

Linguistic Competence and Error Analysis in Selected Hausa Subtitled Movies

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Abstract

This paper explores Kannywood, a genre of the Northern Nigeria industry. The emergence of film industry in Africa has helped in showcasing Africa to the international community, hence, subtitles came in handy, since most viewers do not understand the language in which the movies are produced. The Hausa film industry is the subject of this study because of the large viewership it enjoys by people within and outside the country extending even beyond the shores of Africa. The research was motivated by the persistent errors, which the researcher noticed while watching Hausa subtitled movies. The study adopted Corder's theory of error analysis- identification, classification, interpretation as a model to enable it interrogate different types of errors and how they impede understanding in two subtitled movies aired via DSTV Hausa magic channel captioned: “*Kaddara*” (Destiny) and “*Kwadayi*” (Avarice) produced between 2014 and 2015. It therefore concluded that the errors in Kannywood subtitled movies are mostly grammatical and submits that in view of the importance of English in Nigeria, there is the need to pay attention to all the processes involved in subtitling because beyond communication and promotion of the Hausa cultural values, subtitles serve as vehicles of promoting and learning the English language to many viewers.

Key words: subtitling, linguistic competence, grammatical errors, error analysis, Kannywood

1.1 Introduction

There are different definitions for subtitles, because of its evolution over time owing to the dynamic nature of technology. According to Morris (2009), subtitling is many things; not least of which is a way of rendering a foreign language film comprehensible to an audience which does not understand its source language. Similarly, Diaz-Cintas (2003) defines subtitles as displayed written texts, which are usually shown at the bottom of the screen, and which give an account of the actors' dialogue and other linguistic information which form part of the visual image (letters, graffiti, and captions) or of the soundtrack (songs). Bartoll (2004) added this to this definition by stating that usually, subtitles are presented underneath or at the bottom of the picture, hence their name, and are normally centered. While Morris (2009) points out that some can be teletext subtitles which can be added to the picture as the viewer wishes by means of a decoder or character generator in the television set. Ivarsson (2003) adds that alternatively, they can be open subtitles, which are an integral part of the film or programme

and cannot be removed according to the wishes of the viewer. What this implies is that in the case of the latter, the viewer does not have control over when the subtitles come up on the screen and his/her only way of calling back the subtitles to move at his/her speed is either by pausing the movie in order to read through or rewinding over and over again each time the need to call back a particular subtitle arises.

Kannywood is the title given to the film industries in the Northern part of Nigeria with Kano as its epicenter, hence named after Kano (Farouk, 2012). It suffices to note that the name “Kannywood” followed the styles of the American - “Hollywood”, Indian - “Bollywood” and similar other “woods” across the world (Farouk, 2012). Kannywood was created beside the national film industry called “Nollywood” where the films produced are in English, the actors mostly Christians from the Southern part of Nigeria (Lere, 2014).

Unlike Nollywood, the medium used in

Kannywood is the Hausa language, which is the major language in the North of Nigeria and the most widely spoken indigenous language in Nigeria second only to Swahili in the whole of Africa (Musa, 2014). With the world being reduced into a global village day by day, and with markets shrinking and fast expanding, many have welcomed the idea of subtitling Hausa films as produced by film industries in the Kannywood (Musa, 2014). Some years ago films initially rendered in Hausa like “Wasila” directed by Yakubu Lere were re-filmed with new cast and, English language was used as medium of communication. This apparently proved unviable due to limited sales as a result of the strong role of the Hausa Language among the majority of Kannywood viewers (Musa, 2014). This set back only helped to confirm the need to subtitle Hausa films to English language in order to ensure wide viewing among various audiences who are non-speaking Hausas in Nigeria and indeed beyond the shores of Nigeria.

Kannywood has come to stay and it is waxing stronger by the day to the extent that movie industries within and outside Nigeria want to associate with the industry. However, the sad thing is that ever since the onset of subtitling of such Hausa movies English, both Hausa and non-speaking Hausa viewers have increased their calls for producers to do a good job.

Two movies of Kannywood were selected on the basis that they contain enough subtitling that will make for a worthwhile interrogation of this type. The movie-“*Kaddara*” (Destiny) was produced in 2015 and despite its high production quality and superb acting skills displayed by the actors, the movie fails in the area of subtitling. The movie employs the technique of flashback to unfold its story. It opens with Nasiru regretting over his rash suggestion that his girlfriend Fadila should marry Aliyu his boss and confidante. Until then, Nasiru and Fadila were madly in love but he (Nasiru) decided to sacrifice their love in a bid to providing a solution to his boss'(Isham)predicament whose

initial marriage turned into a catastrophe. Fadila at first rejected the crazy proposal but later accepted reluctantly interpreting it as something that God had destined to come to pass in her life. The movie thus revolves around the theme of 'Destiny' as it is titled. The second movie titled- *Kwadayi* (Avarice) was produced in 2014 and portrays a typical Hausa family setting where a daughter does not have the right to the choice of a future husband. Her parents, especially her father decides when and who she marries and as an obedient daughter she is expected to give her consent regardless of who is chosen for her. In the case of Sadiyya, the daughter of Mallam Tanko, she is so unfortunate to have an avaricious father who does not care about anyone but himself and money. Even when she and her mother tried to convince him to accept her relationship with Saeed an undergraduate with Danfodio University, he vehemently refuses and even threatens to divorce his wife. He collects money from another suitor- Kagara (a drug addict) and promises to give Sadiyya's hand to him in marriage. At the end, Sadiyya elopes with Saeed and her father was left to suffer in the hands of Kagara for failing to deliver on his side of the bargain.

2.0 Theoretical Considerations

2.1 Linguistic Competence

The term linguistic competence refers to the unconscious knowledge of grammar that allows a speaker to use and understand a language. Also known as grammatical competence as used by Chomsky and other linguists, linguistic competence is not an evaluative term. Rather, it refers to the innate linguistic knowledge that allows a person to match sounds and meanings. Chomsky (1965) submits that there is a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations).

Linguistic competence constitutes knowledge of language, but that knowledge is tacit, implicit. This means that people do not have conscious

access to the principles and rules that govern the combination of sounds, words, and sentences; however, they do recognize when those rules and principles have been violated. For example, when a person judges that the sentence- “John said that Jane helped himself” is ungrammatical, it is because the person has tacit knowledge of the grammatical principle that reflexive pronouns must refer to a noun phrase in the same clause (Fernandez and Smith, 2011).

2.2 Errors/Error Analysis

Errors are usually defined as systematic deviations from the rules of a target language. They may occur because a learner does not know a rule such as subject - verb agreement in English. Mistakes, on the other hand are seen as unintentional accidental slips. Lee (1990) explains that errors arise because the correct form or use of a target item is not part of a speaker or writer's competence whereas mistakes arise (for reasons of fatigue, stress, inattention, etc.) even though the correct form or use is a part of the user's competence. Freeman and Long (1991) succinctly add that a learner can readily self-correct a mistake but not an error as that is a product reflective of his or her current stage of L2 development, or underlying competence. Lennon (1991) asserts that an error is a linguistic form or combination of forms which in the same context and under similar conditions of production would, in all likelihood, not be produced by the speaker's native counterpart. Brown (1994) upholds that an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the *Interlanguage* competence of the learner whereas a mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a 'slip' in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. Brown (1994) asserts that mistakes are not the result of a deficiency in competence but the result of some sort of breakdown or imperfection in the process of producing speech. Errors, on the other hand, as stated by Ellis (1997), reflect gaps in a learner's knowledge and they occur because the learner does not know what is correct.

Errors may also be classified according to the level of language: phonological errors, syntactic errors, vocabulary or lexical errors etc. They may be assessed according to the degree to which they interfere with communication: global errors make an utterance difficult to understand, while local errors do not. Errors are part of competence and mistakes are a part of performance.

The theory of error analysis (hereafter referred to as EA) was discussed in Corder's (1967) seminal paper, “*the significance of learner's errors*”. According to him, EA is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make in both the spoken and written medium. He identifies three stages in error analysis; recognition, description and explanation of errors (Corder, 1974). According to him, recognition of errors is a first and most important stage in EA, while description of errors is a comparative process between erroneous utterances of the learner and native forms of the language. The comparison between the two shows the deviations on phonological, morphological and the syntactic levels of the target language structure where the learners have committed errors. Corder (1974:128) suggests that “Our objective in error analysis is to explain errors linguistically and psychologically in order to help the learners to learn”. The description of errors follows the categorisation of errors such as grammatical errors which include - omission, wrong transformation, wrong plural formation, use of wrong verb forms etc. Similarly, the phonological, morphological and semantic errors with all sets of their sub-classes.

The explanation of errors is concerned with accounting for why and how errors come about. The explanation of errors is an investigation into the reasons as to why the learner has broken, disregarded, misused or ignored the rules of the target language. Errors bear a strong resemblance to the characteristics of the mother tongue; indeed many erroneous utterances read like word-for-word translations.

Errors arising from the influence of learner's mother tongue is termed as transfer errors. There are instances even when a learner has discovered a correct rule he may still continue to make errors because he has not yet discovered the precise application of the rule. Learners may produce sentences like he *goed*, he *cans* come. Errors of this sort are errors of overgeneralization or analogical errors. Analogical errors are inherent and perhaps inevitable in language learning process.

3.1 Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. This is because qualitative research makes it possible for descriptions to be made since the purpose of the research is to describe a phenomenon. Also, qualitative research is closely related to descriptive method that can explain more about the feeling or the process beyond the problem than other conventional methods. All Hausa movies subtitled in English constitute the overall population of this study. A stratified random

sampling technique was applied where Hausa films subtitled in English and produced between 2014 and 2015 from Africa Magic Hausa were sampled from which two were picked. The two movies selected for the analysis include; “*Kaddara*’ (Destiny) and “*Kwadayi*” (Avarice). The theory used in the analysis is adapted from Corder's Error Analysis (1967). Erroneous sentences, phrases and words were identified, classified, explained and evaluated or interpreted from the corpus thereafter their correct versions were given.

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

The data are presented in tables below. Each table is captioned according to the errors captured. The content in each table is structured in such a way that the titled of the movie is indicated, followed by an excerpts from the movie that contains the error, then an identification of the type of error, classification of the errors, and finally the corrected versions of the errors are presented in the last column of each table.

Table 1 - Wrong Lexical Selection

S/N	Movie	Excerpt	Correct form	Type of Error	Classification of Errors
a.	Kaddara	1. If you don't mind, can I <u>offer</u> you a lift?	If you don't mind, can I give you a <u>lift</u> ?	Grammar	(Wrong lexical selection) Wrong- Correct
		2. ...so that you will <u>separate</u> them forever.	...so that you will break them up forever.		1.Offer-give,
		3. You <u>most</u> be patience with her...	You must be patient with her...		2. Separate-break
		4. <u>Is</u> true	It's true		3. Most-must, patience- patient
		5. <u>Its</u> marriage a sunna of our prophet?	Is marriage a sunna of our prophet?		4. Is-it's
		6. But I can't <u>rectify</u> why exactly you want to see me	But I can't <u>understand</u> ...		5. its - is,
		7. Since i cannot <u>scan</u> your precious heart then tell me what the reason is.	Since I cannot <u>read</u> ...		6. Rectify-understand
		8. I might be of <u>helpful</u> if you tell me.	I might be of <u>help</u> if you tell me.		7. Scan-read,
					8. Helpful- help

b.	Kwadayi	9. I am not <u>fear</u> . 10. Just give us order to <u>illuminate</u> him. 11. <u>Is</u> not like that I just want you to calm down.	I am not afraid... Just give us an order to eliminate him. <u>It's</u> not like that...	Grammar	9.fear-afraid, 10.illuminate-eliminate, 11. is-it's
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Table 2 - Wrong Use of Transitive Verbs

S/N	Movie	Excerpt	Correct Form	Type of error	Classification of errors
a.	Kaddara	12. I appreciate. 13. I really appreciate.	I appreciate it. I really appreciate it.	Grammatical error	Misplaced verbs

Table 3 - Concord/Subject-Verb Agreement Errors

S/N	Movie	Excerpt	Correct Form	Type of error	Classification of errors
a.	Kaddara	14. That's my fate. I've accepted it already because my parents* <u>feels</u> everything is okay 15. I <u>cannot</u> stop him from doing what God* <u>decree</u> him to do. 16. I went to his mum and she * <u>support</u> him	... my parents <u>feel</u>what God <u>decrees</u>she <u>supported</u> him.	Grammar	Errors of concord (subject-verb agreement)
b.	Kwadayi	17. What do you think she will <u>becomes</u> 18. She can <u>finds</u> the way out 19. But I want to <u>warns</u> him 20. I just want you to <u>warns</u> him 21. I'll just <u>makes</u> these dogs to <u>tears</u> you into pieces 22. This is what will <u>leads</u> you astray	... she will <u>become</u> ? ... <u>find</u> her way out. ...want to <u>warn</u> him. ...to warn him ... <u>make</u> these dogs to <u>tear</u> you into pieces. ...will <u>lead</u> you astray		

Table 4 - Omission of Lexical Items

S/N	Movie	Excerpt	Correct form	Type of error	Classification of Errors
a.	Kaddara	23. We ^ been together for months. How can you say that? 24. Is that why you ^ shouting like thunder. 25. Why^ you doing this to me am i your slave or housemaid? 26. What we ^ going into is our fate	We <u>have</u> been... Is that why you <u>are</u> ... Why <u>are</u> you...? What we <u>are</u> ...	Grammar	Omissions of the modal verbs <i>have</i> and <i>are</i>
b.	Kwadayi	27. I'm^ uncle to Saeed 28. Yes it has been ^very long time 29. The girl he ^likes to marry... 30. What is the matter ^ you that just...	I'm <u>an</u> uncle to been <u>a</u> very he <u>will</u> like... ... with you...	Grammar	Omission of the articles: <i>a</i> and <i>an</i> , the modal verb <i>will</i> and the preposition <i>with</i> .

Table 5 – Direct Translations from Hausa Language to English

S/N	Movie	Excerpt	Correct form	Type of Error	Classification of errors
a.	Kaddara	31. Ok, we may live to see the day 32. This would be the best remedy for solving my <u>friends</u> problem	Ok, may we live to see the day. This would be the solution to my friend's problem	Structural errors	Direct translation from Hausa language to English
b.	Kwadayi	33. Sadiyya I love you more than your expectations	... beyondyour expectations.	Grammar	Direct translation from Hausa to English

Table 6 – Punctuation Errors

S/N	Movies	Excerpts	Correct Form	Type of Error	Classification of Error
a.	Kaddara	34. But i can't *rectify why exactly you want to see me 35. Since i cannot *scan your precious heart then tell me what the reason is. 36. Where on earth do you think i'll be other than my office 37. I'll make sure i come over latest in the evening 38. This would be the best remedy for solving my <u>friends</u> problem 39. All i want for her is the best 40. <u>Thats</u> what i've been expecting to hear from you 41. <u>Gods</u> decision is the best	But I... Since I cannot... ... I'll be other ... I'll make sure I my friend's ... All I want ... That's what I've ... God's decision ...	Grammar - punctuation	Non-capitalization of the personal pronoun 'I' all through the subtitling. Also, punctuation marks were not used all through the subtitles.

b.	Kwadayi	42. I'm not *fear 43. Just give us order to *illuminate him 44. But I want to *warns him 45. Looks like I'm treating you well 46. This is what will *leads you astray 47. I'm uncle to Saeed	There should be a fullstop at the end of every sentence.	Grammar-punctuation	Non-use of punctuation marks all through the movie's subtitles
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Table 7 – Structural Ambiguity

S/N	Movies	Excerpts	Correct Form	Type of Error	Classification of Error
a.	Kaddara	48. OK, we may live to see the day... 49. Can you imagine that she took a stupid boy to my house called Isham? 50. I learn that still you are a small girl.	Ok, may we live to see the day... Can you imagine she took a stupid boy called Sham to my house? I learnt that you are still a small girl.	Grammar	Structural ambiguity

4.2 Discussion on Errors

4.2.1 Wrong Lexical Selection

The two sentences:[1]If you don't mind, can I *offer* you a lift? And [2]...so that you will *separate* them forever, suffer from a wrong choice of vocabulary. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary (2018), the word '*lift*' which appears in the first sentence above can be used as either a verb or a noun. As a noun, one of its senses means “a ride in a vehicle”, as in “*She gave me a lift to school*”. In Standard English, therefore, 'lift' is given and not offered, as used in the sentence above. Thus, the sentence can be modified as- *If you don't mind, can I give you a lift?* Similarly, the bone of contention in the second sentence is the use of the word '*separate*'. When the word is used in the sense of parting a man and a woman in a relationship, it means to temporarily cease to live together, probably because of an existing tension but with the hope of reuniting in future. In the sentence however, the word is not used as such. And since Mahdi intends to bring an end to the relationship between his daughter Fadila and Isham, he should not have used the word '*separate*' because it has a different connotation in Standard English. Instead, the sentence should be “...so that you will break them up forever”.

Other examples of wrong lexical selection include the use of the possessive – '*its*' in place of the contracted form '*it's*' as well as '*is*' in place of the contracted form '*it's*' in the following sentences:

Is true[4]

Its marriage a sunna of our prophet?[5]

Is not like that I just want you to calm down.[6]

4.2.2 Errors as a Result of Malapropism

Malapropism refers to an amusing mistake somebody makes when they use a word which sounds similar to the word they wanted to use, but means something different. The English language has many homophones (a word that is pronounced like another word but has a different spelling and meaning), hence, a learner of this language may confuse words which leads to errors, e.g.

You most be patience with her.... [3] Instead of “You must be patient with her”. Here the auxiliary verb 'must' is substituted with 'most'.

Just give us order to illuminate him.[10] Here instead of using the word *eliminate*- *illuminate* is used.

4.2.3 Omission of Auxiliary Verb and Articles (Fossilized Errors)

Fossilized errors are seen in the consistent

persistence of errors in a learner's speech despite progress in other areas of language development. Littlewood (1984) stresses that fossilization is most likely to occur when a learner realizes (subconsciously) that the error does not hinder him in satisfying his communicative needs (at the functional or social level). This is what Gass and Schacter (1989) refer to as a stage short of success as it is the stage when development ceases and even serious conscious efforts to change are often fruitless, and even if there might be some brief changes, those would just not take the learner anywhere as the learner always backslides to the stable state. Spada and Lightbrown (1993) add that this lack of change happens even after extended exposure to or instruction in the target language. Brown (1994) indicates that this could be a problem even with those who have otherwise learned the language quite well. From the data collected, the modal verb 'are' is omitted all through the subtitles and as well, the personal pronoun 'I' is written in the lower case all through. Here are some examples of fossilized errors from the excerpts:

We ^ been together for months. [23]

Is that why you ^ shouting like thunder. [24]

Why^ you doing this to me am i your slave or housemaid? [25]

The personal pronoun 'I'/ proper nouns

But i can't rectify why exactly you want to see me. [34]

Since i cannot scan your precious heart then tell me what the reason is. Where on earth do you think i'll be other than my office. [35]

I'll make sure i come over latest in the evening [36]

Fossilized errors such as those above tend not to affect comprehension although people committing such errors are likely to be stigmatized due to the fact that they often reflect errors that are typical of very basic-level learners.

4.2.4 Concord/Subject-Verb Agreement Errors

In English, the subject-verb agreement is when the subject and verb in a sentence agree in number.

That is, they both must be singular or they both must be plural. There is no singular subject with a plural verb or vice versa. For example: “*She teaches English Language*” and “*Parents plan for their children's future*”. In these situations, “*teaches*” is singular and it agrees with the singular subject “*he*” whereas in the second sentence, verb “*plan*” is plural and it also agrees with the plural subject “*parents*” too. The reciprocal placement of the two verbs in the two sentences would have defied the agreement rule, thus resulting in the sentences being grammatically wrong. This is because each noun phrase is either singular or plural, and its number is determined in general by its head, which is typically a noun. The conclusion could be that one does not know the language unless if one understands the rules of subject-verb agreement and can apply them in context. The verb and subject must agree in number (singular or plural). This means that if the subject is singular, the verb should be singular and if the subject is plural, the verb should also be plural. That is what linguistic competence is all about.

However, in the two movies, the following errors were discovered:

That's my fate. I've accepted it already because my parents feels everything is okay [14]

I cannot stop him from doing what Goddecree him to do. [15]

I went to his mum and shesupport him [16]

What do you think she will becomes. [17]

She can finds the way out [18]

But I want to warns him [19]

4.2.5 Wrong Use of Transitive Verbs

This was mostly detected in the movie titled “*Kaddara*”. In the following sentences:

I appreciate. [12]

I really appreciate. [13]

The transitive verb “*appreciate*” is used as if it were intransitive. These are verbs which can take a direct object, while intransitive verbs do not take a direct object. According to Online Oxford Learners Dictionary (2018), the verb *appreciate* is used as a transitive verb in all its senses except one; and that is when it is used to refer to increase in

value over a period, as in- *Their investments have appreciated over the years*. In this example, the verb is used in its intransitive form. But looking at the above instances in which the verb is used in the film, it is evident that it is used in the sense of being grateful for something that someone has done. In this case, the verb is used as a transitive verb and should, therefore, be followed by an object, such as: *“I appreciate your assistance or I really appreciate it”*.

4.2.6 Improper Arrangement of Word Order Leading to Structural Ambiguity

Ok, we may live to see the day. [48]

Can you imagine that she took a stupid boy to my house called Isham? [49]

I learn that still you are a small girl. [50]

The problem with these sentences is the improper arrangement of the words in the way that will help convey the intended message to the audience. The sentence- *“Ok, we may live to see the day”* for example, was uttered as an expression of prayer; therefore, it should be rendered to sound as such—*“Ok, may we live to see the day”*. Also, the sentence—*“Can you imagine that she took a stupid boy to my house called Isham?”*—is riddled with structural ambiguity that makes it difficult for someone to understand whether *'Isham'* is the name of the invited boy or that of the *'house'*. Thus, to disambiguate, the sentence should be restructured to read- *“Can you imagine that she took a stupid boy called Isham to my house?”* Finally, the use of the word *“still”* in the sentence—*“I learn that still you are a small girl”* is also somewhat incorrect. Therefore, it can be rearranged as—*“I learn that you are still a small girl”*.

4.2.7 Punctuation Marks

Punctuation is referred to as the practice or system of using certain conventional marks or characters in writing or printing in order to separate elements and make the meaning clear, as in ending a sentence or separating clauses. The following punctuation errors made the subtitles confusing.

That’s what i’ve been expecting to hear from

you [40]

Gods decision is the best.[41]

Thats my fate I've accepted it already because my parents feels everything is okay [14]

What we ^ going into is our fate [26]

This is what will *leads you astray [22]

I'm^ uncle to Saeed[47]

5.1 Implications/Recommendations

The implication of the above findings is that Hausa films makers are contributing negatively to lowering the standard of English language in Nigeria. Their products are watched daily by children, young adults, adults, and males and females throughout the Northern Zone of Nigeria and across the nation. Instead of contributing their quota towards uplifting the standard of the English language in the country, they are doing the opposite. In so doing, they are misleading millions of people who daily watch their products many of whom have mistaken them for models.

In order to reverse this trend, it is recommended that movie producers should ensure that specialists are involved in subtitling their works. They should go an extra mile by allowing linguists to do proper editing of such subtitles, even though, this may involve more costs, “the end will justify the means” as the economists would say. Many of their fans would not mind spending more to purchase their products once they are sure that they are rich in quality in terms of visual output, thematic thrust, language and standard translations.

6.1 Conclusion

Hausa movies are watched all over the world and the essence of subtitling them in English is to make them intelligible to all peoples and cultures. Results from this study are thus important and significant to the Nigerian Hausa film editors and translators. Translators need to take note of the identified types of errors that are preponderant in Nigerian Hausa films subtitled in English and take positive steps to gradually eliminate future occurrence of such errors.

A very careful look at the errors identified in these subtitles suggests that Kannywood film producers only pay attention to the visual quality and the thematic thrust of the movies. It is not enough for the industry to be concerned only with the visual quality and the thematic thrust, attention should equally be given to the grammaticality and accuracy of the subtitles for the benefit of audience who do not speak nor understand Hausa language. This poses a challenge to the Association of Nigerian Theater Art Practitioners (ANTP) to wake up to its responsibilities. The Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board usually have a role to play in ensuring that these film producers improve the quality of the work in all ramifications. Film producers also should allow professionalism and specialisation of processes. Specialists in different aspects of the profession should be employed to handle the different areas of the work, not minding the cost.

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