

LINGUISTIC POLITENESS: AN INSTRUMENT FOR PEACE BUILDING AND MINIMIZING INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

Lack of peace and insecurity pose great challenge to the Nigeria nation. The way we communicate and address each other go a long way in building peace or destroying it, which has implication for national security. Without peace and security the objectives of Nigerian nation cannot be achieved. This paper highlights the role of linguistic politeness in building peace and minimizing insecurity in Nigeria. The paper discussed the concept of linguistic politeness, theory of linguistic politeness, peace building, linguistic national security and insecurity. The paper recommends among others that, there should be some sort of politeness education at all levels of Nigeria's education system to inculcate the spirit of politeness in Nigerians; and that parents should emphasis politeness to their children right from childhood so that it become part of their personality as they grow up to become adults.

Key Words: Linguistic Politeness, Peace Building, National Security, Nigeria

Introduction

Language, peace building, national security and development have intricate relations. Every nation's target is positive development and to attain it, there must be maximum security ensured not just through military force but something more subtle and powerful. Effective and appropriate use of language of communication (a generally accepted language) is very important. In other words, right choice of words that will not create threats, anxiety or danger for human existence (Okeke, 2012).

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 researcher (Thomas, 2013; James, 2015; and Musa, 2019) 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 (Adamu, 2017).

The national security and peace building that have formed the major theme of many conferences recently, need collaborative efforts of every one not just the duty of the government and security agencies. In the words of Roberts (2021), national security is the ability of a country's government to protect its citizens, economy, and other institutions. Beyond the obvious protection against military attacks, national security in the 21st century includes several non-military missions.

Interestingly many factors have been identified as exacting impact on national security. Among those that constitute threats are: bad and weak government, human right violation, unjust and inequitable distribution of national resources (e.g, in political posts, industries, investments, funds, etc), disunited and unintegrated ethnics groups, ethnic and religious antagonisms, and cleavages, weak and poor economy marked by corruption, weak currency, etc, socio-economic hardship, unemployment, hunger, etc, weak military might, weak media, communal clashes, unhealthy competition among the ethnic groups for national resources,

political domination, abuse and misuse of power by some defense and security agents etc. (Odunlami, 2019).

Although the above factors can threaten national security, Odunlami (2019) seems to undermine language use which is an element central to all that he has mentioned above as none of these forces could be achieved without inappropriate use of language. However, he identifies some factors that enhance national security as: good and strong governance, respect for human rights, just and equitable distribution of national security and other positive factors that can be drawn from the negative factors mentioned above. This paper adds that effective and appropriate uses of language communication enhance peace building and national security.

Linguistic Politeness

Politeness comprises linguistic and non-linguistic behavior through which people indicate that they take others' feelings of how they should be treated into account. Politeness comes into operation through evaluative moments – the interactants' (or other participants') assessment of interactional behavior – and it is a key interpersonal interactional phenomenon, due to the fact that it helps people to build up and maintain interpersonal relationships (Kader, 2017).

Linguistic politeness can be defined as the ways in which language is employed in conversation to show consideration for the feelings and desires of one's interlocutors, to create and uphold interpersonal relationships (so-called politic behavior), and to comply with the rules for what society or one's culture considers appropriate behavior (Brown, 2015).

According to Brown (2015), linguistic politeness involves discourse strategies or devices which are perceived or evaluated by other as having been used to maintain harmonious relations and avoid causing unnecessary friction. Being polite involves adapting sensitively to evolving social relationships. Let us consider the dialogue between the lecturer and a course representative below:

Course Rep: Good morning, sir.

Lecturer: Morning, dear. Do I have lectures with you today?

Course Rep: Yes sir and exams will start on Monday.

Lecturer: So what?

Course Rep: Sir, we still have.....

Lecturer: Walk out of my office, Nonsense

In the above discourse the power face of the addressee is threatened so he feels offended.

Politeness involves contributing to social harmony and avoiding social conflict. Watts (2013) reiterates that for polite language usage we might resort to expressions like: the language a person uses to avoid being too direct or language which display respect toward or consideration for other. Language which contains respectful forms like sir, madam, and language which contains certain polite formula utterances like please, thank you, excuse me, and apologies.

One can therefore refer to linguistic politeness as language use that enables smooth communication between participants according to the norms of social interaction and which shows consideration for each other's feelings. Being linguistically polite involves speaking to people appropriately in the light of their relationship. Inappropriate linguistic choices are usually considered as rudeness (Ifechelobi, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this work is Brown and Lewinson's (1987) politeness phenomena. They state:

that every utterance is uniquely designed for its context. Among the aspects of context that are particularly determinate of language choice in the domain of politeness are the power- distance relationship of the interactants and the extent to which a speaker imposes on or requires

something of the addressee. In being polite, a speaker is attempting to create an implicated context (the speaker stands in relation x to the addressee in respect of act y (Grundy, 2018).

In their theory they assume a “Model Person” with two kinds of face-the positive and negative face. Positive face is a person’s wish to be well thought of. Its manifestations may include the desire to have others admire what we value, the desire to be understood by others and the desire to be treated as a friend and confidant. Example: A complaint about the quality of someone’s work threatens the positive face. Negative face is our wish not to be imposed on by others and to be allowed to go about our business unimpeded and with our rights to free and self-determined action intact (Grundy, 2018). Example: Telling students that they cannot see you at the time they expect is a threat to their negative face.

Face Threatening Acts are created when an act of verbal or non-verbal communication runs contrary to the face wants of the addressee and or the speakers. For example when an addressee is criticized, accused, interrupted, insulted, disagreed with or that something he/she cherishes is disapproved of threatening an addressee’s negative face include ordering, warning, advising, and threatening.

A speaker’s positive face can also be threatened in acts like confessions, apologies, acceptance of a compliment and self-humiliation. Example: If a student confesses to being involved in examination malpractice.

Linguistic Politeness and Peace Building

Peace building emphasises people working together to create an atmosphere of peace that is welcoming and accommodating to all (Kedar, 2017). Peace building requires individuals to act towards one another in a respectful and responsible way. This can only be achieved when individuals make appropriate use of language in addressing people.

If people learn to talk politely, they will be able to make peace with whomever they interact with. Nigeria, given its diverse people with different cultural, traditional and religious background, will only see peace if the citizens learn to address one another in an appropriate manner. You can have your opinion about other people, which could be negative or positive but you don’t have to bluntly tell them to their face, especially the negative opinion. Unfortunately, Nigerians cannot hide their negative opinions about people of different religion and ethnic background. Log onto facebook and see how comments are full of insults and impoliteness which create nothing but hatred and threats to national security.

If kidnapped victims can make peace with their kidnappers by speaking politely about them, then we can achieve peace by simply speaking politely to one another. The kidnappers are harden criminals who kills at will but some of the captives were very careful not to speak impolitely about the kidnappers when allowed to address the government and the public to come to their aid. They called them (kidnappers) as “*bayin Allah* (God’s servants)” and not “kidnappers” in order to sound polite. This makes the kidnappers feel happy and believe the captives are sympathetic too. So we can make peace with one another by simply being polite in our communication.

If we can be polite to everyone we meet irrespective of gender, religion, region or tribe, we will be able to establish peaceful environment that can accommodate all.

Linguistic Politeness and National Security

National security has been described as the ability of a state to cater for the protection and defence of its citizenry (. By state here, it does not only refer to the constituted authority but also to the general public. Many times conflict arises when we use vulgar words in addressing

other people. They feel offended and react and when we react, fight erupt and thus a threat to national security.

According to Thomas (2020) the major cause of conflict between individuals is impoliteness and a good number of such cases ended up in death and loss of properties. So if only they were polite in their talks, these lives and properties could have been saved.

Nigerians are so emotional and sensitive that conflict in one area creates a series of conflict in other places. If for examples there is fight between Hausa and Yoruba in Kano which leads to the death of the Yoruba, people in Ibadan, Ondo, Abeokuta and several other areas will try to retaliate on the Hausas living in those areas and vice-versa. So, linguistic politeness plays significant role in ensuring national security.

Strategies of Linguistic Politeness

Having seen the importance of linguistic politeness to peace building and national security, it has become imperative to highlight some strategies of linguistic politeness. This paper adopts the five super strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987).

Based on the divisions of the positive face and negative face, Brown and Levinson introduce the concept of face-threatening acts (FTA). Some acts are threatening positive face; hence it is called positive FTA. Meanwhile, some acts of threatening negative face are referred as negative FTA. For Brown and Levinson, politeness is a linguistic effort to mitigate FTA: both positive and negative. There are five super strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson.

- (1) Bald on record
- (2) Positive Politeness
- (3) Negative Politeness
- (4) Off record
- (5) Cancel FTA

The option of which super strategy to use on certain occasion depends on the combination of three socio-factors related to the FTA. There are at least three socio-factors which may affect the decision to use which super strategy: power, distance, and rank from Brown and Levinson (1987).

- Relative power (P) that the speaker has over the interlocutor (an asymmetric relation)
- Social distance (D) that binds the interlocutors to feel more intimate or familiar (a symmetric relation).
- Ranking of imposition (R) of an act that the speaker requests to the interlocutor.

The first socio-factor that influences the types of any conversational acts is power; it refers to the relative power of the speakers in society. Power is available and inherent in most societies and in some cases. Power is also closely related to the hierarchy system in society. Teachers have more power than the students and a president is more powerful than a vice president. A parent has more power than children. Power can go unnoticed without people noticing, nor objecting. For example; old people maintain more power than the young ones. Buyers can have more power than sellers during a commerce transaction. As expected with the politeness strategy, young people are demanded to use more indirect speech act such as addressing the elder with an appropriate honorific (Hendi, 2019).

Another socio-factor is social distance. Distance refers to the social bonding between two speakers. Two classmates who meet each other every day have a closer distance than two former classmates who have not met for ten years. A neighbor is relatively closer to us than a stranger we meet on the bus. However, the social bonding does not merely pertain to the proximity of space between speakers that unites them into familiarity. Distance is more related to the intimacy of relationship instead of the frequency of meetings or space proximity or familiarity. Let's take an example at schools. A teacher may use different politeness strategies

to two students of which the intimacy is on a different level, be it due to the familiarity or intimacy. When speaking to the student whom the teacher feels closer to, he will talk more casually that in return, the student will reply with more direct speech act with less formality but still maintaining other politeness strategies such as addressing appropriate honorific.

The third socio-factor is rank. Imposition ranking is the weight of the stake or request involved in the interaction. This factor is highly related to the other two aforementioned factors. Let's relate the rank with the power. The same request addressed to people who do not possess the same power level can demand different politeness. Asking people who have more power with us to sign some papers requires more politeness speech act than asking it to our subordinates. A similar situation can be found with people from a different social distance. Borrowing a car is considered a more difficult request than borrowing a pen to a stranger.

It can be summarized in this statement: the more powerful the person, the closer the distance between the speakers and the lower the rank of the stake will make the speaker consider more direct super-strategies. The weaker the person, the farther the distance between the speaker and the higher the rank of the stake will make the speaker to consider more indirect super-strategies. Since three factors are involved in considering the most appropriate strategies to use, it can be burdensome for speakers that they may end up having a misunderstanding. At the very worst case, the speaker will cancel the interaction to save his face.

To mitigate the FTA as proposed by Brown and Levinson, below are the explanations of the super-strategies.

Bald on record has three variations. The first one is when power, distance, and rank are guaranteed. The second one is when an emergency happens. The third one is conventional politeness involving direct utterance such as "Good Morning" and "See You Later"

Positive politeness consists of fifteen strategies. All these strategies are intended to save positive faces, i.e. to make other people feel wanted, liked, approved and appreciated. Fifteen strategies of positive politeness are: Notice and attend to his interests; exaggerate approval; intensify interest; in-group marking; seek agreement; avoid disagreement; assert common ground; joke; presupposition of what hearer wants; offer or promise; be optimistic; include speaker and hearer in the utterance; give or acquire reasons; assert reciprocity; and give gifts. Negative politeness consists of ten strategies. All these strategies are intended to save negative faces, i.e. to give other people the sense of more freedom. Ten strategies of negative politeness are: be indirect conventionally; question and hedge; be pessimistic; minimize the stake; give deference; apologize; impersonalize speaker and hearer; compare the FTA with a general rule; nominalize; mention that the speaker is indebted and not burdened.

Off record is an act to obscure an utterance. This is an example of the violation of maxim of manner proposed by Grice (1975). In maxim of manner, a speaker is expected to avoid ambiguity and obscurity. However, in "off record" super strategy, the speaker wants to reduce the level of commitment between him and his utterance. There are fifteen strategies in off record acts: Provide hints; Provide clues based on association; presuppose; understate; overstate; tautologies; contradictions; be ironic; metaphors; Rhetorical questions; be ambiguous be vague; overgeneralize; displace hearer; be incomplete and/or use an ellipsis.

The fifth super strategy is not even a strategy. The speaker cancels the interaction because he calculates that no strategy can mitigate the risks of interaction. He may conclude that the FTA is too costly for his social undertaking.

These linguistic politeness strategies can be used by Nigerians in interacting with themselves depending on the circumstances surrounding the interaction.

Conclusion

In social interactions people must constantly make different linguistic choices of what they want to say, how we want to say it and the specific sentence types, words or sounds that best unite the what with the how. Correct choice of appropriate linguistic forms must be used to achieve politeness. Being on the receiving end of politeness affects both the speaker and addressee differently because polite utterances establish correct relationship between the speaker and the addressee. If we do not see the relationship between ourselves and the person who addresses us as they do, we will be upset by the strategies they employ since these strategies imply the nature of our relationship which is the heart of linguistic politeness. From the strategies analyzed, it is discovered that a harmonious and peaceful co-existence is achieved through the use of positive polite utterances. Impolite or face threatening acts must be avoided as they lead to impolite responses, misunderstanding, friction and conflict. Utterances must be oriented to the positive face of those they interact with.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Nigerians should learn to be polite to one another irrespective of their differences.

There should be some sort of politeness education at all levels of Nigeria's education system to inculcate the spirit of politeness in Nigerians.

Parents should emphasis politeness to their children right from childhood so that it become part of their personality as they grow up to become adults.

Teachers should study and understand these linguistic politeness strategies in order to adopt them in dealing with their students since they serve as role model to students.

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