) report that of the 521 languages that have been spoken in Nigeria, 510 are living languages, two are second language without mother-tongue speakers, and nine are extinct. This is worrisome. Studies have shown a relatively easy mastery of language complex skill in younger children (Rowland & Noble, 2010). However, language acquisition in adult L2 learners of a second or new language has proved more challenging (Lenneberg, 1964). As a result, various techniques have been employed to enhance language acquisition of the L2 category. Interestingly, digital technologies have increased options of language acquisition. One of such possibilities is the application of the Web 2.0 tools such as blogs to enhance language acquisition. In less than two

decades of its emergence, blogs have reshaped communication, content creation, and information sharing. The City of Kitchener, (2010) posits that this development,

... has created what some experts call the most significant and fundamental shift in world culture since the Industrial Revolution, the automobile and television. It has transformed online monologues into engaging dialogues, social media platforms enable millions of people worldwide to connect and communicate in new and innovative ways—to be content creators, critics, reviewers, and filmmakers.

In addition, Blench (2012) contends that besides traditional media of communication, new media have become more important and significant in the promotion or otherwise of indigenous languages. According to him, with new media a lot has changed in the technology of language dissemination, as stakeholders must consider the Internet and SMS text messaging. Blogs have provided a unique platform for any kind of information sharing through content and comment on the content of others. Language Weblogs or blogs are gaining in popularity (Herring et al. 2005). Bloggers are increasingly using blogs to promote the learning of languages in ways that may encourage language acquisition.

Although many people use blogs for information dissemination and content sharing, studies that have analysed the content of Nigerian language blogs in pertinent scholarly articles are scarce. This is because extant research has focused on foreign languages. In other words, the use of blogs to push the language agenda in Nigeria is still in its infancy. This article seeks to help fill the knowledge gap in this field. The researchers believe that Nigerian language content on blogs deserves research attention because the ubiquity and interactive nature of blogs make them veritable platforms to host language acquisition contents. Against this backdrop, this paper analyses the contents of Nigerian language blogs and possible future uses of these blogs for L1 and L2 Nigerian language learners. The results of the content analysis carried out may form the basis for relevant effect studies and future empirical validation.

Statement of the Problem

The usefulness of the blog approach to learning languages and for language acquisition could stand out with the rising threat of some languages extinction. Hence, as technologies grow to enhance access to information, linguists are beginning to see the possibility of using language information made possible by blogging to encourage teaching and learning of language, especially among computer literate members of society. The questions are: Have blogs helped encourage indigenous language usage among L1 and L2 audience in Nigeria? What are the possibilities of using language blogs to stop the possibility of some Nigerian languages going into extinction? To what extent do blogging in Nigerian languages extend to some other languages outside the three major languages (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo)? These are the questions this research set out to answer.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to find and content-analyse manifest Nigerian language content on Nigerian blogs. Hence, the study was aimed at

- (1) finding out how many Nigerian languages are covered on indigenous blogs;
- (2) ascertaining the frequency of posts update on Nigerian Languages blogs;

- (3) identifying the magnitude and prominence of contents among Nigerian languages blogs;
- (4) finding out the level of interactivity of Nigerian languages blogs.

Research Questions

- RQ 1 How many Nigerian languages are covered on indigenous blogs?
- RQ 2 What is the frequency of posts update on Nigerian Languages blogs?
- RQ 3 What is the magnitude and prominence of contents among Nigerian languages blogs?
- RQ 4 What is the level of interactivity of Nigerian languages blogs?

Literature Review

Blogosphere: An Overview

Bolter (2004) notes that new digital media is a cultural and economic phenomenon; no wonder many academic disciplines are turning their attention to these forms, at least in part to claim a share in the resources that it is generating. This position compels us to rethink the relationship between language acquisition and new media tool such as blogs. Blogs which is the short for web log are Web sites is an online journal or diary that displays frequently updated entries or posts that usually appear in reverse chronological order and can focus on one narrow subject or a whole range of subjects (City of Kitchener, 2010; Jackson-Brown, 2013; Wang, 2011). Blog is also a place of opinions, research, and creation in which one or more authors publish over time contents as texts, images, media objects and data, sorted in reverse chronological order (Le Meur & Beauvais, as cited in Anggia & Sensuse, 2013). According to Jackson-Brown (2013), recent technologies enabled blogs to integrate the “comments” function that allows readers to send reactions to the blog posts and track links to a blog post. Anggia and Sensuse (2013) note that the introduction of blogs as a part of Web 2.0 tools promotes an appropriate way to manage knowledge. Blog, is characterised by the production, communication, sharing and dissemination of information involving more users and generating an infinite interactivity (Sbihi, El Kadiri, & Aknin). That being the case, blogs can greatly facilitate in real time the education, information transfer and skills acquisition of users, for instance—Nigerian languages.

Jackson-Brown (2013) writes that one of the earliest and most widely referenced publications about blogs is written by Blood (2002) wherein she identifies three broad types of blogs (short-form journals, notebooks and filters). Luzón (as cited in Jackson-Brown (2013), while analysing 15 academic blogs from different disciplines for a study on use of links in these blogs, identified four main types of academic blogs namely: political, research sharing for feedback or collaboration, conversing or networking about academic life, networking, and hybrid of all or some of the above. In her study, Luzón (2009) found links are used for scholarly communication purposes such as building communities, development intellectual identity, and facilitate conversation that leads to greater collaboration. Herring et al. (2005) conducted extensive research on blogging using both content and discourse analyses methods. In their 2005 study they conducted a quantitative analysis of 203 randomly selected blogs and found that blogging:

...along with other emergent genres expressed through interactive Web technologies — occupies a new position in the Internet genre ecology. Specifically, it forms a de facto bridge between multimedia HTML documents and text-based

computer-mediated communication, blurring the traditional distinction between these two dominant Internet paradigms, and potentially contributing to its future breakdown.

Studies have shown that blogs provide a platform for Web-based collaboration for academics and others (Dennen & Pahnyak 2008). Some other studies on the use of blogs for educational purposes are: application of blog for university students' information literacy education (W. Li, & T. Wang, 2010); improving knowledge management for educational blog; Improving teachers' knowledge management with blog platform (Yang 2008); Blog for teacher implicit knowledge sharing model construction (Wang, 2011) and Analyzing the benefits of blog for enhancing knowledge management among bloggers (Anggia & Sensuse 2013).

In spite of the challenge of applying content analysis to Web-based content, several studies have been conducted in this regard. For example, Singh and Baack (2004) used content analysis to study Web Site adaptation between U.S. and Mexican Web sites. Herring, Scheidt et al. (2004, 2005) employed content analysis as a means to characterise English language blogs as a genre in a random sample of 203 blogs selected from the blogs-tracking site blogs in 2003. They found that the average English-language blog had a single author, focused on personal events in the bloggers life, contained relatively few links and received few comments, Papaacharissi (2004) conducted a quantitative content analysis of a random sample of 260 blogs hosted by Blogger.com and found similar results. In a sequel study, Herring, Kouper et al. (2004) found that ordinary bloggers were female nearly as often as male and young (teens or young adults) as often as adult. However, gender and age of bloggers varied according to blog type. Adult males wrote almost all the filter blogs and young females wrote the largest proportion of personal journal (diary blogs).

Recent research suggests that there may be also cultural differences in blogging practices. In their content analysis of 358 polish-language blogs drawn from the blog hosting service blog.pl, Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmokl and Sapp (2006) found that Polish bloggers are almost 75% female and younger than English language bloggers, they are often elementary and mid-school ages. Similarly, Scheidt (2006) contend that Trammell and her colleagues found that the themes of young Polish female bloggers' posts tend to focus on the emotional impact of the life events that they are portraying. Analysing websites by human coders is often challenging, mainly because many websites consist of many pages, as a result, Bauer and Scharl (2000) introduced WebAnalyzer in their study to automatically gather and analyse parameters such as a site's HTML code and information about the site features, including the number of images and external links. None of these studies to the researchers' knowledge has addressed the use of blogs in language acquisition and learning within the Nigerian blogosphere, hence, the need for this study.

Preferences in Media Language Content

Arguably, in spite of the over 500 Nigerian languages (Blench, 2012, Nwagbara 2013), only a fraction are often represented in the media. Supporting this contention, Nwagbara (2013) observes that,

There are more than 250 distinct ethnic groups and languages in Nigeria. Only a few of these languages are used in news presentation in the broadcast media. Such 'privileged' languages are those spoken by bigger ethnic groups. English, the official language of the country also dominates in media presentations. This trend

has led to the marginalization of the languages spoken by smaller ethnic groups in the country.

Corroborating this position, Blench (2012) writes that,

The use of second languages for communication and in administration was well established in pre-colonial Nigeria and has further expanded, as the diversity of migrations has required the development of *linguae francae*. The most notable languages used in this way are English, Pidgin, Hausa, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Yoruba, Igbo and Efik. Some of these are expanding, such as Hausa and Yoruba and others in decline, notably Kanuri and Efik.

The question is: how are bloggers using blogs to promote the over 500 Nigerian languages? This and more, are some questions this paper hopes to provide answers. This paper incorporates content analysis of Nigerian blog perspective by analysing a selection of 5 Nigerian language blogs to determine how it can aid language learning and acquisition of especially L2 learners.

Theoretical Framework

This paper anchors on the SECI model and functional-notional language acquisition theory. Wikipedia (2016) defined language acquisition as the process by which humans acquire the capacity to perceive, produce, and use words to understand and communicate. It involves the picking up of various syntax, phonetics, and an extensive vocabulary. Behaviourists, like B.F. Skinner Piaget and Noam Chomsky argued that language acquisition and development are learned behaviours. They believe that over repeated exposures, especially for L1 language learners may learn to associate an object with a sound or word for that object.

Popularised by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983), the Functional-Notional Approach of language acquisition or teaching which is categorised under the communicative approach posits that language acquisition is organised in a language syllabus. The emphasis here is on breaking down the global concept of language into units of analysis in terms of communicative situations in which they are used. According to them, notions are meaning elements that may be expressed through nouns, pronouns, verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, adjectives or adverbs. The use of particular notions depends on three major factors: (a) the functions (b) the elements in the situation, and (c) the topic being discussed.

SECI model from knowledge evolution is a model from socialization, externalization, internalization and combination as shown in Figure 1.

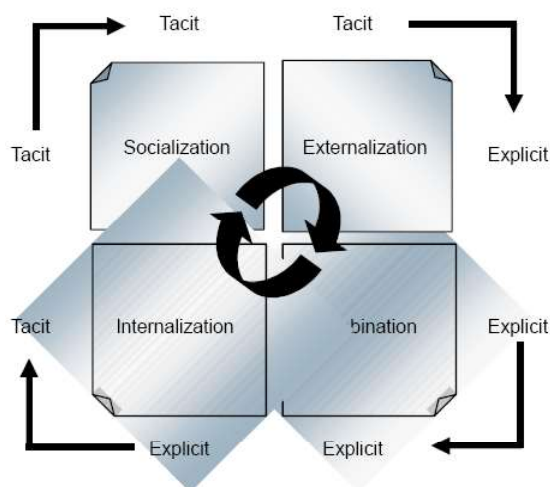


Figure 1 : SECI Model (Anggia and Sensuse 2013)

Anggia and Sensuse (2013) used the SECI model to analyse the benefits of blog for enhancing knowledge management among bloggers. They used the model based on blog to explain the common issue about the exchanging ideas of tacit to explicit way. While tacit knowledge includes insights, intuitions, and hunches (instinct) and are difficult to express and formalise, difficult to share and usually based on individual experiences, explicit knowledge refers to knowledge that has been expressed into words and numbers. This finds relevance in the issue using blogs to enhance explicit language acquisition skills. Pinkie Anggia and Sensuse (2013) found that blogs have been able to provide many new benefits such as enhancing learning process, strengthening communication among bloggers, readers and brands; building relevant communities and developing new skills. The externalization example is blog, which is a process of converting tacit into explicit knowledge. In language acquisition, we can convert tacit into explicit knowledge as an externalisation form taken from SECI model by expressing blog posts in words, sentences, symbols and so forth. The knowledge captured on blog can be transferred easily to readers and other bloggers through multimedia content. As a part of knowledge management system, blog provide several technologies to transfer the idea appropriately. As with other new media theories, SECI shifts away from traditional one-way models of communication to two-way communication. Although studies have shown that as we age, language acquisition becomes more difficult, especially for adults learning a new language (Lenneberg 1964), application of these theories may still find relevance for L2 language learners. This paper conceptualises blogs as a mechanism to enhance the language spread, prominence, visibility, and magnitude of Nigerian language contents on blogs.

In applying the SECI model and Functional-notion approach to language acquisition, it is pertinent for bloggers to answer these questions: Do the contents provide solution to a L2 language learner? How easily can the blog user access content? What is the frequency and level of interactivity? Processing these from the blog users' viewpoint could possibly improve the chance of language acquisition success. The answer to these questions has implication for understanding the nature, of blogs and changes for predicting future trends.

Methodology

This study identified and employed a content analysis on five Nigerian language blogs. Krippendorff (1980) posits that content analysis examines the artefact (e.g. text, images) of communication itself and not the individual directly. The population of study consisted of all text-based and multi-media Nigerian Language blogs that cover one or more languages. Based on ‘findability’ and relevance, five blogs were purposively selected for this paper. For the purposes of this study, we exclude all official English language-based Nigerian blogs as well as blogs that had not been updated in the past six months to ensure that the blogs were not an abandoned project. Defining the unit of analysis on Web-based content usually presents unique challenges due to the combination of multiple media forms it displays (Kim & Kuljis 2010). In this study, we choose the home page as the main unit of analysis because it covers the contents we wanted to examine. Factors for the coding categories (e.g. visibility, comments, longevity, activity level and content) were adapted from sample of blogs list identified by Quinn (2009) and expanded upon. We coded nine sub-themes (images, language, words, audio, visual, audio-visual, multimedia, sentences, symbols) under 5 categories (frequency, visibility or prominence, language spread, magnitude and interactivity).

Prominence (placement) and magnitude measures (pixels for images, bytes for video/rich media and line text) using a 5-point rating scale previously developed for an online study by (Epepe, 2015) were adapted. We adapted indicators from Odoemelam, Okeibunor and Okorom (2015) as follows Frequency-1-10, 21-30, 31-40 41-50. The intervals indicate that the frequency of content was observed at least once per interval. A code sheet containing the categories was created based on these measures. Sampling of weeks studied within the 5 language blogs was drawn from a random sample of 6 weeks over a 3-month period (December, 2015, January 2016 and February 2016) at 2 weeks per month as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample of Weeks/days

Month	Week/days	
December, 2015	13-19	6-12
January 2016	3-9	17-23
February 2016	14-20	21-27

This finds support in extant study, which found that after the analysis of 19 studies that applied content analysis on the World Wide Web, most studies conducted data collection in one to two months with the quickest data collection reported at two days, and the longest being five months (McMillan as cited in Kim & Kuljis 2010). The coding categories were adapted from conceptual constructs of pertinent studies (e.g., Herring et al., 2004, 2005) and checked for consistency by a statistician. In addition, data samples coded by four coders achieved 79 per cent agreement. Reliability test of instrument from a pre-test (14 January and 3 February, 2016) by the researchers and an independent coder, gave a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.818. The intercoder reliability of each coding category was above the acceptable indicator of 0.75. The results are reported using descriptive statistics.

Results

Research Question 1

How many Nigerian languages are covered on indigenous blogs?

Table 2: Nigerian Language Spread on blogs

Blogs		Language Spread			
1.	NigerianDictionary.com	Igbo	Pidgin English	Yoruba	Hausa
2.	Yoruba Blog			Yoruba	
3.	Igbo English .com	Igbo			
4.	Teach yourself Hausa				Hausa
5.	Nigerian English.com		Pidgin English		

Source: Content analysis, December 2015-February 2016

The results in Table 2 indicate that only the NigerianDictionary.com representing 20 per cent of blogs selected had a language spread of four Nigerian languages(Igbo, Pidgin English, Yoruba and Hausa). We observed that although there was a label (see Appendix B) for ‘others’, the blog covers just the three major language and Pidgin English which is fast gaining reputation as an authentic Nigerian language. In contrast, 80 per cent of the blogs studied focused on single language coverage as their names imply (see Table 2). This result implies that the major languages remain the sole focus in language learning and acquisition programmes of blogs.

The findings are similar to those of Nwagbara (2013) which found that broadcast media and schools curriculum did not cater for minority languages in four States (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River and Rivers) of Nigeria. As with this present study, language content tend to be focused on the major or ‘privileged’ languages of the country. Nwagbara (2013) contends that this trend is unfavourable to the spirit of the Nigerian Language policy. The trend found in this study may be attributable to the fact that those who run the blogs are from the majority language blocks. From the findings, we conclude that minority languages are not the focus of the major operational Nigerian Languages blogs. The results also lead to discussions about the expansion of language spread to promote Nigerian language acquisition for a wider range of languages.

Research Question 2

What is the frequency of posts update on Nigerian Languages blogs?

Table 3: Frequency of Nigerian Language Blog Entries

Blog	Frequency					Total
	1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	
NigerianDictionary.com	78	42	29	7	-	156(37.7%)
Yoruba Blog	45	19	13	11	9	97(23.4%)
Igbo English .com	7	11	19	4	1	42 (10.1%)
Nigerian English.com	4	9	10	13	2	38 (9.1%)
Teach yourself Hausa	33	21	13	6	8	81(19.6%)
Total	167	102	84	41	20	414(100%)

Source: Content analysis, December 2015-February 2016

Table 3 shows that NigerianDictionary.com had more frequency with 37.7 per cent in terms of blog entries update. This was followed by the Teach yourself Hausa with a frequency of 19.6 percent of blog entries. The blog with the least frequency interval was the Nigerian English.com which is a Pidgin English focused. The behaviourists established that language cognition is a learnable skill and that repeated exposures to language content is associated with success rate of language acquisition (Wikipedia, 2016). Based on the Functional-notional approach of language acquisition, the frequency of organised language syllabic blog entries may enhance language acquisition for L2 learners. It stands to reason that the more blog users are exposed to a language content that are syllabically organised language content, the greater their chances becoming proficient in that language. This position finds support from Finocchiaro & Brumfit (1983).

Research Question 3

What is the magnitude and prominence of contents among Nigerian languages blogs?

Table 3: Magnitude and Prominence of Nigerian Language Blog Entries

Blog	Magnitude (Pixels)	Points	Prominence (position)
NigerianDictionary.com	110		81
Yoruba Blog	78		95
Igbo English .com	16		11
Nigerian English.com	21		17
Teach yourself Hausa	35		41

Source: Content analysis, December 2015-February 2016

Using our magnitude measure (pixels and bytes) to capture images, text and audio visual, we found that while NigerianDictionary.com had content with higher magnitude of 110 points, most of the audio content was not functional. By contrast, the Yoruba blog had fewer magnitude rating (78 points) with functional audio pronunciation and translation content. The Igbo English.com, Nigerian English.com and Teach yourself Hausa, had the lowest magnitude as their contents were mainly text-based. The Yoruba blog gave more prominence as observed from the strategic and organised placement of relevant content. As with other new media theories, SECI (Socialization, Externalization, Combination and Internalization) shifts away from traditional one-way models of communication to two-way communication. The concrete expression or externalisation of language content through multi-media content may be crucial to blogs serving as a vehicle for language acquisition. As with the L1 group, the interest of the L2 learners may be captured with rich media content. This is a position that both the SECI and Functional-Notion approach promote.

Research Question 4

What is the level of interactivity of Nigerian language blogs?

Qualitative findings suggest that although some elements of interactivity were found in the selected five blogs, only two blogs representing 40 per cent (NigerianDictionary.com and Yoruba Blog) had a relatively functional two-way interactive commentary or contribution platform. However, because NigerianDictionary.com is a membership blog, only registered users are allowed to interact on the blog (see Figures 2 and 3). Thus, users who do not have the patience to register or willingness to divulge their personal information may be restricted from using the blog.

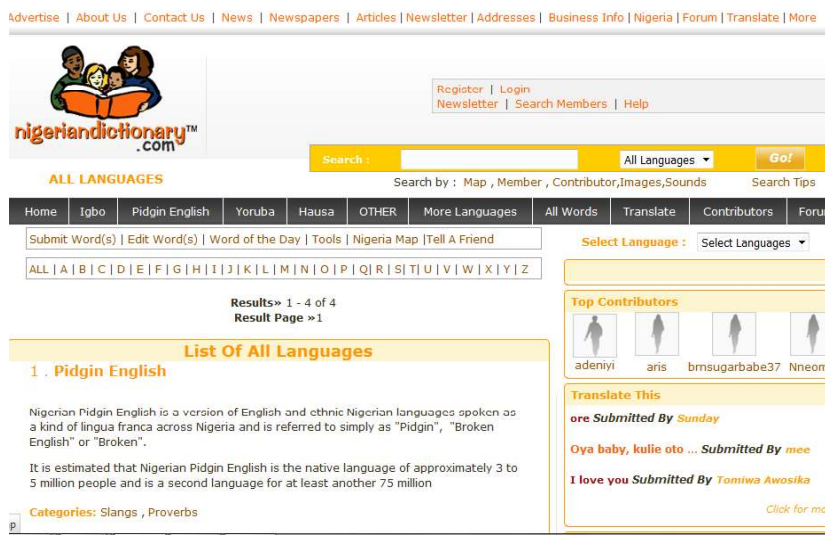


Figure 2: Comment section on NigerianDictionary.com



Figure 3: Comment section on NigerianDictionary.com

This negates the position of Anggia and Sensuse (2013) that blogs are knowledge management systems for bloggers to build relevant communities, where people in the same topic of interest share knowledge. These findings largely negate blogs' role in language acquisition by creating a virtual space for language content to thrive on strategic engagement, collaboration and networking.

Implications

The findings have theoretical and practical implications. It has expanded literature and empirical literature on language blogging. By successfully applying the SECI and Functional Notion models, this study contributes to an understanding of the strategies that guide optimum content creation on blogs. This understanding is crucial to running a successful two-way communication language

blog. Blogs have developed and increased in popularity among academics and professionals, but little research has been published about language blogs. This study examined the content categories of blogs thereby contributing to research in this area.

Conclusion, limitations and areas for further study

This study sought to examine the possible use of blogs in promoting Nigerian languages acquisition. This study offers evidence of the positive effects of blogs on language acquisition. It also contributes to the discourse of issues in language learning through blogging and blog use. Findings show that majority of Nigerian language content on the blogs representing only the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo Yoruba) and Pidgin English lacked interactivity and multimedia content. The study concludes that the spread of Nigerian language content on blogs could be improved if a significant number of bloggers representing various languages integrate a basic language literacy multimedia component on their blogs to stimulate the interest of native and other speakers of the language and help prevent further decline or prevent extinction of some Nigerian languages. The findings of this study contribute to knowledge regarding the application of Nigerian blogs in languages learning and acquisition. Further research is needed to determine the possible effects of Nigeria languages blog use on L1 and L2 learners. In addition, the study recommends a more comprehensive and diversified language use on Nigerian blogs. In this process, emphasis should be placed on languages that are considered ‘minority’.

Finally, as with many other previous web-based studies (e.g., Kim & Kuljis, 2010), this content analysis conducted in this study was faced with sampling and coding challenges. As with many other related studies, the complexity of characteristics of media mix within the Web content makes generalisability and representativeness a daunting task in this study. In spite of these limitations, this study has hopefully contributed to knowledge in the area of new media, development communication and language acquisition.

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Appendix A: Nigerian Language Blog list

1.	“The Yoruba Blog,” http://www.theyorubablog.com/
2.	“NigerianDictionary.com,” http://www.nigeriandictionary.com/index.php
3.	Igbo English .com http://www.igboenglish.com/
4.	Nigerian English.com http://www.nigerianenglish.com/
5	Teach yourself Hausa http://www.teachyourselfhausa.com/

Appendix B: Content measures

The unit of analysis was the home page

Magnitude was measured using a five-point pixels/bytes-based scale.

Frequency-1-10, 21-30, 311-40 41-50 at least once a week calculated by overall posts on home page for each blog for the study period.