Ensuring National Integration, Peace and Security in Nigeria through Qualitative Language Education

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ABSTRACT

The thrust of this paper is to show how inappropriate use of language could threaten national integration, peace and security while appropriate use could enhance them. Plato believed that education should aim at producing the best type of citizen both for war and peace. Qualitative language education could serve as a panacea to an endearing national integration, peace and security in Nigeria. Language use in an interpersonal relationship is like a double-edged sword. It could be used to destroy as well as to mend. Nigeria is currently bereft with many crises some of which have been alleged to be connected to inappropriate use of language by politicians, ethnic and religious leaders. This paper examines how inappropriate use of language could threaten national integration, peace and security in Nigeria. The paper recommends, among others, that government should put in place appropriate language education mechanism for the citizenry to improve their communicative competence.

Keywords: Language Education, National Integration, Peace, Security

Introduction

National integration, peace and security have been issues of national discourse in Nigeria. Several efforts have been made by successive administrations in Nigeria to provide endearing national integration, peace and security mechanisms for the country. One of such efforts was the national conference convened by the former president, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Concerted efforts are still needed to proffer solutions to an endearing national integration, peace and security in Nigeria.

The unity of Nigeria as a country is not only threatened by political exclusion, economic marginalization and social discrimination but also by ineffective and inappropriate use of language. Language, to some extent, makes human existence worthwhile or chaotic. This paper sees it as a major factor in national integration, peace and security because most of the hostilities, disagreements, rivalries (ethnic, religious or political) and indeed insecurity being experienced in Nigeria have been alleged to be as a result of ineffective and inappropriate use of language, especially by politicians, ethnic and religious leaders. Appropriate use of language has always been used to calm the various situations. Suffice it to say that language use in interpersonal relationship is a double-edged sword. There is, therefore, need for qualitative language education to bring about "correctness", a situation where users of language put into consideration the relationship between the words they use in different contexts and their meanings. If users of language are given effective education, it could foster national cohesion and security. Here in lies the crux of this paper.

Language Education

Language, according to Richard (2010), is the human vocal 'noise' or arbitrary graphic representation of the 'noise' in writing used systematically and conventionally by a speech community for purposes of communication. It is the principal means used by

human beings to communicate. Language is the key instrument for shaping thoughts and contouring the mind. Language not only permits an enormous condensation of knowledge, but permits human beings to turn knowledge into hypothetical forms so that they may consider alternatives without having to act them in the form of trial and error (Fafunwa, 1990).

Language as a cultural component is a major instrument used by a people to identify themselves as members of a group or for taking decisions to be primarily self-identified as a member of a given community. It prescribes the mode of communication within any cultural setting. Language is an aspect of cultural control mechanism which influences individuals' decisions and promotes social accountability which is a social capital needed for understanding a variety of issues be it political, economic or social in any society.   Language ensures certain amount of uniformity, thereby facilitating interpersonal cognitive communication, without which shared values and traditions would be impossible and the very fabric of national integration, peace and security could be hindered (Ayakroma, 2012). Language helps to sustain peace and security in given societies.

Education, on the other hand, simply means imparting knowledge. That is the process of sharing knowledge for the development of mankind. Thus effective education implies education which transcends the four walls of the classroom, one which exposes the learners firstly, to everything in life, both positive and negative. Secondly, and more importantly, education empowers one with wisdom to choose that which is right, not just because one is prejudiced into doing it, but because one is convinced that it is right. This way the learner becomes socially, politically, economically as well as culturally relevant in the society.

Education, according to Watkins (2000), is the leading out of an individual. The growth of the individual, his self- awareness and confidence, his intellect and his feelings are all vital. The purpose of education is not the transmission and memorization of facts. It is to enable an individual to discover what he or she is naturally good at or passionate about and, then, providing him or her with relevant tools – including academic knowledge – to develop the necessary competences to excel in areas of his or her maximum potentials.

The primary purpose of education is the liberation of man (Kadenyi and Kariuki, 2011). To liberate is to set free from impediments that hinder human progress and development. According to Kadenyi and Kariuki (2011), there are two imperatives essential to a liberated human being, namely: (i) an awareness of man's humanity (ii) the power to use circumstances rather than be used by them. These dual imperatives should enable an educated person to overcome ingrained feelings of superiority or inferiority and be able to co-operate with other people based on equality, for the common good. The tool that facilitates this is effective and appropriate use of language. Language users therefore need appropriate language education to enable them function maximally in the society.

Language education refers to the study of the art of language which involves the understanding of the nature and importance of language as a vehicle for communication. According to Mgbodile (1999), language education derives from the general importance of language as a vital instrument for man's activities on the planet, and is built on the rationale that as language is the chief means of inculcating knowledge, skills and competencies, there is the need for all those who employ the use of language in helping others grow in whatever field of human endeavour to have some specialized knowledge and understanding of the mechanics of language. Language education is therefore expected to provide the individual with a deeper understanding of the science of language and equip him with the skills for achieving communicative competence, which, according to Adeyanju (1989), subsumes grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic competence and strategic competence.

National Integration

National integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It means that though we belong to different religions, ethnic groups and speak different languages, we recognize the fact that we are all one. It is unity in spite of great differences. In other words, unity in diversity

Omachonu (2014:88) sees national integration as "the bringing together into equal membership of a common society those groups or persons previously discriminated against on cultural ground". It means a feeling of oneness. It implies social, political,

economic, linguistic and cultural unity. According to Gould and Williams (1994) cited in Omachonu (2014:88)," it is the process of making whole or entire". Coleman and Roseberg (1964) see national integration as the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogeneous political community. Simpson (n.d) understands it as a process of creating a mental outlook which will prompt and inspire a person to place loyalty to the country above a narrower sectarian interest. National integration indicates unity and solidarity in all spheres of human cultures and civilizations without the manifestation of dogmatic sentiments, prejudice and loyalty among nationals of a country. It means a heaven of freedom where the nation is not divided into fragments by narrow domestic walls.

National integration is based on the feeling of oneness, common ideals of life and common code of behavior. It implies confidence in the nation's future, deep sense of values and obligations of citizenship, mutual understanding and respect for the culture of different sections of the nation. It is an essential pre-requisite for the success of democracy.

Peace and Security

The term "peace" is often equated with harmony and lack of conflict or violence. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2007) defines peace as a situation in which there is no war between countries or in a country; a feeling of calmness and lack of worry and problems. It is harmony between different social groups that is characterized by lack of violence or conflict.

Despite an assumed shared understanding of the word, peace usually embraces different connotations depending upon the context in which it is used and the person using the term. In order to clarify some of this conceptual confusion, Galtung (1996) identified a distinction between positive peace and negative peace, where negative peace simply means an absence of war or direct physical violence. Positive peace denotes the presence of conditions for political equality, social and economic justice. Positive peace acknowledges and challenges the structural conditions in society that inhibit the ability of individuals or groups to achieve their potentials. Thus, Galtung's concept of positive peace highlights a more holistic analysis of peace.

Security, on the other hand, is a situation in which the human mind accepts and values the rights of his or her co-inhabitants to enjoy peaceful living and as a result lives, properties and positive interests are not under threat whatsoever (Abuh and Matthew, 2014). The Encarta Dictionary (2009) simply defines security as the state or feeling of being safe and protected. Maier (1990) conceived security as a capacity to control those domestic and foreign conditions that the public opinion of a given community believes necessary to enjoy its own self-determination or autonomy, prosperity and well-being. Brown (1983:281), looking at security at national level, defines it "as the ability to preserve the nation's physical integrity and territory; to maintain its economic relations with the rest of the world on reasonable terms; to preserve its nature, institutions, and governance from disruption from outside; and to control its borders". Consequently, national security is beyond the narrow conception of human protection and preservation in a nation. It extends to issues on preservation of international, social, political and economic relations.

Peace and security are, therefore, inseparable. The phrase "peace and security" implies a synergy, a complimentary state that is not present when violence and conflict pervade a society or country. Both are means to other ends, and means in themselves (Lederach, 1997). Combined together, peace and security is a condition where individuals, institutions, regions, nations and the world move ahead without any threat. In this condition, regions or nations are generally more stable domestically, likely to be democratically governed and respectful to human rights. Conflict not only generates threat and fear, but also hampers economic, social, or political advancement.

The Relationship between Language Education, National Integration, peace and security

Language education, national integration, peace and security have intricate relations. Every nation's target is positive development and to attain it, there must be maximum integration, peace and security ensured not just through military force but something more subtle and powerful than military force. That thing is effective and appropriate use of language which can only be achieved through qualitative language education. It is in view of this that Odunlami (1999) believes that the security of Nigeria is not only the function of the government and security agencies

alone but the entire masses who should also be involved one way or the other. Qualitative language education could lead to effective and appropriate use of language which would in turn enhance national integration, peace and security. This is why it is worrisome that some of our leaders use words in an unguarded manner. Clark (2009) attributes ignorance, unguarded utterances and rumours to factors that could lead to conflict or crises. The effect of such attitudes on national integration, peace and security is very grave.

In a multi-lingual country like Nigeria with over 400 indigenous languages, there is need for national co-operation and integration among these ethnic groups who speak different languages to enable them solve their common problems of poverty, underdevelopment and insecurity. Information is essential for national integration, peace and security and language is one major tool for information dissemination. Hence if government is to influence her citizens to alter their behaviour in order to unify them towards national integration, peace and security, information must be improved and this can be done only through qualitative language education. When the citizens are linguistically deficient, they will be so handicapped that they will be unable to realize the nature, quality and size of their individual contribution to national integration, peace and security (Omachonu, 2014).

Language Use

Expressions are usually intended for certain meanings and such meanings manifest in different linguistic forms to depict the intention of the speaker. Meaning is embedded in language. The branch of language that studies the meaning of words is semantics. Umera-Okeke (2008) defines semantics as the scientific study of words and sentences. Closely related to semantics is pragmatics which Cook (2003) defines as the discipline which studies the knowledge and procedures which enable people to understand each other's words. Its main concern is not the literal meaning but what speakers intend to do with their words and what it is which make their intension clear.

The literal (semantic) meaning of words may lead to contextual (pragmatic) meaning as people tend to interpret meanings of words further by examining some extra-linguistic features. What we do with language can have positive or negative consequences. For instance, it could have negative effect when used to curse, or fire an employee but positive effect when used to pray, propose marriage or tell the truth. This is why Wardhaugh (2010) claim that every language has an effect (positive or negative) on the way in which the people who use it view the world – how they feel, think, see and talk about things.

Knowing a language is not simply a matter of knowing how to encode a message and transmit it to a second party, who then decodes it in order to understand what we intended to say. Language use does not simply involve encoding and decoding of messages or just attaining grammatical competence where every sentence would have a fixed interpretation irrespective of its context of use, it also embodies our ability to use language accurately, appropriately and flexibly to be communicative competent. To achieve national integration, peace and security in language use, people should constantly and strategically figure out what to say, how to say it and how to understand what others say in the process of interaction, hence the need for qualitative language education in Nigeria.

The present problem of national insecurity in Nigeria has been attributed to the inappropriate choice and use of words by people, especially top politicians, ethnic and religious leaders who fail to strategically figure out what to say or what would be the import of what they say. Obi (2012: 26) made reference to President Mohammed Buhari's threat during his electioneering in 2011 as he reports:

After the 2011 presidential elections in which he was pronounced a loser, he ignited an orgy of bloodletting through his inflammatory utterances. … Then came the Boko Haram insurgency that has largely been traced to his threat that Nigeria would become ungovernable if he was not elected as president in 2011.

President Buhari's threat of 'ungovernability' has been alleged to have led to the Boko Haram menace by many Nigerians. His choice of the word 'ungovernable' is the interest and worry of this paper. The semantic import on any hearer would be an action intended to make a country impossible to govern or control. The threat is also conditional - if he was not elected the president - and eventually, he was not elected. The meaning of the statement may be taken beyond its literal level to incorporate extra-linguistic factors. Such interpretation is better examined

pragmatically where some pragmatic principles are employed. One of such principles is Speech Act theory.

Speech Act Theory is a sub-field of Pragmatics concerned with the ways in which words can be used not only to present information but also to carry out actions. It was propounded by J. L. Austine in 1962 and was further developed later by J. R. Searle in 1969. The theory looks at speech as an utterance defined in terms of a speakers' intention and the effect it has on a listener (Austine, 2005). It considers the levels of action at which utterances are said to perform: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act, also known as locution or utterance act, is the act of making a meaningful utterance. An illocutionary act is the way in which a sentence is used to express an attitude with a certain function or "force"(called illocutionary force); i.e. its intended significance is a socially valid verbal action.

A perlocutionary act is an action or state of mind brought about by, or as a consequence of, saying something. This is also known as perlocutionary effect, the actual effect of an utterance such as persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring, or otherwise getting someone to do something whether intended or not (Austine, 2005). According to Kempson (2007: 14), "The perlocutionary act is the consequence effect on the hearers which the speaker intends should follow from his utterance." Bach (2014) notes that almost any speech act is really the performance of several acts at once, distinguished by different aspects of the speaker's intention: there is the act of saying something, what one does in saying it, such as requesting or promising, and how one is trying to affect one's audience.

Speech act, according to Mey (2001), focuses on the action inherent in an utterance which is still an action (a message transmission, not an interaction) based on an encoded (abstract) proposition. This brings up issues like locution, illocution and perlocution and the issue of felicity condition. Hence, President Muhammed Buhari's threat at the locutionary level may be over looked or taken as ordinary utterance made by a politician but at illocutionary level, it raises the question of the effect of his utterance on the hearer while we still consider how the receiver (public) takes the statement at perlocutionary level. We also consider who said what and whether he has the right to say that from the angle of felicity condition, such that his position/rank in the society, his personality, constituency, locus standi, etc are all considered. Of course, if a road-side mechanic had made such utterance as President Buhari's, he would not be taken serious but because of the political position being occupied by Buhari as well as his personality, his statement was taken very seriously such that people alleged a very strong connection between his utterance and Boko Haram menace – a situation which has been a serious threat on the nation's peace and security.

This pragmatic analysis can better still be examined from the aspects of field, mode, and tenor of discourse. In this sense, the field for Buhari's utterance is politics. The mode of discourse is written medium as it passes the stage of casual oral statement to a serious written one published in Newspapers. In language and communication, when something is written, especially for public consumption, it is taken more seriously that it can be given formal reference.

The tenor of discourse in this context raises the question, who is the speaker and to whom has he spoken? Of course Buhari is the speaker, a big name in Nigerian politics. This is clear in Obi (2012: 26)'s description of him: "He cuts the image of a sacred cow that cannot be held accountable for any action of his… His audience becomes whoever that reads the published article and interprets the statement in different ways as they try to figure out the speakers intention". The utterance is highly inflammatory, inciting and intimidating. Such war mongering is scaring. The picture created with this statement is that of insecurity when politicians would be engaged in a bloody war for presidential sit. Of course Nigeria witnessed a bloody post-election violence in 2011.

A second example is: "Rogues, armed robbers are in the states and National Assemblies, what sort of laws will they make?"(Amodu, 2012:23). This statement was credited to former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo. The statement forms Obasanjo's judgement about the Nigerian Assembly members then. Everyone has his own opinion about people and their activities. Obasanjo seems to create the picture of 'legislooters' rather than 'legislators'. The import of Obasanjo's statement is the suspect nature of the Nigerian National Assembly members vis-à-vis their ability to perform their duty of making laws genuinely

and diligently. Significantly, the choice of words – rogues and armed robbers – sounds too hard and strong or even crude. If such statement is taken instantly as a fact by not so critical a mind, it is likely to cause tension and crisis.

A third example was the statement credited to Mujahideen Asari-Dokubo, leader of the Niger-Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), during the 2015 presidential electioneering. Asari-Dokubo was quoted as saying that the All Progressive Congress (APC) must produce its candidate for the presidency from the Niger-Delta and if this was not possible, Nigerians must allow Goodluck Jonathan serve a second term or there would be war. In the words of Asari-Dokubo as quoted by Ochayi (2015): "If it is war the North wants, we are ready for them because Jonathan must complete the mandatory constitutional allowable two terms of eight years. At home, we have regrouped and have put our people at alert". This statement attracted opprobrium from Nigerians. The statement was capable of causing tension and crisis. In fact, it was alleged to have triggered the action of the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA). What if Goodluck Jonathan was defeated in a free and fair election? Of course, that was what happened; he was defeated. Asari-Dokubo had forgotten that it was Nigerians who voted Goodluck Jonathan into office and that they reserved the right to vote him out of office and they did.

The statement could have been over looked if Asari-Dokubo were an ordinary person. But he is an ex-militant who led his group, the Niger-Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) to cause mayhem in the Niger-Delta area for many years before late president Musa Yar' Adua granted them amnesty. When such unguarded utterance (inappropriate use of language) is made, some miscreants may take advantage of it to perpetuate evil in an attempt to put into action what their leader carelessly spoke. Statements from such personalities (political, ethnic and religious leaders) should be decorous, state manly, and focused (appropriate use of language) on issues of national interest instead of promoting acrimony and division in the polity.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed in the Nigerian constitution. That right guarantees every Nigerian to speak his mind on issues. However, for a nation like Nigeria where different tongues and tribes were weaved to form a delicate country, an expression in one tongue can sometimes be interpreted to be an offence in another language. This fact has been notably brought to fore with recent developments in the polity with various regional groups clamouring for geo-political interests in acerbic words. Such words and communication have inevitably helped to pull the fabrics that hold the nation to its seams. Bitter and inflammatory statements emanating from politicians, ethnic and religious leaders have consumed thousands of human lives in Nigeria. Our leaders (political, ethnic and religious) have failed to understand that language is a 'container' from which users draw their choice based on contextual variables. Language plays a vital role in social integration. For Nigeria to live in peace, therefore, there should be qualitative language education to enable people use language appropriately.

Conclusion

National integration, peace and security are cherished by all Nigerians. But many do not mind as they go about igniting fire to consume the existing relative peace. This they do through their ineffective use of language. It is important that all Nigerians maintain peace and security through appropriate language use by constantly and strategically weighing what to say, how to say it and how to understand what others say in the process of interaction. Effective language education is the best way out of the quagmire. Through effective language education, Nigerians would know what to say, their receivers, the effect of their utterances on them, the possible interpretations that might be given as their intended meanings. This is necessary because the insecurity in Nigeria has taken a shape that needs, more than any other thing, effective and appropriate use of language as the best way to address the security challenges.

Recommendations

For any peaceful democracy to thrive there must be peace and security. There cannot be national integration without peace and security. Nigeria needs peace and national integration. It is based on this that this paper recommends that seminars, workshops and conferences should be organized for people occupying positions of authority, especially politicians, where adequate and effective use of language could be taught to them to enable them avoid making inflammatory and unguarded utterances that could threaten national cohesion and security. Pragmatics should be incorporated into Language and Communication Skills at all levels of education to

acquaint Nigerians with speakers intended meaning in language use. Finally, Nigerians should strengthen their feedback mechanism and improve on their communicative competence.

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