Emerging Indigenous Language Usage Practices in Digital Newspaper Readers' Comments in Zimbabwe

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Abstract (T Oral Presentation)

The advent of digital newspapers has ushered in a new era of participatory journalism whereby the stringent logic of the media is subverted. Editors no longer dictate the rules of engagement and readers are free to express themselves anyhow. Before the introduction of the digital newspapers the only available method of providing feedback to the newspapers was the "letter to the editor", which needed to conform to certain editorial prescriptions such as sticking to the language used in the newspaper, stipulated length, disclosure of personal identity as well as adhering to ethical considerations. The new digital media environment has therefore 'liberated' newspaper readers from the shackles of editorial gatekeeping and the media gatekeepers' tyranny as they now free to deliberate in a language of their choice thereby enabling them to mix the language of the media and indigenous languages. Deploying the concepts of hybridity and counter-hegemony, this paper qualitatively explores indigenous language usage practices in Zimbabwean digital newspapers. In particular, the paper examines indigenous language use practices among digital news commentators in two Zimbabwean dailies to shed light on the future of African indigenous knowledge in the context of globalisation. It addresses two research questions, namely, (1) How do online news commentators use indigenous languages in online English medium newspapers? (2) How does the use of indigenous languages in online newspapers counter coloniality in the news? (3) What are the implications of using indigenous languages in digital news? Empirical data comprised of a corpus of 55 user-generated comments curated from two mainstream English medium newspapers, namely, *The Herald* and *Newsday*. The paper reveals that the digital news platform is a 'liberated zone' in which indigenous language speakers subvert conventional journalistic logics. Consequently, indigenous African languages become part and parcel of the global media culture, thus countering western hegemonic epistemologies. Understanding the language choices of digital news commentators helps in gaining deeper insights into the implications of mixing indigenous

languages with colonial and indigenous African languages. The paper contributes new knowledge on the future digital humanities in general, and the future of indigenous languages indigenous in the context of digitality.

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