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Language as a Tool For National Integration and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria, like many other societies in the world, has witnessed unprecedented conflicts in various sectors of the national economy. Conflicts, in whatever form, has a propensity of stalling the development of a nation, thus leading to national disintegration. To avert this, and to promote a nation where integration is paramount and conflict effectively managed, a strong non-lethal weapon is needed. The strong weapon needed here is neither gun nor missile but the use of language. Language plays a vital role in any society. It is the social tool that ties people together. Just like the biblical story of the tower of Babel, where the people succeeded in building a tower that almost reached heaven because they spoke the same language, so it is with any language and its speakers. It is a powerful and indispensable tool for national integration and conflict resolution.

Language is universally accepted as the most effective instrument used by man to interpret the challenges in his daily life activities. It permeates his thoughts and mediates his relationship with others (Babalola, 1998). Language fosters unity in a social group; and by extension, it promotes national cohesion (Okunlola, 2008). Language is not only recognised by man as a peace-making instrument among people and nations but has also been advocated in the spiritual spectrum as such. Ker (2010: .3) avers:

There is a sense in which development may be said to defy the boundaries of language and culture, yet to understand it well,

there is a need to conceptualise it in such a way that it makes sense to the generality of the people who are its target. These concepts, needless to say, are articulated through language and as long as we keep the majority of our people unable to communicate with each other through language, so long shall we be unable to realize our development goals.

This stance is corroborated by Udofot (2010: .5) who submits that language is a form of action which is intended to generate reactions and counter-reactions. Hence, it can be deployed in strengthening socio-political and economic ideologies that promote peaceful co-existence among the heterogeneous peoples in the country.

In view of the foregoing coupled with the prominent roles a language plays in a society, the focus of this paper is to explore the roles of language as a veritable instrument of achieving national integration and conflict resolution in Nigeria.

Language Situation in Nigeria and its Implication for Linguistic Mistrust/Suspicion

According to Schaefer (2006:62), language is the foundation of every culture and it provides meanings and symbols for all aspects of culture. Hence, the most prominent distinguishing factor between a cultural group and another is language. Taking this stance from another angle is Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which states that a people's language determines their perception of things around them because the language helps to focus the attention of its users to certain phenomena rather than others (Lyons, 1981). Thus, it can be said

that an element serves as a binding factor for any group of people, and this element is language. This aligns with Cohen's view that "communal life is possible only because members of a community possess a set of shared meanings, enabling them to make coherent sense of the world... The mother tongue is the main repository of a community's common sense" (Cohen, 2001:26). The mother tongue, in this instance, refers to language which is expected to be well understood by every member of that community. Thus, whatever language that has been chosen to be used must be one which brings about unity or binds the users together.

However, Lawal (1989) states that a major problem facing the developing nations of the world, especially those that are multi-ethnic and multilingual in their composition is how to integrate their diverse ethnic linguistic groups. People of a particular ethnic group and language see each other as one and often times do not feel secure around people of a different language. The fact still remains that people of a language believe that they perceive the world differently from other linguistic groups and this assumption psychologically constrains them to operate within the confinement of their linguistic group. Of course, this attitude cannot promote development. The 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognized three languages as the major languages and gave them a reputable role for conducting National Assembly affairs. The promotion and recognition of these ethnic groups was vehemently contested by the speakers of minority languages. They feel isolated. To them, our people have been neglected.

Obviously, language has given them that feeling of togetherness. Oha (1999) cited in Mbakaogu (2002) confirms these criticisms based on the suspicion that language expresses and transmits culture or is perceived as a signifier of cultural identity. This means that the promotion of any language invariably is the promotion of the culture of the speakers of that language. People see their language tied to their culture and perception of the world. Consequently, any attempt to promote any language in place of theirs is imagined as an attempt to deny them of the world they live in. This is why a linguistically heterogeneous country like Nigeria needs a generally acceptable language as a tool for national integration and resolution of prevalent crisis.

According to Adegbija (1997), in Nigeria, there are over four hundred (400) indigenous languages and dialects spoken by its peoples. He groups the languages into three: exoglossic, endoglossic and contact or pidgin languages. According to him, the exoglossic include English, French and Arabic while the endoglossic are the indigenous languages and the Nigerian Pidgin English. The English language which is one of the three exoglossic languages occupies the enviable position of the official language. The language is functionally deployed in every facet of Nigeria's national life. It performs diverse functions ranging from unifying, integrative, communicative to official functions.

The language situation in Nigeria has implications for national development. There seems to be a consensus that for national integration, cohesion and development to thrive, there must be a

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language capable and acceptable by all to propel the nation's affairs. In a multilingual society like Nigeria, language can serve as an effective instrument for national development and unity; it can also turn a weapon for marginalization, destabilisation or exclusion. Without English language, integration would have remained a mirage in Nigeria with so many social frictions unresolved.

The endoglossic has not been of much value, most especially in the area of integration, to the entire country except to each speech community. However, Spencer (1962) sees this situation as a barrier to national unity and development. The situation is capable of generating bad feelings of jealousy, rancour and ethnic domination and overall collapse of the entire nation. It therefore poses a challenge not only for the co-existence of the citizens but also for language planning and policy. To break this language barrier, there is the need for a common language to facilitate a common and effective communication.

Adapting the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis to the Nigerian linguistic situation, it can be observed that different linguistic units or tribes in Nigeria have diverging perceptions about almost every issue because they do not see the same issue in the same way owing to their language differences. To a large extent, this explains why the densely multilingual nature of the Nigerian nation engenders different conflicting circumstances stemming from the linguistic front. With the heterogenous linguistic units, there has been a lot of problem for national cohesion. This is because as a language group struggles for political and economic dominance, so do other language groups

strive to attain relevance, and the resultant effect of this is conflict as well as lack of national integration.

For instance, a typical Hausa man feels threatened whenever a Yoruba man speaks his language to his fellow, especially when the Hausa man is in the south-west or any Yoruba dominated environment. Similarly, a Yoruba man feels uncomfortable when an Ibo man uses Igbo language because of mutual unintelligibility and other related shortcomings.

Nigeria is a multilingual nation where language itself has become a conflicting issue for several years. Speakers of each of the endoglossic languages would want their language adopted as the national language. Yuka (2010:223) says that successive Nigerian governments have resisted these calls out of fear "... that such a move will rekindle the language loyalties of ethnic minorities which government interprets as a threat to national integration...." This situation places language as a human factor for the promotion of unity, national consciousness and mass mobilisation for national development. Language therefore becomes the nation's most important asset for national development and conflict resolution.

The Key Concepts: 'Integration' and 'Conflict'

It is pertinent at this juncture to understand the meanings of the fundamental terms in this paper—integration and conflict.

Integration

The Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2007) defines

integration as the process of becoming a full member of a group of society and becoming involved completely in its activities. The activities in this sense can be social, political, educational and economic. Integration is viewed by Gardner and Lambert (1972) as identifying with and sharing the values associated with the language and culture of other people. Basing its meaning on the anthropological plane, Friday-Otun (2007) refers to integration as coming together of people of different colour, race, language and religion.

Conflict

Conflict is a situation characterised by the inability of those concerned to iron out their differences. It thus starts from simple complaints and it then escalates to an unimaginable proportion (Fajana, 2000). Hellriegel, Slocum and Woodman as cited in Akinbode and Ebeloku (2010:82) define conflict as "any situation in which there are incompatible goals, cognitions or emotions within or between individuals or groups that lead to opposition or antagonistic interaction". To Robins (1998), conflict occurs when one party perceives that another party has frustrated or is about to frustrate his / her effort.

Similarly, Robbins and Judge (2013:480) define conflict as a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has or is about to negatively affect something the first party cares about. Hence, there can be instances of conflict whenever there is a clash of interest. And the inability to make sure that every party gets what exactly they want or reaches a compromise always creates a problem.

According to Akinbode and Ebeloku (2010) conflict can be constructive or destructive, beneficial or detrimental, and functional or dysfunctional. Whatever the type, what is important is the weapon that can be used to resolve it. The position of this paper is that language can serve as a potent tool of resolving conflict.

Integration, Conflict and National Development

There can never be any meaningful development unless there is integration and national cohesion. There can never be any development in an environment where there is crisis. In view of this, Cohen (2001:6) asserts that unless a country can "contain disagreement and control violence, it has little hope of surviving. For this reason, the subject of conflict resolution has been of great theoretical and practical interest to researchers at both the domestic and international levels." Thus, it is clear that there will be instances of conflict but such conflicts must be resolved so that the country can live in peace because without peaceful coexistence, there cannot be any meaningful development.

Words Mar or Make: Examples from the Quran and the Bible

Injunctions on how to use language as a weapon of peace abound in Holy Scriptures. The holy scripture of Islam, Quran, advocates creating and fostering peace and unity. To begin with, the religion of Islam, which etymologically denotes peace, recognises the inevitability of multiple religions in human societies thus, calls for dialogue and understanding among various heterogeneous adherents,

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and warns against forceful attempts to win converts. It says: "O people of scripture (Jews and Christians): come to a word that is just between us and you" (Chp. 3: Vs. 64). Here, the locution aims at calling for dialogue as the best means of avoiding the differences that can trigger violence.

Similarly, the Holy Quran warns Muslims "not to insult those whom they worship besides Allah, lest they insult Allah wrongly without knowledge" (Chp.6: Vs. 108). These quotations advocate inter-religious tolerance and harmony through dialogue and avoidance of insult. Language here is clearly identified as a tool for peace and harmony in the society.

Apart from its role as a propeller of national integration and conflict avoidance and resolution, language is strongly emphasised and concretised as an action. Thus, the Quran admonishes for "kind words and forgiving of faults" which it describes as being "better than charity followed by injury" (Chp. 2: Vs. 263). Juxtaposing language with charity here is noteworthy. The use of language to persuade, assure and re-assure dejected and pessimistic people was said to be better than paltry gesture followed by tongue-lashing. What is good for the goose is also good for the gander. This is epitomised in the command given in the Quran that the prophet of Islam was advised to "speak to him mildly perhaps he may accept admonition..." (Chp. 20: Vs. 44). There is a strong warning against "speaking harshly" (Chp. 3: Vs. 159).

There are many examples in the Holy Bible to show how words can mar or make a human being. However, one of such instances will be considered from 1 Samuel

(Chp. 25). The passage contains the story of David and Nabal. Prior to the time of the incidence between David and Nabal, David had been anointed by Prophet Samuel to be king after Saul. Hence, Saul wanted to kill him by all means. This made David to become a wanderer, moving from one village to another in avoidance of King Saul. Although David was a very strong warrior and commander of Saul's army, he did not want to confront Saul because he said he did not want to kill an anointed man of God. Being a fugitive due to the pursuit of his life by King Saul, David with his army was hungry; so, he sent some of his soldiers to Nabal for aid. He asked his soldiers to tell Nabal thus:

And thus shall ye say to him (Nabal) that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast... Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David (1 Sam 25, Vs. 6-8).

In response to David's plea and supplication, Nabal sent the following words in verses 10 and 11 to him: "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?" Nabal's words infuriated David, so, much that David decided to kill him and his entire household. However, one of Nabal's servants rushed to meet Nabal's wife, Abigail, and told her how soft David

had spoken to their master and how harsh their master had replied. He also added that David had planned to wipe out Nabal's household. On hearing this, the woman quickly went to meet David and spoke soft words to him, pleading for her life and those of her entire household. David was convinced, so, he changed his mind about destroying the man's household.

Besides, in the new testament, the epistle of Paul the apostle to the Galatians, he warns Christians not to provoke one another (Gal. Chp. 5 : Vs. 26). The implicature of the word 'provoke' is that language could be used as a tool to destroy ones relationship with another and that should be avoided. We should be conscious of our words for us not to instigate violence. From these examples, it can be seen that in both the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran, there are instances in which words can either mar or make a man.

In addition, Leech (1981) comments that all kinds of conflict and pressure arise between one individual and another or between one group and another, and language takes a major part in the interactions. Often times, misconceptions arise from the use of words. Akin (2003) cited in Jija (2012) observes that misapplication of language especially the use of inflammatory utterances or words is one of the most common causes of conflict.

The Role of Language in National Integration and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

Language ignites conflicts of different kinds which foment disunity and hinder the growth and development of a society. Similarly, language can also be used as a tool for conflict resolution.

Orjime (2002) cited in Jija (2012) sees language as a sure way of bringing about disharmony and by extension underdevelopment. Inappropriate use of language brings disunity in a country while appropriate use of it promotes unity.

National integration is geared towards ensuring security consciousness in the minds of the inhabitants of a nation. It promotes peace and harmony. It instils awareness of oneness and common identity. For instance, in Nigeria, a Yoruba and an Ibo seeing themselves as one, irrespective of their distinct culture and language, is a strong sign of integration and development. Hanna (2012) states that several methods and strategies have been adopted to retain and sustain Nigeria as an integrated entity. For instance, the language policy is enshrined in section 51 of the Nigeria constitution of 1979 and 1989 with the statement of intention towards achieving nationism and nationalism. It recognizes only three indigenous languages and elevates English language as the language of administration and its operational scope; and by extension, the national language (Akindele & Adegbite, 1992:80). Specifically, the 1981 National Policy on Education states that government wants the medium of instruction in the primary school to be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community at the elementary stage but at a later stage prefers the use of English. The introduction of English has recorded success. Similarly, the introduction of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 1973 by the Federal Government has facilitated cross linguistic and cross-cultural interactions in the country because it further promotes the use

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of English as a language of national communication, co-operation and understanding.

However, in most cases, the option of language has rarely been assessed. Multifarious solutions have also been proffered to end the constant communal clashes on land borders, religious crises and political differences to no avail. What other means cannot achieve, language can. This is explicitly explained in the words of Eva Engholm as cited in Adeyanju (2005:184) that:

Language is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lose the people. If we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to untold riches, riches which cannot be guessed as from the other side of the other.

This further explains the importance of language in keeping the people together. Language, according to Bamgbose (1994:1), "makes cooperative effort and joint action possible". Amayo and Bamgbose as cited in Elugbe (1994) lend credence to this with the affirmation that integration cannot be effectively achieved in Nigeria except people therein communicate with one another in a language they all understand. Language, most especially the English language, performs an integrative role in Nigeria. According to Ogunsiji (2001), it is the symbol of national unity in Nigeria; it is one of those things that bind the country together.

Multilingual contexts, according to Udaya (2003) are in two categories. The first category is almost anthropomorphized by its speakers. They grow to find that they speak the language. Udaya cites

Bangladesh as an example of this type. The second category views language as a skill. Such society uses different languages for different purposes, i.e. one or some for interaction and one or other for transaction. Nigeria is a good example here where indigenous languages are used for internal communication within a limited scope of an ethnic boundary and English as an official and general language.

The concept of conflict resolution can be thought to encompass the use of non-violent measures by conflicting parties in an attempt to promote effective resolution (Robert & Garton, 2009) as cited in Dalung (2013). However, Forsyth (2009) cited in Dalung (2013) says that conflict resolution is the method and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful resolution of conflict between societies by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of the group. There is no conflict that cannot be resolved with an adequate measure. Conflicts can be resolved through the use of language. The power in the use of language cannot be overemphasised. According to a Yoruba adage, there are two ways by which you can apologise for an offence committed. What this means in essence is that language can be used to either resolve an issue or aggravate it. Soothing words can turn a crazy man into a stupid fellow instantaneously.

Humans through their utterances persuade and threaten, encourage and discourage, make and mar, fix and fuel issues. However, the consequences of what is started by language in a room could end up in doom. Eternal enmity, wanton

killings and destructions among individuals or between nations are caused or aggravated by utterances. Therefore, linguists and language philosophers, including sociologists and anthropologists, should look beyond the pedagogical or structural values of language to its functional capabilities. This functional use of language with respect to conflict resolution may not be as explicit as it is in other facets of language use. It is, however, unconsciously appreciated by language users during interactions. People are mindful of the words they use and the ones used on them. Sometimes, it suggests human reactions and countenance. Words can trigger violence or spur peace. It is an indispensable tool that should be handled carefully if conflict resolution and national integration is desirable.

On the international scene, words have led to wars when they are not constructively deployed. As words precede wars, words conclude wars. After all, the unfolding events in international politics now reveal that victory on the battle ground does not signify the end of a crisis. Conflict resolution has been the biggest challenge in multilingual nations while the factor of ethnicity prompts most of these challenges. Positive Language Attitude as Key to National Integration and Conflict Resolution

Attitude is a psychological attribute. It is a personal disposition or behaviour towards a thing which is either positive or negative. It may be individual or collective perception. It depends on values. That is why a person's or group of people's attitude could be different from that of others. Their values are simply different. They perceive and appreciate things

differently. Bainbridge (1994: 400) defines attitude as "the positive or negative evaluation of an object with anything, tangible or intangible, capable of being the object of an attitude". Similarly, Atkinson in Adekunle (1995: 59) defines attitudes as "likes or dislikes affinities for and aversions to objects, persons, groups, situations, or any other identifiable aspects of the environment including abstract ideas and social policies". Moreover, Hogg and Vaughan (2005) describe attitude as a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups or symbols. These definitions indicate that attitudes can either be positive or negative; favourable or unfavourable; tangible or intangible; people-focused or object-focused, among others. It covers almost, if not all aspects of human lives. Hence, its importance cannot be overemphasized in the discussion of language.

Fasold (1984) believes that attitude towards a language is often mirrored in the attitude towards the members of that speech community, while Brown (2000) confirms that language attitude refers to a set of beliefs that the learner, for instance, holds towards members of the target language group and also towards his own culture. People see language and culture as two interwoven phenomena of a people which cannot be separated. Each reflects in the other and an attitude towards one is invariably the same for the other. When they hate your culture, they hate your language and that culminates in disunity. When there is a positive attitude towards other people's language, there will be a high possibility of peaceful coexistence

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among people of different linguistic background. However, there will be rancour and acrimony among people who have negative language attitudes towards other peoples' languages. It has been said that one of the major barriers to communication is mindset. Thus, whenever someone gets into a conversation or a discussion with a negative mindset, it has a great deal of implication for national development.

However, there are factors which influence the attitude and mindset of people towards a language some of which include:

1. Socio-cultural Factor

As it was earlier stated, people see culture of a people embedded in their language. They associate language with the belief and values of the speakers of that language. Therefore, if the culture of a people is appreciated the attitude of other people towards the language will be positive and that will foster peaceful co-existence. For instance, the attitude of a Yoruba and an Ibo towards each other's language may be different due to the different cultural values attached to the languages. Yoruba uses the particle 'e' when addressing elders while Igbo language does not have such. An Igbo man, for this reason, will have positive attitude towards Yoruba language and the people, but a Yoruba man's attitude towards Igbo may not be the same because the language does not acknowledge elders, it is considered as culturally poor on the cline of politeness.

2. Historical Factor

History plays important role when it comes to decision making even in the aspect of language. People often associate

language with the history of the owners of the language, especially, in a second language situation. Past occurrences and events sometimes propels people's attitude towards a language. The negative attitude of Nigerians towards the English language is linked to the fact that it is the language of the colonial master. Therefore, they see English as a language of intimidation and suppression.

3. Religious Factor

People appreciate and have positive attitude towards a language attached to their religion. Since Arabic is considered the language of Quran, a Muslim is likely to have a positive attitude towards it and a Christian may not. Likewise, a Catholic's attitude towards Latin is expected to be positive since it is the language associated with the Roman Catholic.

4. Economic Factor

The economic value attached to a particular language determines the people's interest and attitude towards the language. English Language, in Nigeria, is a language of great economic value. A person's performance in it often suggests his/her chances of gaining a certain height which is of economic benefit and this makes most people to have a positive attitude towards it. They want to study it. They want to learn and speak the language for assurance of good job. For instance, many countries of the world have developed interest in Chinese language for the purpose of business transactions and technological exchange.

Conclusion

To sum up, we need to re-evaluate our approach to understanding the nature of conflicts and tensions that have to do

with language, race and ethnicity. We also have to re-assess how we could possibly relate them to nation-building. It is quite obvious that language plays a catalyst role in national integration and conflict resolution in Nigeria. There is no short cut between language and affairs of the Nigerian populace. As also established in this paper, English language has conferred a lot of privileges on Nigeria, most especially in the area of national integration and globalization since it is the only official language Nigeria adopts. Citing Oyetade (2003), it is however pertinent to state at this juncture that Nigeria has no defined comprehensive language policy which would address the varying language problems. What the country seems to have been using as the guideline is the language clause in the National Policy on Education. Hence, it is recommended that scholars on national language issue, in conjunction with the appropriate governmental agency, should come up with a workable and vibrant national language policy for better integration of Nigeria.

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