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INCOMPETENCE IN LANGUAGE USE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF SELECTED POLITICAL STATEMENTS FROM ONLINE NEWS MEDIA

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Abstract

In contemporary time, there have been public outburst and criticism on the public use of inapproprate, impolite or unaccomodative expressions especially in political engagements or social responses to political events. Politicians especially, use language to vilify, incite or wip up sentiments against their opponents or perceived detractors. Such language use, presently categorized as hate speeches or incitational speeches have become the order of national discourse compelling resentment from government, individuals and legislative sanctions. It is no gainsaying that fact that such use of language has the capacity of further polarising and undermining the unity and cohesion of our country considering its multiethnic and pluralist natural. This paper tries to evaluate some of these kind of language use which goes to demostrate the intricate impacts of language incompetence as observed among political teachers and aspirants. Six separate speeches were selected and analyzed using 3 research questions. The findings obviously confirm that impoliteness in language use undermines unity and creates distrust, acrimony, rancour and ultimately destroys the spirit of cooperation that engender progress in a society such as Nigeria

Introduction

Language is one of the unique features among human beings that make linguists to refer to it as species specifics, that is, the only being that possess language. The primary purpose of every language is for communication to be effective, the message encoded by the speaker(encoder) must be decoded properly by the listener(decoder). When both parties understand each other, we say that communication is effective and there is harmony but in a situation where there is poor communication there could be conflict, quarrels and in extreme cases violence that could result in death.

According to Hayawa, when the use of language results, as it always does in the creation of aggravation or disagreements and conflicts, there is something linguistically wrong with the speaker or the listener (64). What he refers to as linguistic problem is what the reseachers refer to as incompetence in language use. In language use there is a difference between linguistic competence and communicative competence. Linguistic competence is at the level of *langue* which every language user is born into. As a user of language, you have a langue which provides you with the rules of the grammar of your language. These rules are different from the rules of usage which is communicative competence. The competence one has of a language transcends mere knowledge of grammatical rules to knowing 'how' 'where' 'when' to 'whom' in what occassion' and for 'what purpose' the language is to be used. The knowledge is not the same as the 'whatness' of language. It is the inability of language users to differenciate between linguistic competence and communicative competence that always lead to conflict situations.

No meaningful progress and peace can exist in a country where politicians do not know how to use language to influence thier citizens positively. Instead of being polite, accommodative (convergently) and subtle in thier speeches, they resort to hate speeches, impolite speeches, unaccommodative speeches and so on. These help to tear the nation apart and undermine national integration and trust especially in a heterogenous and multiethnic structure as ours.

Therefore, in a bid to draw the attention of language users, especially politicians who hold power or aspire to do so, langauge use should be done with meaningful discipline, consciousness and control. They shoud be assisted to resolve their communicative incompetences through enrollment in language classes where they would be taught the tenets of communicative competence because, nothing meaningful could result from poor communication in respect to unity and socio-economic progress in a nation as ours.

Debora Cameron's theory of verbal hygiene (1995) forms the theoretical framework of this study. This theory calls for selectional restrictional rule in communication. This means that the codes are in existence in our langue but language users should select the code that is most appropriate for every context and decode same appropriately.

Conceptual Framework

Language as a concept

The concept "language" has attracted a lot of definitions from linguists and non linguists alike, and each has tried to define the concept to reflect his/her area of specialization. Some of these definitions are examined below.

According to Horny, language is "the system of sounds and words used by humans to express thier thoughts and feelings" (260). It connotes characteristic ways of talking, thinking and feelings about attitue, goals and ideas. Emenanjo in his own definition sees language as a particular way or style of speaking or wriing. It is that complete way of communication which includes signs, symbols, knowledge, belief, customs and cultures and any other form of speech acquired by mankind for the sole purpose of communication and identity (Hornby in Okpara 260). Language here is seen as the total configuration of a person or group of persons that enable people in the society share common information and ideas. The Encyclopedia Americana (International Edition) 2000 edition volume 16, describes language as the principle and richest means of communication used by human beings. "It functions primarily as a spoken, means of

communication" (19). This definition, excludes nonverbal language use. Nevertheless, language as a system of communication is one of the biological characteristics that distinguish humans from other animals, birds, insects etc. All human communities possess language; thus, it is perhaps the single most significant property that distinguish humans from other animals. Just as all living creatures depend on water and earth around us, so also the society depends on language for its existence.

Talking about language, Fromkin, Rodman and Hymes, has this to say:

> We live in a world of language, we talk to our friends, our lovers, our teachers, our parents, our rivals and even our enemies. We talk to bus drivers and total strangers, we talk face to face and over telephone and everyone responds with more talk. Television and radio further swell this torrent of words. Hardly a moment of our waking lives is with words (284).

From the explanation above, everybody uses language, and language is used to perform varieties of functions, but there is also inexclusion of the non-verbal aspect of language use.

Again, Fromkin, Rodman and Hymes while still, answering the question - what is language? Explain that, “it is whatever people may do when they play, fight. Make love or make automobiles”. They however conclude by asserting that we are the animals that do this - talk (1). This definition includes both verbal, non-verbal etc. That is to say, that the totality of human activities is language-based.

Communication

Communication can be defined as a process of giving or passing information, feelings, diseases, etc. Effective communication can be attained only when language is properly used both linguistically and para-linguistically and these are what linguists refer to as linguistic and communicative competences. The knowledge of only the linguistic features

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of a language cannot make one communicate effectively but one has to look at other para-linguistic features that are involved in communication.

According to Ngonebu, communication is transmission of information from one person to another in order to elicit a response (56). Ijeoma defines communication as an interaction by means of signs and symbols. The symbols may be gesture, picture, or verbal or any other which would serve as stimuli to behaviour (213).

In the words of Eyre in (Sybil et al 3), communication is not just the giving of information, it is the giving of understandable information and receiving and understanding of the message. Communication is the transferring of a message to another party so that it can be understood and acted upon.

Communication touches every sphere of human activity. It informs all of man's actions because it is occasioned by his need to interact 'with his fellow human. It manifests itself in symbolic, verbal forms. Animals and trees also communicate, but it is man's ability to create symbols, ascribe meanings and interpret messages that elevates him above the status of lower animals and gives form and character to his existence (Sybil, Isaac O. Oludayos 1) Communication also serves as an instrument of social interaction. It helps us to understand ourselves, to keep in touch with other people, to understand them and to predict their responses to situations. It is a means by which power is acquired, exercised and. sustained. It is the medium through which, people in. business, politics and the professions act, and interact, exchange information and ideas, develop plans, proposals and policies, make decisions and manage men/women and. materials.

Furthermore, communication, is also interaction in one form or the other, either by visual or auditory symbols. People are continually interacting with themselves and with their environment by talking to their friends, watching television, listening to the radio, reading printed pages, calling or sending away domestic or other animals. Communication involves the action of one or more people in saying or doing somethings

which attract reactions in the minds of other people. Symbols such as words or gestures are the major means that people use to communicate.

Similarly, communication can also be defined as the transmission, transfer or exchange of ideas, knowledge, beliefs or attitudes from one person to another. Communication is thus a process by which we assign and convey meaning in an attempt to create shared understanding. This process requires a vast repertoire of skills in intrapersonal and interpersonal processing, listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analyzing and evaluating. Ginibo (20) defines communication as the process of using verbal and non-verbal cues to transact mutually understandable meanings between two or more people within a particular context and environment.

Communicative Competence and Incompetence

According to R.A. Hudson, Communicative competence was invented by Dell Hymes in 1971. Hudson says that communicative competence is the ability and/or the knowledge of 'how' to use linguistic terms appropriately. Hymes, according to Hudson, explains communicative competence as 'the competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about, with whom, when, where, in what manner' (224).

George Yule elaborates communicative competence in terms of three components including;

a. The ability to use language accurately, appropriately and flexibly" (197). The accuracy in language use is what he describes as the grammatical or linguistic competence “the accurate use of words and structure of a language”.
b. The appropriacy in language use which he terms “sociolinguistic” competence. This acquaints the user with the ability to use language in its context.
c. The flexibility in language use which he calls “strategic competence”. “It is the ability to overcome potential communication problems in interaction”.

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Conversely, communicative incompetence means the inability of a language user to differentiate between performing with a language in communication and having a language. It is the absence of this knowledge that makes language users to use impolite, derogatory, unaccommodating and bad/hate speeches to their communication partners. These neglects have smeared relationships and created long lasting rancour that limit development.

Although, linguistic code provides the foundation for communication, knowledge of only the linguistic code does not make a competent, good, and accommodating speaker; it takes knowledge of a combination of both the linguistic codes and the communicative competence.

Development

Speakers' view on the concept of development vary, hence, there is no commonly or generally accepted definition of the concept. It suffices thus, to assert that the concept has generated a great deal of controversy among analysts and theorists. Incidentally, there have been different definitions of development from different perspectives; the liberal view, classical economist, western liberal, the Marxian view and so on.

In simple parlance, development, describes the process of growth to full potentiality of an object or organism. It is a process of change, often natural, as the organism evolves into different stages of being, till, it achieves its full potential.

Transposed from the biological to the social arena, the development of a people will always imply a change from a simpler to a more complex, from a worse to a better, from a lower to a higher state particularly in terms of infrastructure, inter and intra communal associations and economic indices. However, this paper chooses to discuss development as a holistic phenomenon and then narrow it to politics.

Development denotes advancement, a change that is capable of yielding tremendous improvement in the overall living standard of a greater number of people in the society.

As the researchers attempt to discuss development from the holistic view point, a review of some definitions of the concepts of development as offered by scholars is pertinent.

According to Rodney, cited in Ohabuenyi (588), development implies increasing skill capacity to do things, greater freedom, self-confidence, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. Ohabuenyi views development as:

> A dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interact, with their physical, biological and inter-human environments, transforming them for their own betterment and that of humanity at large and being transferred in the process. The lessons learned and experiences acquired in this process and passed on to future generations, enabling them to improve their capacities to make further valuable changes in their inter-human relations and their ability to transform nature (588)

From this definition, it can be contended that development is associated with changes in man and his creative energies and not things. This goes to mean that development is man-oriented and man-generated. Otherwise, it is a continuous improvement in the capacity of the individual and society to control and manipulate the forces of nature.

Todaro, in his own view, defines development as:

> A multi-dimensional process involving the re-organisation and re-orientation of the entire economic and social system. This involves, in addition to improvement in income and output, radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs. (198).

This shows that Todaro regards development as a physical process as well as a state of mind. Moreso, Okeke observes that development is viewed by many people as the presence of modern amenities, such, as industries, roads, schools, hospitals, potable water, electricity and so on. Going by this view, development may be seen as

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synonymous with modernization. But this is a narrow conception of development since though modern amenities may be there, but they are inequitably distributed, or very little are produced thereby creating dependency problems.

Despite the various attempts at defining development, the concept still maintains multi-dimensional outlook. To a large extent, development involves the improvement of all facets of human life. There must be remarkable improvement in the political, economic, cultural and social life of any society before such society can comfortably assess its development.

On a general note, development is the sustained evaluation of an entire society and social systems towards a better human life. It is a comprehensive change or positive transformation in cultural, educational, economic, social, and political environments, towards the enhancement of the condition of living of the greater number of people. It also involves creating opportunities through peoples' abilities and talents. Development becomes meaningful when it facilitates peoples' accessibility to basic necessities of life', allows popular participation of people in political activities and in defining their priority need, proffers solutions to their problems and so on.

In summary, development aims at improving the living standard of greater number of people in the society. Development should be man-centred; hence physical artifacts alone should not be used as a parameter to measure development. Political stability, economic viability, social transformation and solidarity, peaceful environment, visionary leadership and strong and reliable civil society are some of requisite conditions that engender development in any given society.

National development is an umbrella term that includes development beyond a state but a nation. All these developmental processes raised in this paper cannot be attained without language. Language is used to make and interpret policies that can lead to different developmental achievements. If politicians don't have the knowledge of how to

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communicate, these developments cannot be attained. Here lies the importance of coraimmi.cati.ve competence.

The Concept of Verbal Hygiene

Verbal hygiene is a concept that denotes the use of politically, socially, religiously and linguistically correct words to express our opinions, ideas and views in a given situation. The concept of verbal hygiene is a new area of sociolinguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis, coined by a British linguist, Deborah Cameron to create awareness on the use of language which is culturally, socially and linguistically correct. Certainly, language involves producing and sending information which is often decoded by an individual through the mechanism, of his social context. Verbal hygiene does not mean that speakers should be economical with the truth but can express our opinion respectively without causing unnecessary frictions in the society. Cameron Deborah argues that language use is paradigmatically a social and public act, therefore, talking, writing and singing must be carried out with reference to norms which may themselves become the subject of overt comments and debates.

Research Questions

The researchers formulated three research questions for this study which comprised the following:

a. To what extent do communicative incompetence lead to national development?
b. What are the effects of communicative incompetence on the language users?
c. How can verbal hygiene help in solving the problems of communication incompetence?

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Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Verbal Hygiene

Verbal hygiene is a term coined by sociolinguist Deborah Carneron in the first edition of her book, published in 1995. Cameron (2012) defines it as the "Motley collection of discourses and practices through which people attempt to ‘clean up’ language and make its structure or its use conform, more closely to their ideals of beauty, truth, efficiency, logic, correctness and civility. Central to Cameron's discussion is the idea that, behind the ostensible desire to regulate language and ensure standards, verbal hygiene practices hide a range of deeper social, moral and political anxieties.

Verbal hygiene practices, argues Cameron, are inevitable and common to all language users. Whether these practices are carried out to criticize deviant or incorrect language forms and. to impose standard, or to argue against any form of interference with, 'natural' changes, both linguists and lay people have strong ideas about how a specific language should sound, work and look.

"Our norms and values differ" argues Cameron. but "what remains constant is that we have norms and values" (9). This 'urge to meddle in matters of language" is a consequence of the fact that humans do not just use language, but also observe and reflect on the language they use. Linguists may engage in verbal hygiene practices to prescribe how language should work or to describe how it works. In both cases, however, they are engaging in struggle to control language by defining its nature as either a man-made product to be controlled or natural entity to be observed.

Verbal hygiene is concerned with who has the right to impose specific standards and why, what the language we speak reveals about us and how it contributes to shape our identity, which linguistic changes are acceptable and which are to be discouraged (and why?)

Excerpt 1: "God willing by 2015, something will happen. They either conduct a free and fair election or they go a very disgraceful way. If what happened in 2011 should happen again in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood". (Nigeria 2015 will Be Bloody if Buhari by Luka Binnyat, www.vanguardngr.com 15th May 2012) abstracted 2nd Sept. 2018. This type of statement causes or raises fear in the minds of the citizenry. It is a threat and should be avoided.

Excerpt 2: "Nigerian, politicians are tiny men". (Nigerian politicians lace of virtues of greatmen - President Adetoye www.punching.com 13 December, 2013 ... the present federal administration has now become a government of impunity run by an evil-minded leadership for the advancement of corruption... using its mass murderers/cul-throats imbedded 'in.-our legitimate and traditional Defence and Security organizations... cases of mass murders by its bloody minded killers and cut-throats are well: known but it attributes the killings to so called Boko-Haram... ("Governor Nyako accuses Jonathan administration, of genocide against Northern Nigeria. This is an insult to the personality of the president.

Excerpt 3: "Jonathan is a kindergarten president', what the country needs is a thinking leader not a kindergarten president with no solution to the myriad of problems plaguing the nation" ('my problem with Jonathan, PDF, by Bisi Akande-Gbewa Olarinonye www.vanguardngr.com 18 August, 2013). This statement is an insult and a slap to the president and also lead to serious quarrel and therefore should be avoided in politics.

Excerpt 4: Quote me, if Jonathan insists on running, there will be bloodshed and those who feel shortchanged may take the war path and. the country may not be the same again... So, there will be bloodshed. But we don't pray to get to that level, before his ethnic and tribal advisers pull him back...

Blood will flow if President Jonathan should context in 2015... Nigeria should be ready for war" (2015: There will be blood, if Jonathan runs, warns Junaid Mohammed by Ikmad Omipidan (www.sunewsonline.com 01 December, 2013). This type of language use is a hate speech which could lead to war and therefore should be avoided.

Excerpt 5: "OBJ lied, Jonathan sinned and Sanusi is just a talkative boy" (www.sunnewsline.com 30 September. 2012). This type of language is insulting. The user did not consider the character involved. It is a bad language used.

Excerpt 6: There would be violence in the 2015 elections and the only way to take power is by force. (SSS storms-el-Rufai's Abuja house to arrest him January 24, 2014 by Adelani Adepegba www.purichng.com). The user of this language is not mindful of the situation in Nigeria because of his inability to use the language properly, there could be war.

Excerpt 7: "You are a motor park tout". Some senior citizens behave like motor park touts - Jonathan: (http://www.vnaguardngr.com/2018/01. This is an insulting language which could lead to serious altercation.

All these comments are typical instances of aggressive communication capable of setting a person or nation on fire, thereby hampering national development. These are utterances made out of communicative incompetence of the speakers. There are no regards to personalities of the persons they are addressing. These speeches were made out of hatred which can be traced to tribalism, egocentricism or selfishness. The big question that the researchers want to live everybody with is, can a country with such people who are so careless about what they say make any meaningful progress towards development? Their speeches can set fire and make men/women go out of the streets to fight.

The way forward

Nigeria is a country made up of different ethnic groups and in a country with such ethnic diversities, little mistake made in language use can destroy the country. So political leaders and aspirants should be selective of their words. If need be, political leaders should be made to pass through communication classes to learn how to communicate effectively, so as avoid hate speeches that hamper development.

Again, punishment should be meted out to communicators who do not mind their language use. Effective communication begins with caring about the feelings of others. The communicators should care about the people with whom they are communicating and what happens as a result of their choice of words. As such they must be objective and factual in what they write or talk.

Teachers of language should, as a matter of urgency, begin to inculcate in their teaching, linguistically appropriate right attitudes and skills of talking to people politely and accommodatively in any situation of talk exchange.

Parents should also inculcate the right communicative attitudes to their children because it is said that charity begins at home. Some of these hate speakers are demonstrating what the young members of the society learnt from their homes either from their mothers or fathers.

Conclusion

To be communicatively competent entails knowing your language and being able to use it as at when needed, to whom, how, in what context and being able to communicate without hurting feelings. To be incompetent is to use the language negatively in such a way that people's feelings are hurt such as hate speeches, aggressive communication, impoliteness and unaccommodating speeches. No country can develop when the people cannot communicate effectively. There will definitely be conflict in such countries. Conflicting situation leads to rancor, hatred, unrest and killings.

In a country like Nigeria, we need to develop consciousness about what comes out of our mouth because there is power in spoken words. Every aspect of a nation's development is done through language. When language is not properly used and interpreted, it leads to a disconnect and misapplication. Therefore, all hands should be on deck in the area of effective communication so as to help the nation develop socially, economically, politically and so on.

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