

LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

Nigeria is experiencing a build up to a foreseeable (though preventable) crisis of a gigantic magnitude. Though the nation has had several tales of insecurity over time, it seems not to have learnt from the experiences. That is perhaps why the present democratic experiment has been characterized by several shades of crisis situation; From her genocide in the name of civil war to several ethno-religious riots, Boko Haram insurgency, Niger Delta resource control agitation, Biafra secession threats, cases of armed robbery and kidnapping to recession. All these are causes for concern. This is why this paper examines language and communication as important factors in national security. It submitted that language and communication are double edged swords that can provoke hostilities and be used to reduce or remove hostilities. It recommended amongst others that citizens should be mindful of what they say, how it is said and when if peace and tranquility is to be achieved.

Keywords: communication, language, security, communicative competence

Introduction

Nigeria as a nation has been plagued by national insecurity for quite some time now. It has been a tale of one security challenge over another, especially since the return to democratic rule in 1999. As noted by Okeke (2012) the present democratic dispensation has been characterized by several shades of crisis situations which seem to have aggravated the existing unresolved conflicts.

The nation has witnessed genocide in the name of civil war between 1967 and 1970; a war was caused by ethnic chauvinism and tribal intolerance, according to Oladeji Ogundepo & Oduola (2016i) who posit further that:

Today, Nigeria is experiencing a build up to a foreseeable (though preventable) crisis of a gigantic dimension. Book haram is decimating the Nigerian population; Niger delta militants are destroying oil installations thereby applying oil economy, Biafra apologists are threatening secession and Arewa Youths are bracing up for the challenge .

All these indices of insecurity are sources of concern on the unity and development of the country. That is why this paper has as its focus how language and communication induce crisis and how language and communication can be effectively deployed to stem the tide of security challenges bedeviling Nigeria.

The security challenge inducing situations include ethno-religious crises, disputes over territories, environment agitations and resources controls, perceived political marginalization and social discrimination.

The current economic recession which is claimed to be the worst for Nigeria in the last 29 years has also added to prevalence of criminal activities and security challenges.

As noted by Oladeji, and Oduwole 2017

the current economic hardship is biting so hard that many state governments owe workers salaries to the tune of twenty-one months. Kogi is a case in point. Osun State has been paying half salaries to workers for more than a year while Oyo State tertiary institutions are only paid 25% of workers salaries.....

“A hungry man,” they say, in “an angry man”. Anger, itself is a small madness. So an angry man can easily be predisposed to involving himself in on-towards activities that precipitate a breach of the peace. This has been the Nigerian experience in recent times.

Language, Communication and Security Conceptualized

Any meaningful attempt to examine how language and communication precipitates crises and at the same time act as means of engendering national security must as a matter of necessity situate the terms language communication and security in proper perspectives.

Language has been viewed from several perspectives by various scholars. Ogunsola & Babatunde (2017) described language as a tool for National security. They opined that language is a system of communication that enables human beings to cooperate and live in harmony among themselves. In a similar vein, Mc. Laughlin (2006) described language as the system of arbitrary verbal symbols that speakers put in order according to a conventional code to communicate ideas and feelings to influence the behaviour of others.

To Okeke (2012), language is a compendium of words, phrases, clauses and sentences which a user chooses from and string together, systematically, to express meanings that are appropriate in a particular contexts. It is part of human inheritance and of course, the major distinguishing attribute of human beings from other animals (Fromkin et al 2003, Cook & Newson 2007, Ogundepo, Foyewa and Alabi 2008, Ogundepo & Okedigba 2013).

Essien (1998) saw language as a system of structured arbitrary words and symbols by means of which human beings make meaning and communicate with each other in a given community.

Gonwalk (2000) submits that man cannot function without a language all human activities have language at their nucleus. This view is corroborated by Iwarra (2005) who said that language and communication are the heart of human relations. Perhaps, this is why Ogundepo, Alabi & Okedigba (2008) opined that language refers to the means through which members of a social group exchange ideas, information and the like; a means of self expression, a powerful instrument of social interaction and the most potent means of sending and receiving information.

A careful examination of the above definitions reveals that the single line that runs through all of them is communication. This is because communication is the essence of a language. Without a language, communication cannot adequately and effectively take place. If there is no need for communication a language becomes less important. That's, perhaps is why some scholars describe language and communication as two sides of a coin. (Alabi et al 2006, Adejumo 2004) Ogundepo (2011) asserted that it is through the use of language (in whatever form) that any meaningful attempt can be made to communicate.

Communication

Communication is a very important factor in any human community. It is a means through which relationships are initiated, formed, maintained and ended. As a concept, communication is hard to be pinned down to an iron cast definition. There are as many definitions as authors and scholars of communication. However, as remarked by Jegede (2009), none of these definitions has been found "perfectly adequate".

The encyclopedia Richard's (1928) definition of communication is one of the first and in some way, still the best definition as a discrete aspect of human enterprise. In it, Richard opined that:

Communication takes place when one mind so acts upon its environment that another man is influenced and in that other mind, an experience occurs which is like the experience in the first mind and is caused in part by that experience.

Adejumo (2004) submitted that communication is a process of passing a message across to another person from a source. It is a transference of a message from a sender to the receiver through a channel (Ayoade et al 2008) To Ogundepo, Alabi & Olatayo (2011), communication involves a mutual exchange and interaction of those belonging to a community. This exemplifies Eyre's (1983) submission that communication is not just giving and receiving of understandable information but the transfer of a message to another party so that it can be understood and acted upon.

Trenholms and Jensen (1995) defined communication as the process whereby humans collectively create and regulate social reality. It a vehicle for social cooperation, co-existence and understanding between two parties which cannot hold unless the two parties engage in creative meaning (Jegade 2009).

Watzlawick Bearin and Jackson's (1968) assertion that one *cannot* not communicate captures the importance and indispensability of communication to all human communities. This simple but yet profound statement is true of all times, in all situations, contexts and circumstances. As observed by Soola and Ayoade (2000) communication is both an indispensable and unavoidable human activity. Even, a deliberate refusal to communicate, for example, communicates something to someone somewhere (Oguundepo & Okedigba 2013).

From the above, communication can be seen as the process by which members of a human community exchange ideas, feelings, opinions and the like with a view to maintaining a social order and good relationships and interactions. It is a process of information transaction through effective use of language.

As stated earlier, language and communication are inseparable. They are mutually interdependent. However, as noted by Okeke (2012):

Knowing a language is not simply a matter of knowing how to encode a message and transmit to a second party, who then decodes it in order to understand what we intended to say.....it also embodies our ability to use language accurately, appropriately and flexibly to be communicative competent.

By this, it is meant that a language user needs more than a mastery of the rules of language, grammatical correctness etc. to communicate effectively. It must include knowledge of what to say how to say it and when. An effective communicator should know that not saying a thing (silence) is in itself, a form of communication.

Security

Sobola and Sotoyinbo (2011) see security as a potential liberation and safety from physical, political economic socio-economic or psychological danger or attack. They opined further that security means a protection or safety of people against all kinds of molestation

from external/military attack, economic want, poverty, illiteracy, diseased, ill health political humiliation, or suppression, social exploitation and criminal acts. A nation is secure when citizens are free from threats to life and property, enjoy socio-economic well-being and live in peace and tranquility.

Okeke (2012) described security as development. He argued that security is much more than military response and management of threats (internal or external). It is beyond military force:

.....security is not traditional military activity, though it encompasses it, security is not military hardware, though it may include it. Security is development and without development, there can be no security.

Corroborating this view Ogunsola & Babatunde (2017) asserted that security is more than inclination of state protection against any attack, especially external invasion. They agreed with Jega (2007) that it consists a situation in which citizens can be liberated, live in harmony and safety, participate fully in the process of governance, enjoy protection of fundamental human rights, have access to resources and necessities of life and inhabit in an environment which is conducive to their health and well-being”

If one agrees with the views expressed above about security, then it is convenient to assert that Nigeria is actually grappling with security challenges. All the indices of security as espoused by the definitions cannot be said to be fully available in the nation. Rather there are several manifestations of indices of insecurity.

Language, communication as precursors to crises and insecurity.

Language as a distinct and invaluable human heritage is the most veritable means through which human beings cooperate among themselves in a given community. It is used by human beings to express themselves and manipulate objects in the environments. Man uses language to share information, for group identity socialization, social grooming, social stratification and entertainments. It brings people together for interactive purposes and for cooperation.

As pointed out by Cook and Newson (2007):

Language is of human inheritance; it is our genes. However, just like other inherited attitudes, this does not rule that variations between individuals as some way be more linguistic competent or communicative competent than others.

These differences in levels of language competence and certain other variables affect the result of every communicative encounter. Okeke (2012) rightly opined that what we do with language can have positive or negative consequences in view of this he suggested that to maintain continuity as well as achieve peace and success in language use, people should constantly and strategically figure out what to say, how to say things and how to understand what others say in the process of interact with others.

A seeming harmless expression can trigger violence of unimaginable magnitude if not well handled. An example is the religious riots that engulfed Nigeria in 2002. As reported by Ogundepo and Okedigba (2013).

The 2002 edition of Miss World beauty pageant was to be held in Nigeria, but there was a general resentment and opposition from the Nigerian Muslim community. Isioma Daniel, a fashion writer with Thursday Newspaper made this remarks: “The Muslim thought it was immoral to bring 92 women to Nigeria and ask them to reveal in vanity. What would Mohammed think? In all honesty, he would probably have chosen a wife from them”.

This seeming harmless statement which the author found “funny and light hearted” threw the nation into an orgy of violence that left more than 200 persons dead, over 1000 injured and more than 11,000 people rendered homeless. In spite of a retract of the story and an apology by the Newspaper, its office in Kaduna was burnt down and a ‘fatwa’ was issued against the author by the Deputy Governor of Zamfara State in a broadcast of 26th November 2002 when he said:

Like Salman Rushdine, the blood of Isioma Daniel can be shed. It is abiding on all Muslims whereas they are to consider the killing of the writer as a religious duty. (BBC New 2002)

Other examples include the Danish cartoon crises of 2006 and the Kano religious riot of 2012. A young tailor joked with his neighbor over a piece of cloth he sewed using an adage considered debasing the person integrity and divinity of prophet Muhammed (Pbn). The tailor showed a newly sewn cloth to his neighbor describing the style as *Annabi Ya Shiga Kasuwa*, meaning, the Prophet has entered market. Angry Muslim youths took to the streets of Bichi in Kano leading to the burning of churches and houses and loss of lives.

President Muhammad Buhari’s post-election remarks of the 2011 presidential elections was said to be responsible for the violence that attended the declaration of the results where several lives were lost including those of innocent youths serving in the NYSC scheme Amanze Obi made reference to this on 17, May 2012 when he said:

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

Chowwen (2006), through a study, revealed that out of nineteen variables identified as conflict inducing in the forty-one organizations sampled, communication ranked first. This corroborated Meyer’s (1999) assertion that conflict arises out of ineffective communication. This implies that achievement of a violence free nation, to a large extent, is determined by communicative competence. Little wonder Carey (1975) asserted that communication is a

symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed. It is a very important phenomenon which informs the way a view of reality is perceived, understood and constructed.

A Yoruba adage *oro ni yo obi lapo, oro naa ni yo ofa lapo*, meaning, words draw colanuts from the pockets while words also draw arrows from the quiver, seems to capture the effect of communications on human actions very well. The expression clearly demonstrates that as words can provoke hospitality, it can also provoke hostility! What is said and how it is said goes a long way to determine what reactions attend to the utterance.

Unfortunately the news media are awashed daily with utterances, especially by political leaders that are prone to predisposing the people to violent actions. In the election that produced Goodluck Jonathan as the president the sitting president then, president Olusegun Obasanjo said in one of his campaign speeches that the election was a ‘do or die affairs’.

Oyo State was almost turned into a theatre of war over Gov. Ajimobi’s utterances while addressing the demonstrating Ladoke Akintola University of Technology students over the closure of their University for Eight months running. His infamous constituted authority’s handling of the communicative encounter almost, literally set the state on fire.

Language and communication as a means of engendering National Security

Haven established how language and communication can trigger violence and insecurity, it is pertinent to state that the same language and communication is the most potent force to douse tension and bring about peace and tranquility.

No society, however advanced, is free of conflicts. Every nation has its peculiar features of insecurity which can only be effectively curtailed and through the appropriate use of language communication. It must always be borne in mind that language and communication are good potent tools for mobilizing people for good or evil and conscious efforts should always be made to use language for good. As reported by Ogundepo, Alabi & Okedigba (2008), ineffective communication is a major cause of conflicts in most organizations, if people lack adequate information, good intentions might be misinterpreted and thus predispose people concerned to avoidable conflicts.

Due respect should be accorded opinions and world views of others eve when they are at variance with ours. All issues have several sides to them. Efforts should be made to examine issue from more than one angle. Like Chovwen (2006) rightly observed, language is symbols not things, the meaning of these symbols are inside people’s head where they are associated with and shaped, to some extent, by individuals’ experience. This accounts for our different interpretation and reaction to same utterances.

At every point in time a thought should be given to what a speaker wants to say to the receiver, how the utterance is likely to affect listeners, the probable interpretations, as well as possible reactions.

Conclusion

In this paper, attempt has been made to show that language and communication play important roles in ensuring national security. The paper recognizes too that improper use of language can bring about insecurity as has been witnessed in the past. It therefore recommends that citizens of Nigeria should always have it in their consciousness that for peace and tranquility to reign they should watch what they say, how and when to say them.

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