

LANGUAGE, SECURITY CHALLENGES IN A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the place of language and peace in a multilingual society like Nigeria. It highlights the correlation between security, peace and national development. Language as the sole attribute that distinguishes man from other animals is mainly for communication of man's needs and feelings. Therefore, the use of language in a multilingual society should be such that promotes peaceful coexistence in the society. The paper recommends effective communication, mutual respect and inclusion in the country. It believes that these would foster unity, national cohesion, peaceful coexistence and national development. The paper concludes that if current security challenges are not contained in Nigeria, peace will elude the country and development would be hampered.

Keywords: national development, multilingualism, peaceful co-existence.

Introduction

The right to security of lives and property is a fundamental human right of every citizen of a country. It is a common occurrence for over a decade to hear of bandit attacks and killings, kidnapping, terrorism, Boko Haram attacks, unknown gunmen attacks and other forms of violent crimes on a daily basis in Nigeria. Many innocent Nigerians have lost their lives to these attacks. Regrettably, this ugly situation is not abating thereby ranking Nigeria low in the Global Peace Index (Olanrewaju, 2018).

The right to movement from one location to the other without hindrance is a huge challenge in the present day Nigeria due to insecurity. No part of Nigeria is safe. The fear of being kidnapped or killed even in one's house is staring every Nigerian in the face thereby creating fear in the minds of people. This paper is premised on the upsurge of security challenges militating against sustainable development in Nigeria and the need for solutions to them. Realizing that a secured environment is a catalyst for national development, the federal government is making concerted efforts towards fighting the menace of insecurity in the country (Olanrewaju, 2018). Despite these

efforts, the level of insecurity in the country is still very high casting a gloomy shadow in the minds of many Nigerians and members of the international community whether security of lives and property is achievable in Nigeria, hence the adoption of a linguistic approach to the problem in this paper.

Our attempt to seek for solutions to the scourge of insecurity from the linguistic point of view is based on the fact that language plays a vital role in every human society. The power of language is incontrovertible and its influence inexhaustible when it relates to societal interest. Language is a veritable tool of interaction and a means of education through which human beings pass their culture from one generation to another (Olanrewaju, 2018). Language makes it possible for human beings to think together, feel together and to act together (Ike, 1998). Despite the critical roles language plays in the society, adequate attention has not been paid to it by national development planners in their efforts to find lasting solutions to the numerous security challenges in the country (Owolabi, 2016).

The gains of peaceful co-existence in the society are not negotiable. The level of insecurity in Nigeria is so unprecedented that one pities and sympathizes with the present day children and youth of Nigeria whose nerves have been numbed with reports of killings, attacks, kidnapping, banditry, rapes, ransom payment among others. Obviously, the wanton destruction of lives and property in the country is a threat to peaceful co-existence and development as no investor (local or foreign) would want to invest in an unsafe environment. There is need to unify Nigeria through effective use of language.

1. Language and National Development

Language is a critical factor in making human existence worthwhile or chaotic and therefore a critical ingredient in national security. In the words of Okeke (2012 p. 218) “most of the hostility, disagreement, rivalry (ethnic, political etc.) and in fact, insecurity experienced among Nigerians have been as a result of ineffective use of language, especially by some political players”. One may be right to ask what then is language? McLaughlin (2006, in Okeke 2012) sees language as the system of arbitrary verbal symbols (and non-verbal means) that speakers put in order according to a conventional code to communicate ideas and feelings or to influence the behaviour of others. To Fromkin et. al (2003) the possession of language, perhaps more than any other attribute, distinguishes humans from other animals. Language is therefore a compendium of words phrases, clauses and sentences which a user chooses from and strings together, systematically to express meanings that are appropriate in a particular context.

Every human being depends on language use in his social activities to do things. People use language principally as a tool to do things: “request a favour, make a promise, report a piece of news, give directions, offer greetings, seek information, extend an invitation, request help and do hundreds of other ordinary things” (Finegan, 2012: 302). What we do with language to a large extent can have positive or negative impact on us. For instance, it could negatively affect us when it is used to curse, abuse etc. but positively when used to pray, praise, propose marriage etc.

Conversation is much more than using language to state propositions or convey facts. Through conversations relationships are established or enmity as the case may be. Language determines the socio-cultural reality of the users; it reflects how the users view the world – how they feel, think, see and talk about things. The implication is that the language user has not only the knowledge of his language but also the culture of his society since the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group (Okeke, 2012 p.221)

Language is importantly functional in the lives of people and in the society not only as the most vital endowment of human race and a means of empowering the society in her quest for national growth, but also as a tool which enables man to deal with the challenges in his environment. In other words, language cannot exist without the society, neither can society exist without language; language is part of society as existence of society invariably necessitates the existence of language with which members of the society interact (Adeyanju, 2002).

Language and National Development are interrelated. Both are situated and achieved within human society. By communicating with one another, people are able to live and work together, pursue individual and societal goals, settle conflicts, design socio-economic and political plan for their present and future well-being. In the same vein, Obanya (1993) asserts that communication through language is an instrument for empowering the individuals that constitute a nation to make positive contributions that will enhance sustainable national development. Thus, reliance on language is inevitable if people must achieve a sustainable national development. Commenting on the importance of communication in the society, Martian Luther King Jr observes thus:

People don't get along because they fear each other. People fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they have not properly communicated with each other. (Cited in Mmegwa, 2014).

In the course of communication, there could be wrong perceptions and interpretations which could lead to conflict. Conflict is a natural phenomenon associated with humans and Nigeria is not an exception. As a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country, Nigerian is bound to experience rivalry, suspicion and other challenges. This is in line with Schwarz (1965) that people are kept apart in a multilingual nation without a common language giving rise to ethnic hostilities.

The best way to maintain and promote peaceful co-existence in such a diverse society is to encourage mutual respect for one another's rights, beliefs and values, equity in the distribution of resources and above all, through the mechanism of effective communication (Mmegwa, 2014). Nigerians must find a common ground to overcome their challenges through the country's lingua franca, the English language. Although English is given a pride of place in discussions bothering on security of lives and property of Nigerians, the role of the indigenous languages (mother tongue) in the different communities as regards the promotion of peaceful co-existence cannot be taken for granted. Therefore, any accepted medium of communication by the people to convey their needs and values should be encouraged and used in promoting peace among them.

Though scholars differ in their perception of the functions of language, Halliday (1970) proposes a tripartite function of language called "Meta-functions of language". The model identifies three functional levels of language thus: Ideational, interpersonal and textual. The ideational function of language sees language as serving as an instrument for the expression of the user's real world, including the inner world of one's own consciousness. It is a means of expressing one's experience internally and externally. The interpersonal function helps to establish and sustain social relations, while the textual function of language allows language to link with itself and with features of the situation in which it is used (Ogunsiji, 2001 in Olanrewaju, 2018).

In discussing the functions of language in human society, Stubbs (1995) proposes seven functions of language as follows: (1) expressive/emotive function (2) directive/conative or persuasive function (3) poetic function (4) contact function (5) metalinguistic function (6) referential function and (7) contextual/situational function. The expressive function occurs when language is used to express the inner state of mind of the speaker such as an instantaneous reaction to an ongoing event e.g. hurrah! etc. The directive or conative or persuasive function of language allows the speaker to direct the hearer to carry out an action. It may also be used to persuade or plead with the hearer for an action to take place or not. The poetic function of language allows language users to use it creatively for aesthetic purposes while the contact function of language, also regarded as ‘phatic’ function allows people to use language for brief social or psychological interaction e.g. for greetings or in attempt to open a channel for communication. The meta-lingual function occurs when language draws attention to itself for the purpose of clarification on any of its levels. The referential function ensures that the denotative meaning of a word or expression is the physical object which the language user has used it for, while the contextual/situational function of language allows a language user to relate his experience to others with regard to the immediate environment probably to solve present or future problems.

The divergent views of scholars on the functions of language could be summarized that language performs numerous roles in the attempt of man to live, work, interact and overcome challenges together in the society (Stubbs 1995). Put differently, the dynamism of language affords people the opportunity to use it in different ways for numerous activities (Yule, 1996). Language could be used to construct or destroy; make or mar, create peace or war. Therefore, language users adapt it to every prevailing situation in their environment to bring about change or solution through interaction. Specifically, the focus of this paper is on the persuasive functions of language where language can be used to solve problems in the society depending on when, where and how it is used. The paper is of the view that people should explore the persuasive function of language by using language effectively in communication to foster peaceful co-existence and invariably promote national growth and development. Through language, people will be sensitised on the need to respect one another’s culture, beliefs, feelings and customs. By so doing, nerves would be calmed and people will maintain peace in their communities. The democratic rule in Nigeria has heightened the rate of hate speech in the country; to stem this ugly tide, effective language should be employed.

2. Security Challenges and National Development

Security is the freedom from danger or threats, and the ability of a nation to protect and develop itself, promote and cherish values and legitimate interests and enhance the well-being of its people (Adebakin, 2012). It focuses on physical, emotional and psychological sense of belonging to a social group which can offer one protection. Any situation contrary to this is regarded as a state of insecurity. However, it has been generally argued that security is not the absence of threats or security issues, but the ability to rise to the challenges posed by these threats with expediency and expertise (Olanrewaju, 2018). Some of the factors that exact impact on national security include among others: bad government, unjust and inequitable distribution of national resources, multiplicity of ethnic groups, ethnic and religious antagonism, corruption, unemployment, hunger, rivalry among the ethnic groups etc. In addition to the above factors is ignorance, unguarded utterances and rumours or fake news.

Odulami in Okeke (2012) states that as a people think of its development, accumulate wealth and live a good life, they should protect these assets from the forces of destruction. Therefore, national security should guarantee physical, emotional and psychological safety of

individuals, groups, nations, states, together with their cherished values. It should ensure freedom in every form – threat, anxiety and danger. On the other hand, insecurity is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury, the state of fear and anxiety; lack or inadequate freedom from danger.

In a nutshell, security is the totality of policies and actions initiated and taken to protect the nation – state from both internal and external threats. In order to achieve this, governments all over the world should devise security strategies and policy frameworks to ensure adequate security for their citizens and their property. The growing internal insecurity challenges in Nigeria are a serious threat to peace and development of the country. To ensure the security of its citizens, the federal government should take a holistic approach to security especially as it concerns the welfare of Nigerians.

The heterogeneous nature of Nigeria in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion heightens the internal security threat in the country. This creates a constant feeling of distrust between the component units and fear of domination based on either ethnic or religious beliefs. Since conflict is as old as humanity itself, the federal government should find ways of resolving it in order not to hamper the development and progress of the country. Therefore, all hands must be on deck. The government, political leaders, civil society organizations, the media, academia, students etc. should rally together to ensure that peace is maintained in the society by exploring the use of effective communication.

There are various definitions of the concept of development but a few would be considered in this paper. Development embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. This implies the improvement in material and well-being of all citizens irrespective of status. It could also be seen as a process of societal advancement, where improvements in the well-being of the people are generated through strong partnership between sectors, corporate bodies and others in the society. Another school of thought still sees development to mean improvement in a country's economic and social conditions more especially improvement in the way of managing the natural and human resources in order to create and improve people's lives (Egwalusor, 2020).

Development is not only an economic exercise but also a socio-economic, political and all aspects of societal life. It is a critical factor in the sustenance and growth of any nation. This is because a nation is classified as developed when it is able to provide qualitative life for its citizens. Nigerians can testify to the fact that the high level of insecurity in the country is affecting the quality of life in the country with indicators such as high rate of inflation because people cannot freely go to their farms or travel to access goods and services resulting in unemployment, underemployment, hunger, poverty, increase in violent crimes and domestic violence among others in the country.

(Asiyanbola, 2016 in Olanrewaju 2018) noted that National development is the development in all facets of human endeavours – health, medicine, information, communication, education, justice, politics, trade, aviation among others. It is the process in the well-being of the society as regards its policy, economy, science and technology and relative welfare of the people (p.117).

National development is considered as a multidimensional phenomenon which encompasses all spheres of human endeavour. In other words, any development that is geared towards the enhancement of individuals in the economy and which would also enhance the development of the nation, should be sustained overtime. No meaningful development can take

place in chaos. For Nigeria to think of sustainable development, the government should curb the high level of insecurity in the country as security is central to development. The Nigerian security challenges are having negative impact on business activities as investors' confidence is not there. Obviously, the quality of life of Nigerians would have been improved upon if the country was not dissipating so many resources on tackling insecurity.

3. Conclusion

The paper has established the relationship between language and society in overcoming security challenges, fostering peace and promoting sustainable national development. Sustainable development should guarantee a nation where people will live without fear for their lives and property, where there is peace and prosperity and where the general welfare of the people is achieved and sustained. When people feel excluded from the scheme of things, when they feel marginalized, they would not feel a sense of belonging and this could lead to agitation and conflict. Language is the most veritable means of resolving whatever conflicts that arise among people. After the barrels of guns have sounded during conflicts, there is always a round table dialogue to resolve whatever differences that exist among the parties involved. Effective use of language is necessary and involves varying one's use of language according to the setting and participants; knowing when to use the informal as opposed to the formal forms of language. The citizens should respect one another's opinions, opposing values and beliefs. The diverse interest groups in Nigeria should bear in mind that no culture is superior to the other in their interactions. Furthermore, people should be clear in their use of words; they should avoid the use of vague and abstract words but should rather use concrete, clear and specific words to avoid being misunderstood.

The task of promoting peaceful co-existence is the responsibility of all. The media and civil society organisations should promote the use of persuasive rather than inciting and abusive language. They should encourage the use of words that suggest inclusiveness, togetherness, unity etc. Both print and electronic media should use words that promote peace in the society. The government on their part should ensure that there is equity in the distribution of the nation's resources. Every part of the country should be given a sense of belonging thereby fostering peace and development in the country. In conclusion, though the use of language may not solve all of human problems due to differing values, cultures, traditions, ideologies among others, it can go a long way in promoting a harmonious society.

4. Recommendations

For any meaningful development to take place anywhere in the world, there must be peace. Nigeria needs peace so that the diversity of the country could be properly harnessed to foster development. It is in view of this that this paper recommends the following in order to promote national security and sustainable development:

- (1) The government should formulate and implement policies and programmes that will address the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria.
- (2) The media, civil, society organizations and all relevant stakeholders should join hands to promote peaceful co-existence among the citizens.
- (3) There should be respect for one another's cultural and religious beliefs.
- (4) The government should ensure that the nation's resources are equitably distributed.

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