What are we communicating to the South African public?

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1. What is Development Communication?
2. The pro-literacy bias
3. Presentation of messages and research results
4. The problem
5. The solution: in theory
6. In practice?
7. Conclusion
Development Communication

- “all forms of communication that are used for the improvement of an individual, community or country’s material, cultural, spiritual, social and other conditions” (Malan, 1998: 52).

- The task of Development Communication is to “inform and motivate at national and local levels” (Rensburg in Nunes, 2001: 30)
Functional illiteracy

• 18.5% of the adult population (Aitchison, 2000)
• 46% of the population (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2000).
Reading proficiency

33.6% of the grade 5 learners
38.5% of the grade 6 learners
45.5% of the grade 7 learners

has an “average” reading skill

(READ 1996)
Pro-literacy bias

- a typical top-down printed media approach
- It undermines indigenous knowledge, abilities, resources and social systems (Cassim, 2000).
A NEW SERVICE IS BORN

I HEARD THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE THAT TELKOM HAS LAUNCHED A NEW SERVICE. WHAT IS IT AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT, TELL ME MORE, HOW DOES IT WORK?

THIS IS BEGINNING TO MAKE SENSE. BUT TELL ME, HOW DO I KNOW IF A PHONE HAS A TONE FACILITY?

THAT IS A VERY GOOD QUESTION, IT DEPENDS ON WHERE YOU ARE CALLING FROM AND THE TYPE OF TELEPHONE YOU ARE USING!

IT'S CALLED TELKOM VOICELINK. WITH THIS SERVICE, YOU WILL NEVER COMPLAIN AGAIN OF BEING UNABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS BECAUSE YOU DON'T HAVE A PHONE AT HOME.

LIKE THIS!

YOU WILL GIVE PEOPLE YOUR VOICELINK NUMBER WHICH THEY WILL USE WHEN LEAVING MESSAGES FOR YOU AND YOU CAN LISTEN TO YOUR MESSAGES AT ANY TIME.

HOW DO I GET CONNECTED?

IT'S VERY SIMPLE. YOU MUST GO TO ANY POST OFFICE, TELKOM CUSTOMER SERVICE BRANCH OR PARTICIPATING RETAIL OUTLET AND BUY A VOICELINK PACKAGE.

GREAT!!

It is so easy. Telkom will give you a VoiceLink number that is like your own personal telephone number. People can dial from a public payphone or a private telephone to leave messages for you. This means that you can always be in touch without having a telephone.
“The product is essentially an **RDP-driven initiative** in an attempt to provide basic telecommunications, via the public telephone network, to people who have no other means of telecommunicating. Almost by definition these people will be **under-educated, under-privileged and perhaps illiterate**. Advertising communications, therefore, have to be as simple as possible in order to communicate an extremely difficult-to-understand product to a largely illiterate market.

As regards print media, experience has shown that the **comic strip concept** is an ideal way of communicating a complex product **in a simple way**, especially to those who may be **intellectually challenged**.”
The paper is based on a selection of empirical studies in which

- usability tests were performed
- on printed media
- to determine the comprehension level
- of an identified target audience
Factors that influenced communication in print based messages

- Language
- Visuals
- Layout and design
- Words as metaphorical signs
Language

- Leaflet
- Producer
- Language
- Target audience
- Production of green mealies
- National Department of Agriculture
- In English only
- Emerging farmers
Development of the maize plant

- The maize plant’s rate of development (how fast it grows from planting time to time of harvest) is mainly determined by temperature.

- Maize develops much slower during the cooler months than in the hot summer months.

- Differences in growing season lengths also occur.

- Frost can kill off green plants.
Respondents

Emerging farmers at Elikwatini and Bethlehem

- 4 of 20 answered correctly
- "hairs on the upper part of the mealie that determines it growth"
- "determines if it is a good time".

• Question

- What does “development of the maize plant” mean
- What determines the development of the maize plant?
Finding 1

• Using only English as language of communication to disseminate information to the South African public is a major impediment to comprehension
Visuals

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Drawing?

- What does the sign signify?

- One answered: “the flower that grows on the mealie plant.”

- The rest answered correctly
• What is this?

• Most respondents interpreted the picture as a housing system for goats.

• Some respondents confuse the shed with a house.
Not suitable for target audience
Finding 2

• Visual signs are much better understood than the English verbal text.

BUT

• Given the heterogeneity of the South African public, multiple interpretations of visual signs are possible.
Words as metaphorical signs

- Billboard
- Producer
- Language
- Target audience

- First campaign
- loveLife
- English only
- South African youth
• Respondents
  Second year Information Science students at the University of Pretoria
• Question
  What does “thethajunction” mean?
Intended message

thetha (talking) + junction (place for coming together) = Toll free number

Interpretation

• “‘tha’ and ‘the’ is basically the same (Eng)
• ‘The’ is most commonly used by white kids and ‘tha’ by black kids (Afr)
• Junction is the name of the organisation” (Afr)
thethajunction

Intended message

thetha (talking) +
junction (place for coming together) =
Toll free number

Interpretation

• “Not the slightest clue” (Venda)
• “Beteken niks vir my nie” (Afr)
• “Talk to you children” (Xhosa)
thethajunction

Intended message

thetha (talking) +
junction (place for coming together) =
Toll free number

Interpretation

• “Let us talk about life” (Setswana)"
• “Tha = teenage hour awareness” (Eng)
• “Number where one can find out about the ‘tha’-factor. Tha is someone’s sex life or love life” (Eng)
Finding 3

Given the heterogeneous linguistic and social composition of the South African public the use of metaphorical language is a questionable practice.
Development of the maize plant

- The maize plant’s rate of development (how fast it grows from planting time to time of harvest) is mainly determined by temperature.
- Maize develops much slower during the cooler months than in the hot summer months.
- Differences in growing season lengths also occur.
- Frost can kill off green plants.
• Respondents

• Question

• Emerging farmers at Elikwatini and Bethlehem

• Why were these mealie kernels placed next to the words?
• A few individuals understood the use of maize kernels in the place of bullets.

• The rest of the respondents showed no comprehension at all
Layout

- Brochure
- Producer
- Language
- Target audience
- Counselling
- National Department of Health
- Multilingual
- General public
AIDS is a disease that affects millions of South Africans. It is caused by a virus called HIV that slowly weakens a person’s ability to fight off other diseases.

People who are HIV positive have many feelings including negative feelings such as fear, helplessness and anger.

VIGS is ‘n siekte wat miljoene Suid-Afrikaners raak. Dit word veroorsaak deur ‘n virus wat HIV genoem word. HIV takele geleidelik ‘n persoon se weerstand teen ander siektes af.

Mense wat HIV-positief is het baie emosies, waaronder negatiewe emosies soos vrees, hulpeloosheid en woede.

I-AIDS yisito esihlasela izigidi-gidi zabantu eNingizimu Afrika. Yisifo esibangelwa yigicwane (ivyirasi) ebizwa ngokuthi yihIV ebulala amasosha omzimba alwa nezifo.

Abantu abane-HIV banemizwa eminingi yokungaphatsha kahle, efana nokwesaba, ukuswela abangakwenza, kanye nentukuthelo.

AIDS ke lefu le tshwarang dimilinyo tsa batho ba Afrika Botswa. E bakwa ke kowanaehloko e bitswang HIV e fakodisang bokgoni ba moho ba ho lwantsana le mafutbutle.

Batho ba nang le HIV ba ba le maikutlo a manganta ho kenyelletsa le maikutlo a ho hloko tshepo a jwalo ka tshabo, ho hloko thuso le ho halefa.

People who are HIV positive may find it difficult to talk to their friends and family about their feelings. They also have many decisions to make about their life.

Friends and family members may not know how to talk to those who are close to them who are HIV positive.

Mense wat HIV-positief is vind dit scms moeilik om oor hul gevoelens met vriende of familie te praat. Hulle moet ook baie besluite oor hul lewens neem.

Vriende en familieledes weet daal nie mooi hoe om met mense wat na aan hulle wat HIV het te praat nie.

Abantu abane-HIV bangakuthola kunzima ukuthi bakhulumisane nabangani kanye nemindeni yabo ngemizwa yabo. Kumele benze izinqumo eziningi ngempilo yabo.

Abangani nemindeni kungenzokwa nabo bengakwazi ukuthi bangakhumlisana kanjani nalabo abasondile nabo abane-HIV.

Batho ba nang le HIV ba ka fumana ho le boima ho bua le metsalle le ba malapa a bona ka maikutlo a bona. Hape ba na le diqeto se ngata tseo ba ka di etsang ka maphelo a bona.

Metsalle le ba malapa ho ka etseha hore ba se ke ba tseba ho bua le bao ba tlwaetseng haholo ba nang le HIV.

It is important that people who feel this way have a chance to talk about these feelings with an experienced counsellor.

Counsellors are trained to listen and can provide accurate information to assist people with decision making.

Dit is belangrik dat mense wat so voel die geleenthed kry om met ‘n ervare berader oor hul gevoelens te praat.

Beraders is mense wat opgelei is om te luister en kan waardevolle inligting verskaf om mense met besluite te help.

Kubalulekile ukuthi abantu abazizwa ngalendlela bakwazi ukukhulumza ngemizwa yabo nama-counsellor.

Ama-counsellor aqeqeshlewe ukuthi alalele abantu kanti anganikeza nangolwazi oluyilo ukusiza abantu ukuthatha izinqumo.
• Respondents
  27 visitors of health clinics in previously disadvantaged areas in the Gauteng and Limpopo provinces

• Question
  What is the main idea expressed in the leaflet?
Response

• 15 respondents answered that counselling was guidance for those who have tested HIV positive.
• Ten responded that the leaflet was about the phenomenon of AIDS in general.
• One identified "condom use", and another "abstinence from sex" as the main topic.
Failure?

The lack of external structure, e.g.
– Headings
– Chunking
Finding 4

Layout can obscure the communication process by providing too little external structure
The problem?

Intended meaning misunderstood by the receiver

Absence of common codes

Shared signs and codes generate meaning
“A complex world creates complicated language – we cannot keep using specialised and exclusive languages – it keeps people out. The most effective communication is that which identifies with the audience as they are”

(Serote, 1998)
The audience is the key

• “To communicate meaningfully one has to study and know his audience very well do research on ‘what to say’ and ‘how to say it in the people’s own way” (Panford, 1997: 336)

• “Spend time listening to your target audience. They’ll listen to you if you listen to them” (Kuzwayo, 2000: 65).
Supporting theories

Reception studies
• the successful interpretation of a message depends on an overlap of culture, frame of reference or a common codal system between communicator and receiver

Participatory communication
• the accommodation of cultural and other differences when communicating information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicator</th>
<th>Receiver</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
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<td>Logic</td>
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<td>Experience</td>
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Audience research in the production of printed messages in SA

Respondents
• 10 case studies

Question
• What is the extent of target audience research in the printed communication of health information in South Africa?

Results
• No evidence of target audience research
• No evidence of message evaluation
• All cases followed a top-down mass media approach.
Conclusive finding

The production of printed development communication messages for the South African public is characterised by:
– a top down communication approach
– a lack of audience research
– a disregard for the diverse attributes of the target audience
Conclusion

• A participatory message design approach

• Three possible levels of participation to accommodate cost and time factors:
  – decision-making
  – implementation
  – evaluation and benefits (Yoon, 1997)
“No matter how much money an organisation may spend to hire the best trained producers of posters and broadcast programmes, no matter how much foreign exchange it may spend to import expensive equipment and trainers, the organization that excludes the audience from the message design process is doomed to be merely an information distribution organization. It will have no capability to reach an identity of meaning with the audience”

(Mody, 1991)
We are the rainbow nation – a diverse society for which a one-message-to-all-approach is just not good enough.
Thank you

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