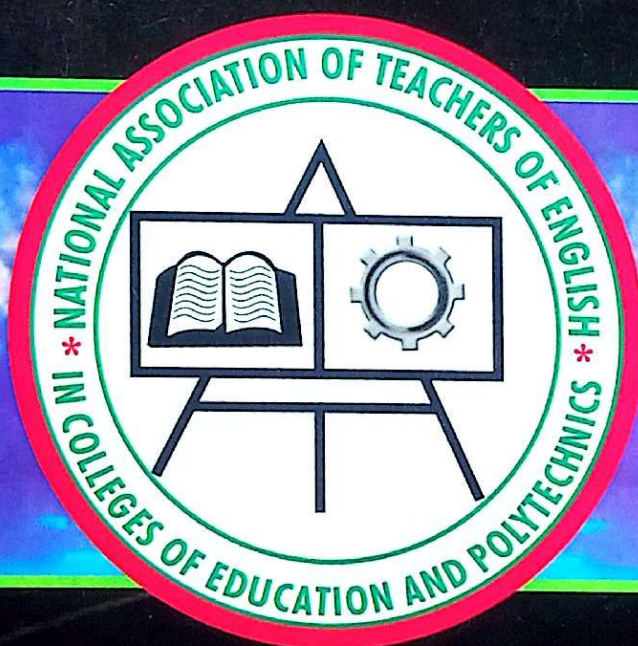


NJECS

NATECEP JOURNAL OF ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES



**A Publication of
National Association of Teachers of English in Colleges of
Education and Polytechnics (NATECEP)**

Vol. 13 September, 2017

ISSN: 1118-115X

NATECEP JOURNAL OF ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

VOLUME 13

SEPTEMBER 2017

A Publication of

**National Association of Teachers of English in Colleges of
Education and Polytechnics - (NATECEP)**

ISSN: 1118 - 115X

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Published by:

The National Association of Teachers of English
in Colleges of Education and Polytechnics – NATECEP.

All correspondence to:

The Editor, NATECEP
c/o Department of General Studies,
The Federal Polytechnic,
P.M.B. 55, Bida, Niger State, Nigeria.

Designed and Printed in Nigeria by:

SoftHands Publishing
08034539959



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Editorial

Nigeria is a blessed country. It is not an undue sentiment to quip that the large expanse of geographical space and sometimes very difficult to determine list of tribes, myriads of cultures with ever increasing indigenous languages constitute great blessings for Nigeria. So our diversities make us blessed.

As is normal, where there are diverse representations, there would also be diverse interests, and diversity of interests is a brewing ground for conflicts. So we may say that the marriage of conflicts we experience in Nigeria, ranging from opposing tribal and regional conflicts, political instability, up-surge of sometimes violent interest groups to very destructive terrorism and endless record of cases of violation of public order are 'normal' in a country as Nigeria.

Irrespective of the copiousness of Nigeria's social, political and security challenges, one factor – the use of English Language in Nigeria- has always been the guarding force keeping the bond of unity of Nigeria together. This factor underscores the relevance of a national association such as ours – The National Association of Teachers English in Colleges of Education and Polytechnics in Nigeria. We dare claim that the combined sections of colleges of education and the polytechnics produce – probably second to the primary section – the largest number of educated Nigerians who work to transform Nigeria from moribund or obsolete traditions to state of modern culture and technology.

In essence, it is not gain-saying to express the relevance of our journal – NATECEP Journal of English and Communication Studies – NJECS to our nation's educational system. This journal publishes researches by scholars on issues relating to teaching, learning and general use of English Language in Nigeria. We therefore encourage our readers to always publish research articles in NJECS.

The journal is published annually and consecutively this is the 13th volume. We regret any error in this volume and we affirm our commitment to improvements in subsequent editions.

Aaron Ndu Nwoke
Editor-in-Chief
08065633293, ndunwoke1@yahoo.com

LANGUAGE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN NIGERIA

By

IKE- NWAFOR, GLORIA NKECHI (PhD)

Department Of English & General Studies
Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka
nkikenwafor@yahoo.com

and

JIMOH, OLUMIDE YUSUF

Department Of English & General Studies
Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka
jomokanary@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In Nigeria today, peace is the prime value and most necessary condition for development, yet the most elusive. In the recent time, the country has been bedeviled by series of violent conflicts that have denied its citizens peaceful co-existence which have accounted for socio-economic and political challenges. For instance, the Niger-Delta conflicts, ethno-religious conflict in Jos, Kano riot, and the much dreaded Boko-Haram insurgency in the northern parts of Nigeria among others. This paper therefore examines the roles of language usage in peace and conflict management in Nigeria. It explores how language can be manipulated to modify human behavior and how it can be effectively utilized to restore peace and tranquility to warring areas thereby creating room for socio-economic and political development in the country.

Keywords: Language, violent, conflict, socio-political development, ethno-religious crisis, resolution

INTRODUCTION

There is no gain saying that conflict is an inevitable part of life arising from differences. Conflict is pressure between two or more opposing parties, whether marked by violence or not, based on actual or perceived differences in needs, interests and goals. Conflicts need not end in polarization or impasse as they are inevitable in every human strata. In the relationship among men, boundary disputes, drive for political and economic domination, inequality in disbursement of human and natural resources and marginalization feature prominently. (Eyiodu and Ehinze 2011:70). Areas for potential conflict among parties include: interdependence of people and responsibilities, jurisdictional ambiguities, functional overlap, competition for scarce resources, differences in organizational status and influence, incompatible objectives and methods, differences in behavioural style, differences in information, distortions in communications, unmet expectations, unmet needs or interests, unequal power or authority, misperceptions and others. Conflict is thus, a product of differences and diversity and it can involve emotions, power, principles and values and be influenced by perceptions and needs (Ezeme 2011:47).

In Nigeria, today there is the existence of common centrifugal tendencies manifest in the forms of ethno-political, ethno-religious and militant or youth's crisis and conflicts in the federation. Despite its negative connotation, conflict is a normal part of society. It is not the conflict itself that is a problem but how we respond to it and whether that response is constructive and resolving or destructive and escalating. This paper is concerned with how often we use language as an instrument of resolving the various crises and conflicts that exists in Nigeria. To this end, the paper takes a look at the relationship between language, conflict and resolution, the major conflicts in Nigeria and how has language served as an instrument of mediation and resolution; vis-à-vis, mediates and negotiation.

Language

Many scholars hold the view that language is human. Only human beings possess the capacity for language. In fact, man has been described as articulate mammal. All normal human beings are physiologically and mentally equipped to speak a language – (Alebiosu and Jimoh 2009). Language is the most distinctive attribute of men for processing information and for organizing personal perceptions of self in relation to one's surroundings.

For the purpose of this work, language is seen as the most sophisticated communication tool of life. It is that outstanding human quality which serves as the means and end of behavior ordered and achieved within any given community, society or nation at large. Language is intimately linked both to conceptual development and social experience. According to Crystal (1987), language is conceptualized as having, perhaps, magical, mystical and unique role in capturing the breath of human thought and endeavours.

Conflict: Definitions of conflicts abound. Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2005) gave it the following definitions:

- Struggle for power, property.
- Strong disagreement between people, groups, etc., that results in often angry argument.
- A difference that prevents agreement; disagreement between ideas, feelings etc.
- Competitive or opposing actions in compatibles: antagonistic state or action as of divergent ideas, interest, or persons.
- Mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes or external or internal demands.

Whichever way one looks at it, conflict is obviously the absence of peace.

Peace is a desirable condition, but conflicts are inevitable in any society.

The main objective of this paper is to create an atmosphere of peace in the nation, hence it is not out of place if we look at what peace itself is.

Everybody desires peace and when it is perceived that peace is threatened or absent, people search for it with peaceful approaches or demand for it with force, thus leading to violent situations. Even in violent situations, parties involved still look for a way out, either through non-violent or force methods. As a result of too many violent situations, there is a desperate search for peace and conflict resolutions in our society.

Role of Language in Modifying Behaviour and Conflict Resolution

Sanusi (2001) defines language from the perspectives of social functions and psychology:

"Language is used for phatic communication, that is, as a special regulation, for ceremonial purposes: as an instrument of action; to keep records, to convey orders and information; to influence people; to enable self expression; and to embody and enable thought"

Language is a powerful instrument of communication. It may be used to influence personality, to declare war, to provoke, to incite, to oppose ideas, intentions and actions, to scatter, to condemn, blackmail, insult, destroy, tell lies, claim or testify falsely, to despise, abuse and to generate violence. In another perspective, it could be used to entertain, appeal, inspire, comfort, amuse, appreciate, build, enlighten, educate, establish cordial relationship, settle disputes, modify behavior and make peace within communities.

Conflict resolution is a basic human activity articulated and conducted in forms that significantly vary across cultures. Differences in approach rest in contrasting understandings of the nature of conflict and society.

In Nigeria for example, various conflicts have emanated recently. These conflicts were either political, social or economic. In conflicts, people exhibit various violent behaviours and brandish assorted sophisticated weapons and dangerous charms, amulets and voodooes. To restore peace to these areas the behaviour of the people have to be modified. Language plays prominent role in modifying their behavior and in resolving the violence.

In Niger Delta Area of Nigeria for example, there has been serious agitations over the destruction of the farms and aquatic resources by the multinational oil companies. The people were overwhelmed by the effect of oil spillage and economic degradation. Often times they resorted to violence. Language has consistently been used to modify the behaviours of the militants in that area.

Language has been used in many occasions to modify the behavior of the people. During the regime of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2008, there was chaos and enormous violence in Niger Delta as the people cried foul for complete neglect and environmental degradation. They resulted into violence and vandalism, the President had to constitute a reconciliation committee to mediate and resolve the conflict in that region. Here, language was used. This led to many of them laying down their arms and consequently the militants were granted amnesty in Nigeria.

Language, Conflict and Resolution.

The relationship between language conflict and resolution needs to be stressed here. Language is not just a means of or expressing thought, it is the means of thought itself. Bring the most distinctive attribute of man, language exerts a lot of influence on all human activities: social, political, economic, cultural, religious etc. Man cannot function without a language since the totality of man is expressed in his language. Therefore language plays a major role in portrayal of the individual and national image. It is observed that the use of language can either engender conflicts or lead to conflict resolutions. This being so, every communicator owns sacred, not only to use the language correctly but also to use it incorrectly (abuse). Conflict on the other hand is defined as ideas, ideologies, orientations, perceptions and tendencies. It involves struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values and goals but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (Adebayo, 2005:5-6). Such, conflicts can be social, ethnic, religious, political or economic. Conflict breeds violence.

The unprecedented upsurge, socio-political conflict and ethno-religious violence can be traced to the failure of man to use language appropriately and effectively for as the Chinese philosopher Confucius aptly puts it:

*If the language is not correct then what
Is said is not what is meant.*

*If what is said is not what is meant, then what
ought to be done remains undone .*

in recent times. There was an ethnic violence in Ile-Ife in Southern Nigeria between the Hausas and the Yorubas where about 40 people were brutally murdered. The leaders of both parties were invited to Abuja and language was used to resolve the violence and peace has since returned to Ile-Ife.

Language, the overall function of which is to communicate meaning, is the underlining factor for conflict in any human society and when man uses it functionally, the antidote to his problem is found. (Adedimeji 2004:9). Communal, state and national peace is threatened by decadent linguistic behaviour. In other words, if language is used functionally, conflicts will be resolved or at least reduced drastically.

Language performs variety of functions. It can be used to persuade, motivate, appeal, explain, clarify, justify issues. For example, Sahara reporters (Dec. 22 2013) quoted President Goodluck Jonathan profusely as he was trying to clarify an allegation by former President Olusegun Obasanjo who had accused him of mis-governance and enormous lobby for re-election.

"Your allegation that I asked half a dozen of African presidents to speak to you about my alleged ambition for 2015, is also untrue. I have never requested any African president to discuss with you on my behalf. In our discussion, I mentioned to you that four presidents told me that they were concerned about the political situation in Nigeria and intended to talk to you about it. So far, only three of them have confirmed to me that they had any discussion with you. If I made such a request, why would I deny it?"

It can also be used to register thought, to pass information across to other by counseling or by teaching, to interact with one another "so that we may have the mutual help of one another" and to please and delight ourselves and others. On the other hand, abuse of language can be evident in the following:

First, when men register their thoughts wrongly by the inconstancy of the signification of their words; by which they register for their conception, that which they never conceived, and so deceive themselves. Secondly, when they use words metaphorically; that is in other sense than that they are designed for; and thereby deceive others. Thirdly, by words, when they declared to be their will, which is not. Fourthly, when they use them to grieve one another.... It is but an abuse of speech (Thomas Hebbes in his the leviathan cited in Schorer, et al 1968:463- 464).

Conflict resolution refers to all process-oriented activities that aim to address the underlying causes of misunderstanding and or violence. A conflict is resolved when the situation that gave rise to destructive behaviour and hostile attitudes has been removed ideally; one should work towards resolution of each conflict. Conflict resolution should thus be about understanding the forces behind a conflict so as to bring about a new understanding and to enable improved relations among stakeholders for a purpose.

Major Conflicts in Nigeria

Conflict is the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests. It is a concept that can help to explain many aspects of social life such as social disagreement, conflicts of interests and fights between individuals, groups, or organizations.

Ethnic tension usually results from the perceptive of inequitable access to resources among groups and the fear of marginalization from power, as demonstrated by the mutual distrust between the Igbo and other groups that led to the 1967-70 Biafran Civil war and the sectarian clashes between Hausa and Tivs in Nasarwa State in 2001. According to Agbede (2007) the first major inter-ethnic riot in the country occurred in Kano in 1953. In 1960 and 1964, riots break out in Tiv land as a result of power struggle between the Hausa Fulani and the local Tiv elite class. The third major ethnic crisis was the 1966 pogrom directed against Ndigbo in the North that led to the civil war in 1967. The post civil-war Nigeria did not witness an end to the intermittent outbreaks of ethnic violence characterized by ethnic conspiracies, betrayals and gang ups. The 1990s marked major upsurge of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, of particular mention are the Zango-Kataf clash of May 1992 and Jukun-Tiv clash also in 1992. Between 1999 and 2000, clashes erupted between Ife and Modakeke groups, the OPC and Hausa-Fulani Community in Ketu and Shagamu in Lagos state. The 4-days ethnic clashes involving the Hausa-Fulani group and OPC in October 2000 snowballed into reprisal killing in Kano and Minna. In late February 2000, religious riot gripped Kaduna, turning the city into a killing field as ethnic champions hiding under the charade of Islam and Christianity engaged in primordial orgy of hatred (Ejiodu and Ehinze 2011:74).

Religion has been a victim of many abuses and misuse. Some selfish individuals have used it as a source of power, domination, and suppression. Others have either used it as an effective instrument for exploitation and cheating, or as a means of persecution and or killing of other ethnic group. In 1987, a religious riot occurred because a Kafanchan preacher during his preaching used derogatory language on the Muslims. This attracted sharp and dangerous reactions from the angry Muslims leading to conflicts between the two religious groups which eventually degenerated into ethnic violence. Expectedly, there was loss of lives, property and civil disorders.

In institutions of higher learning, staff and students are usually divided along ethnic lines in matters where academic ability and competence should be the main consideration such as the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and of the President of Students' Union.

The result is that university dons and their students who would have set the pace for other Nigerians to follow on the path of national integration, national consciousness, justice and fairness to all, tolerance of respect for the rights of other citizens irrespective of their tribe or religion, now offer bad models of ethnic strife and rivalry (Nwanyanwu cited in Ike-Nwafor 2005:250).

There was the Warri crises between the Ijaws, Itsekiri and the Urbobos. This riots claimed many lives.

Another example was the Jukun-Tiv clashes of Taraba state. The factions had to return to the religion of their forefathers to execute the war. The recent dreaded Boko-haram insurgency/bombing in the northern parts of Nigeria has caused so much violence, destruction and death. The tide of conflict, however, has changed from ethnic crises to militant unrest and incessant kidnapping of human rights activists, political opponents and innocent citizens, vandalization of oil pipe lines envisaged from 2008 to date.

The political class is no better. They exhibit gross pettiness and hide their inadequacies by whipping up ethnic sentiments. The political Bureau (1988) set up to identify the countries

social, economic and political ills and point the way to progress, identified thirteen attempts to devise an acceptable revenue allocation formula, each generating acrimonious disputes among the various ethnic interest groups. Ethno-political conflicts and electoral conflicts have assumed ethnic or majority-minority colouration. In view of these dimensions of conflicts, various measures have been to avert conflict situation between 1960-to present, such as the adoption of federalism, fundamental rights provisions in the constitution, adoption of a multi-party system, presidentialism, modification of the electoral system, restructuring of the political parties, national political conference, Niger Delta Development Corporation, setting up of National Youths Service Corps. However, these measures could not douse the ethnic tensions as demonstrated by the crises that still erupt from time to time.

Language as an Instrument of Conflict Resolution

Language plays enormous roles in conflict resolution. Conflict as action is human driven. It cannot occur on its own without an operator which is human being. As noted above, there have been numerous conflicts in Nigeria. The government has tried various means to restore peace in the areas that were violence ridden.

To install peace, there are several non-violent means of conflict resolution connected with the use of language that could be used; some of them are:

Negotiation

Negotiation implies discussions among people. It has to do with an organization or form of carrying out a plan through some norms that are socially acceptable in achieving a predetermined goal or achieving a significant or high degree of purposeful steps taken or actions through dialogue.

In negotiation, Akinawonu (2006) opines that dialogue must be constructively employed in dispute or conflict situations in order to impact positively on the peaceful resolution of conflicts. He further stresses that:

"Since the rule of law ensures peace rather than violence in the country, and knowing that dialogue is a necessary path to peace, it inevitably means that dialogue is a fundamental factor in ensuring the rule of law. In cases where there is no very radical conflict of essential principles, ill feeling may commonly be alleviated by face-to-face discussion"

A lot of people are of the opinion that lack of opportunity for explanation and dialogue is responsible for misunderstanding and suspicions between parties in conflicts.

Adequate and effective use of language, therefore, is key in negotiation which is a direct process of dialogue and discussion taking place between at least two parties who are faced with conflict situation or a dispute.

The government of Nigeria, during the administration of President Umaru Yar'adua invited the Niger Delta militants leaders for dialogue and negotiation. It was the negotiation that resulted to amnesty granted to militants and they surrendered their dangerous weapons. When they agreed to shield their sword, many of them were rehabilitated, a lot of them were sponsored abroad to learn trades. When they came back, they were placed on monthly salaries, which they are still enjoying till date.

Mediation

Mediation is a process of managing negotiation by a third party, realizing that the two parties in a conflict have agreed to resolve their problem. Beer and Stief (1997) defines negotiation as "any process for resolving dispute in which another person helps the parties

negotiate settlement". In mediation, a versatile, highly responsible and knowledgeable individual or group of individuals are used to settle the conflicts. These people would have to use language meticulously to resolve the issues and proffer lasting solutions to them, hence language and effective communication are essential ingredients for conflict resolution.

In bringing back peace, the government may use prominent people who are well respected and who can manipulate language very well to negotiate for peace. Individuals may also hide under the freedom of speech to air their views and opinions on issues that bother on crisis. For example, former Federal Minister for Information and Ijaw leader, Chief Edwin Clark, as reported in the Vanguard Newspaper of 18th May, 2016 asked President Muhammadu Buhari to emulate his predecessors, Late President Umaru Yar'adua and former President Goodluck Jonathan by dialoging with the Niger Delta militants whose activities were threatening the peace, stability and possible existence of Nigeria.

According to him, Late Yar'adua brought ex-militants to the negotiation table which led to positive effects on the nation's economy. In his exact words,

"I again make the same call and appeal today this time in a more shrill voice! Though the perceptions have not changed on the evolving kaleidoscope of national political administration, I still remain firmly convinced that the destruction of our national economic golden goose is not a viable option... I strongly call on the Niger Delta Avengers and others of like mind to desist forthwith from their activities and embrace dialogue as the best means of having their grievances assuaged.

This is a very direct way of using language to make peace in a crisis ridden area. Nobel laureate. Prof. Wole Soyinka has recently been appointed to serve with other international mediators to mediate between the Nigerian government and militants to resolve lingering crisis in the Niger Delta region. The Niger Delta Avengers and other militants in recent time have been bombing oil installations in the Niger Delta, thus crippling economy of the nation.

The international mediators as reported by PM News of 20th August, 2016 had met in London after holding preliminary discussions with President Muhammadu Buhari on how to resolve the conflicts in the Niger Delta.

In the same vein conflicts have pervaded the northern part of the country. These ranged from religious to socio-political crisis. Prominent among these conflicts in recent time is the Boko Haram insurgency. The Federal Government has initiated various peace moves to negotiate peace with them. The sects leaders have been appealed to severally to shield their sword.

In the Guardian Newspaper of 30th September, 2016. Governor Kashim Shettima of Borno state was reported to have appealed profusely to the terrorist and the "Boko Haram" to shield their sword and allow peace to reign in the country. He was so subtle and laconic in his choice of words.

Recommendations

As a result of the enormous importance of language in resolving conflicts in Nigeria, and having seen the practicability and its efficacy in resolving the recent crisis that have rocked the peace of the nation the following recommendations are proffered:

- a) Many communications channels should be opened and utilized for settling disputes.

- b) Refined and subtle language should be effectively used during the process of exchanging information between individuals, groups, communities and parties in conflicts or disputes.
- c) Confidence should be built in the mediators and the parties in conflicts.
- d) Language framing and new agenda settings by the mediator, should always be objective rather than subjective.
- e) Language laws and codes should be reviewed by law makers to promote standard.
- f) Researchers in language should be encouraged and their reports be adopted into uses by both mediators and the government.
- g) A multi functional language approach to conflict resolutions should be encouraged.
- h) The abuses of language which undermine the aim of peaceful co-existence can be resolved by simply avoiding the Hebbesian abuses of speech especially in politics and in religion. People should try as much as possible to improve their literacy level as well as their communicative competence in English.

Conclusion

This paper examines the usefulness of language, in conflict resolution in Nigeria. There is no doubting the fact that like in other societies, violence often occur in Nigeria. It ranges from socio-political to ethno-religious crisis. In all these, language has played prominent roles in restoring peace. It becomes obvious therefore, that through accurate, laconic and subtle usage of language, nerves could be calmed, hearts that are violence ridden can be appealed to, and tension can be diffused. Frankly speaking, the ability and willingness to accept and allow peace to reign, firstly lies in the mind and secondly, resides in actions, since there is a relationship between language and thought, it becomes crystal clear that it is through appropriate and effective use of language that peace and tranquility can remain permanent in Nigeria.

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