

Promoting Peace and Security in Nigeria through Language Education

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Abstract

Security of life and property has been recognized as a primary condition for progress, conducive learning environment and development of a sustainable society. This research work underscores language as an important instrument in nation-building. The paper posits that in a country like Nigeria with many indigenous languages and about 250 ethnic nationalities, a situation whereby each and everyone of the ethnic groups is afraid of the potential domination by the other, the best option cannot be outright rejection of the English language or elevation of any one of the Nigerian indigenous languages to the status of a national language. The paper does not advocate the adoption of any of the indigenous languages as a lingua franca, but the study of the languages of the wider communication namely, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba to reduce, if not eliminate, conflicts often occasioned by unfounded suspicion. Language plays a dual role in most known formal educational system: a subject in curriculum (language education) or the medium of instruction in all subjects. Language barriers lead to misunderstanding, conflict and insecurity, whereas common language, the application of language and its understanding inspire oneness and unity, the paper dwells on the role of language education in promoting peace, security and unity in a given country (Nigeria) and the world at large. The researcher found out that language of both immediate and external environment acts as a catalyst in promoting peace and security and concluded that for us to have the Africa of our dream, language must be recognized as an instrument of peace and security.

Key words: security, language, indigenous, sustainable, development

Introduction

Language has been described as the most effective means of human communication. Through Language, man manifests the degree of his distinguishing feature called intellect. Chinoy (1967:79) states that through the medium of Language, which is obviously social in character, the individual derives the ideas that he adopts as his own." Hence language constitutes that quality of human peculiarities, that unique attribute of man's distinctiveness and the priceless mandate of superiority over the entire culture. It is not only an instrument of social interaction, but also a means of human existence.

Nigeria has witnessed a lot of crises ranging from ethno-religious to ethno-political which have threatened the unity and peaceful co-existence of the diverse peoples of the country. The problem has become so challenging that some observers predict that if urgent measures are not taken to forestall these crises, Nigeria is likely to witness another civil war. Peace and security of life and property are very necessary for harmonious living among humans. Language is used to communicate education to people to make necessary change. When that language is common, it makes education easier. In the words of Ifeazuonu (2014:29) "Education cannot be achieved without communication and an outstanding tool for communication is language." Education enhances peace and security, while peace and security enhance development. Through education, significant change in attitude, perception and orientation can be made, and the language to communicate education could be that of the immediate community, mother tongue or foreign. This paper is an attempt to elicit how the magic of language can be applied in managing and resolving crises in Nigeria and how the power of language can be exploited to forestall impending crises capable of threatening peace and security in the nation. The position of this paper is that in a country like Nigeria with many indigenous languages and over 250 ethnic nationalities, a situation whereby each and

every one of the ethnic groups is afraid of the potential domination by the other, the best option cannot be outright rejection of the English language or elevation of any one of the Nigeria indigenous languages to the status of a national language as many have suggested.

The paper does not advocate the adoption of any of the indigenous language as a lingua franca but the study of the languages of the wider communication namely, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba to reduce, if not eliminate, conflicts often occasioned by unfounded suspicion. The need to harness the resources of language in order to ensure peace and security in Nigeria becomes necessary as no nation can be guaranteed stability needed for accelerated economic growth without a common language. For instance, the activities of the Boko Haram sect in the North, the Avengers in the Niger Delta, Independent people of Biafra and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra in the East to mention but a few have wrecked monumental havoc in Nigeria as a whole. It has resulted in loss of lives, property and security in the country and every Nigerian is affected directly or indirectly. In fact, the feeling of insecurity is not being experienced by those who reside in the Northern part of the country. It is being felt by all Nigerians as a whole. Okafor (2012:21) agrees with the above assertion as he stated, “before you can have progress and development within any level of human community, there must of necessity be a semblance of harmony, peaceful co-existence and tolerance among the constituent members of the given society”.

At the present, the language situation in Nigeria does not permit peace and harmonious co-existence of people from different tribes. Nigeria, has a multilingual nation, is in a situation where many different languages co-exist within the bounds of one society. In the words of Ehinze (2011) the number of ethno-linguistic groups that make up Nigeria is grossly indeterminate mainly due to lack of consensus on what criteria to use in determining an ethnic group.

Clarification of Concepts

Language

Language has been defined in different ways by different authors. Bloch and Tragers (1945) quoted in Ndukwe (1988) define language as “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a group co-operates.” Thus, language is captured as structured arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which man makes meaning and interacts with each other in a given social setting.

Onwuchekwa (2008) states that language is unique to man, and no other specie possesses a truly symbolic means of communication. He added that there is no human society, however simple its material culture, lacks the basic human heritage of a well-developed language. This makes language an important element of human peculiarity, that unique attribute of man’s distinctiveness and the priceless mandate of superiority over the entire culture. The above view of language is supported by Babajide (2000:1) as he states that “language is the distinguishing phenomenon between man and other creatures. Ihezuonu (2014:27) says that “man is the only creature that uses words intentionally and habitually.” This confirms that only human species have the capacity to acquire and learn language and in human community.

Peace

Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (6th edition) defines peace as a situation or period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country or an area.” Peace, therefore, is freedom from fear, conflict, violence or war. Ihezuonu (2014:34) captures peace as “non-violent resolution of conflict and respect for collective basic values such as human rights, liberty, basic freedom, equity and social justice. A nation is at peace when she is free from war and all forms of hostilities. There is peace in a nation when cessation of war occurs.

Security

Security as a concept lacks Universality of definition owing mainly to disagreement among various schools of thought. It has been defined as the state’s physical ability to defend itself from both internal and external threats and act of aggression (Iheazuonu, 2014). Rourke (2008:308) says “one of the greatest assumptions of security is thinking that the threat of violence may successfully deter an enemy

from attacking”. It is a state of organizing and sustaining necessary capabilities, power and resources for the physical protection and or defense of its territory, (Ihezuonu,2014).

Language Education

According to Nwajiuba and Okereke (2008:181- 189) “ Language education and language spoken in an environment encompasses the feature of community or environment”. “Mere words the language produces can make and prevent wars, create understanding, radiate peace, inflame prejudice, form constitution or destroy their shoddy or superior ideas, justify man’s worst action or express his highest ideas”. (Brick and Bork, 1959:3).

Language, besides being a subject in schools, colleges and universities curriculum, is the most valuable single possession of human race. Language education must be given a special place in the educational system for it is the sole means of communication. Samuila (2009:431) observes that “people only listen to us, understand us and respond to us when we speak the language they understand”. Notably, the language of the immediate and external environment constitute the means of communicating with people in order to reach their heart, understand their plight and reach agreement when making moves for peace and security. The more people acquire language education, the more they communicate in these languages and the easier to reach the minds of the people for peace and security that will in turn engender accelerated development.

Language education is the process of planning, developing and implementing the language arts curriculum in such a way that one is trained to acquire language skills that will facilitate his ability to cope with other life skills. (Amadi, 2014). Language education gives the individual the skills to assimilate and synthesize information about events and life. This means that being able to read and write is a function of language, and for an individual to understand life events.

Theoretical Framework

Going by the available linguistic evidence, we notice that children are not born with a predisposition to learn any one language rather than any one other. All children regardless of race, culture and perhaps parentage are born with the same built-in ability for learning language tagged language Acquisition Device (LAD). This is the argument of the mentalist/ innate theory as propounded by Jean Piaget. This theory assumes that the complete act of thought follows a fairly common sequence in this order: arousal of intellectual interest, preliminary explanation of the problem, formulation of ideas and verification of the suitability. In this view, language learners are seen to be using their cognitive abilities in a creative way to work out hypothesis about the structure of the language. The mentalist theory is related to the innate theory of language acquisition. The argument is that children are born with an innate capacity for language development and every normal child has a human brain that is ready for speech. These natural language principles make up a child’s “Language Acquisition Device”. This is an amplification of the innate theory of language acquisition which holds that the child is pre-programmed to effectively internalize and operate language. According to Chomsky, language acquisition device is biologically in-built in the human organism hence the acquisition of a first language as distinct from the learning of a relatively short period from birth. Crystal (1987:23) observes that the child uses its LAD to make sense of the utterance heard around it, deriving from this ‘primary linguistic data’ hypothesis about the grammar of the language- what the sentences are, and how they are constructed. This knowledge is then used to produce sentence that, after a process of trial and error, correspond to those in adult speech: the child has learned a set of generalizations, or rules governing the way in which sentences are formed.

In the light of the above, learners formulate rules, try them out and if the rules are discovered to be inadequate, they alter them. Language learning is then perceived to be transitional and learners move from one stage to another in a systematic process. Given that children, irrespective of race, culture and parentage are born with the same in-built ability for learning languages, the primary function of language teaching should be geared towards activating the linguistic competence with which they are born. Once this is done, the child can learn other languages apart from his mother- tongue.

The Role of Language Education in Promoting Peace and Security

Language, as mentioned earlier in this paper, is a system of arbitrary symbols, through which a group co-operates. This underscores the indispensability of language in any society. Ofili(2005:66) describes language as the blood of a nation. Infact, language is a symbol of identity, a tool for social interaction and a mechanism for cultural conservation and transfer. It is atool for instigating mutual co-operation and understanding in society.

The role of language education in ensuring peace and security in Nigeria cannot be too stressed. Ehinze and Ejiodu (2011:33) have justified language as ethnicity's symbol par excellence by referring to it as "the recorder of paternity, expresser of patrimony and the career of phenomenology. Indeed, language is the pivot on which every other thing, peace and security inclusive revolves.

As observed earlier in this paper, wrong application of language has had the tendency of generating acrimonious relationships between ethnic groups in Nigeria. The hot controversies at the dawn of Nigeria's independence and the fierceness with which ethno-linguistic groups disagreed over language matters lent extra credence to language as a veritable instrument for ensuring peace and security in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper advocates the adoption of a national language policy that can exert moderating influences on the seemingly fixated actions of protest of minority groups against suggestions to adopt one indigenous language as Nigeria's lingua Franca. The solution to this is the adoption of the three language of wider communication namely, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo for study in Nigerian schools. If these languages are made compulsory in Nigerian schools, there will be less resistance from the minority groups and suspicion brought about by language barriers and which often breeds acrimonies will be drastically reduced. This role can only be satisfactorilyfilled by indigenous language and not a foreign language like English or French. Local languages are deeply rooted in the culture of the Nigerian people and that can bring them together and engender a sense of oneness. The pertinent questiona here are (a) How can a national language policy be adopted? (b) How can people of various ethno-linguistic backgrounds learn and speak languages other than their own? These questions bring to the fore the role of education.

To answer the first question above, we would first consider what a national language is. Osuagwu et al (1997:41) observes that a national language is the language that is used by the entire politico-geographical set up (nation) for the transaction of official businesses; it is often seen as the language of the government and the language of the people. It is the language of the people because the people use it to actualize most of their needs, while the government uses it to reach the people. Without making any pretence, one must admit that issue of a national language is associated with problems both political and ethnic, especially if the country already has an imposed language of the colonials such as is the case with Nigeria. Language policy direction in such a situation will be to choose the language(s) out of all the languages spoken in the country and then popularize it through language education. In doing this, concerted efforts will be made by governments, organization , corporate organizations, clubs and individuals to mount campaign and publicity with a view to convincing people, especially those whose language were not chosen. The role of education in this exercise is indispensable.

Essien (1998:6) cited in Okafor (2012) asserts:

as long as education, a vital ingredient in development, is inconceivable without language and as long as all nations, concepts, theories, arguments, analysis and practices in all academic disciplines that enhance national development find expression in language (or its proxy e.g. codes), the role of language in this national development exercise cannot be over emphasized. (Okafor, 2012:62)

Here, we see a deep relationship between language and education. The chosen languages cannot easily be learned unless enough teaching materials are provided. Thus, language becomes the fluid for lubricating the machinery of multilateral co-operation and understanding among the people.

Problems of multilingualism

One of the major concerns of multilingualism is the problem of mutual intelligibility among the component linguistic parts that make up the group. This means that a person from one linguistic part will not interact intelligibly with another from a different linguistic part, and this of course impairs communication.

Again, multilingualism can lead to the stalling of economic activities and relationships resulting from lack of easy communication code. This is noticeable in the conduct of personnel transferred to regions where they (such personnel) do not understand the language in use. This creates division between the staff and the host community and often results in conflicts. In essence, this means that staff cannot be easily transferred from one linguistic part of the country to another to serve the government. Generally, in Nigeria, we notice that staff often put up stiff resistance to an attempt to transfer them to another linguistic part. Some of them resort to all manner of lobby techniques to prevent this, all because of the fear of living among people with whom they cannot freely communicate. This, therefore, raises the question: what is the relevance of language in maintaining peace and security in Nigeria?

Recommendations

The purpose of adopting three indigenous languages as national languages is to make the individual versatile, avoid rancour, insecurity and lack of peace in Nigeria. Thus, the following recommendations are made:

Government should without further delay; revise the existing language policy to accommodate this proposal of pronouncing the three languages of wider communication in Nigeria (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba) national languages and compulsory in schools. Government should also aim at actualizing this dream by mounting strong and aggressive campaigns and publicity to convince people whose languages are not selected to accept and use the chosen language.

Again, adequate efforts should be made by government to organize workshops, seminars etc. for linguists and language teachers to enable them teach the languages effectively.

The mass media should also be involved in popularizing the chosen languages. This can be achieved by mounting programmes with enough air time in the three languages. Efforts should equally be made to establish translation institutes to translate the body of world literature which conveys world civilization into the chosen languages.

Finally, language education should be encouraged since language used in communication brings about change for peace and security. The lack of understanding of language will, no doubt, delay the progress of peace movement initiated towards conflict resolution. During conflict resolution initiatives, the importance of language as a veritable tool for actualization of peace becomes crystal clear. Those involved in this process will achieve greater success if they speak and understand the language of the people than if otherwise.

Conclusion

Since language is used in conflict resolution via dialogue, language education should be pursued vigorously by all concerned to achieve peace and security in Nigeria – nay Africa. Effective use of language makes a lot of contribution, not just in avoiding violent conflicts, but in ensuring respect for the dignity of human life, justice, tolerance and equity.

This paper has been able to establish that the problems of insecurity and lack of peace in Nigeria is due to her linguistic heterogeneity. The paper hereby draws attention to the centrality of language as an indispensable tool for ensuring peace and security. Indeed, if every or nearly every Nigerian speaks three indigenous languages, they would all see one another as brothers and sisters as language has a binding force. If this happens in our nation and with Nigeria occupying a position of prominence in Africa, there is no way the emerging Africa will not be great.

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