

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN CURBING SECURITY ISSUES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Language plays an imperative role in our contemporary society, serving as a medium that allows people effectively communicate their ideas and beliefs. Its vital role can be seen in every sector of a nation including national security. For a multilingual state like Nigeria, English language plays a dominant role in allowing people of different ethnic backgrounds contribute to nation building, encouraging inclusion and diversity of ideas and knowledge base. Several security challenges have aroused, threatening the peace of Nigeria as a nation and have been making life hard and unsafe for the inhabitants. In recent times, moving from one place to another within the country has become a perennial gruesome experience loaded with fear and depression for the citizens. This paper highlights various security challenges being faced by citizens in present day Nigeria as well as its effect on the populace. The paper also elaborates the role English language plays in reducing insecurity including reducing fear of ethnic domination and opening a window of participation in the progressive global culture.

Keywords: Language, English language, security, challenges, curbing.

Introduction

Language can be described as the tool of significant expression since it provides individuals with the much-needed tools for the expression of their thoughts and the exploitation of their own environment. The universality and diversity of speech lead to a significant inference; that language is an immensely ancient heritage of the human race, whether or not all forms of speech are the historical outgrowth of a single pristine form. It has been established through daily human activities that language is a basic requirement and an indispensable tool in human society. Without the effective use and good understanding of a language nothing can be meaningfully achieved.

The expression of the complex communicative needs of people is enhanced by their use of language. Language enhances understanding among a people who share the same linguistic identity. In fact, without language human society would have been chaotic and quite unimaginable. For instance, if some utterances (or even silence) are often misconstrued, what would have been the situation if no language at all is in use in the society? Furthermore, how could one who is misunderstood to have offended another refute or exonerate himself from the wrong allegation? These and many other reasons are some of the justifications for the need for language by people living together as a community.

The presence and acceptance of a given language by a speech community is a symbol of collective identity or a mark of common historical bond. As a matter of fact, language imposes a certain cultural and social affinity on those who commonly speak it. And as a common heritage, it seems to create a feeling of brotherhood, camaraderie and trust among those who inhabit the secluded world of a given language. The implication is that the wider the linguistic difference among a people the wider the gap of communication and the consequent

unavoidable tendency of mutual suspicion. This is psychological and Nigeria is a good example.

Often, Nigeria is referred to as a nation of nations. Prior to the advent of the colonizers, the various notable ethnic groupings within the new political code were independent nations with a form of recognizable political set-ups, each with a peculiarly distinct history and linguistic habit to express its cultural values.

Okeke (2012) believes that ineffective use of language can threaten national security as it causes disagreements, hostilities and unhealthy rivalries. There is no doubt that language of wider communication provides a country of multilingual orientation with the possibility of communicating ideas, transmitting values, feelings and goals from one person to another. These ideas may border on issues of preservation of life and properties; mutual trust, confidence and comfort in the language village that is regarded as a nation.

That ignorance, unguarded utterances and rumour lead to conflicts or crises. The place of English language is an essential entity in solving Nigeria security problems. It is the most commonly spoken language not only in Nigeria but throughout the whole world as international language. It can be used around the world to settle disputes and to promote peace. Security is the state of being free from danger or threat, while insecurity is the state of being open to danger and calamities but there is no society that is absolutely free from conflicts and crises. Security and insecurity are integral parts of the history of mankind. Insecurity can have a major effect on language as they bring about language contact situations which can disturb or change the language ecology of a region. Language remains the major viable tool that can be used to mobilize people for good or for evil (Ogundepo, et al 2017). The Concept of Peace Education in English Language Teaching Peace has always been a concept that has kept its prominence from the time people of the world started to live in communities; however small or large the population, there is a mechanism put in place to resolve conflicts occurring between individuals and nations. English language teaching materials are different from the teaching materials of every other course in that the flexibility of the contents is not comparable to any other course. The reason for this is that the aim is to teach not a single subject, but the target language as a living thing. Every other subject has its own boundaries but English language teaching can include information in all subjects and peace education is not an exception. The United Nation and other international bodies have made noteworthy efforts to establish peace in all parts of the world and in the minds of people, to make our world a peaceful and more inhabitable planet. Brantmeier and Bajaj (2003) say peace education is not just about the elimination of violence, although that is a central tenet, but also about creating preventive structures and conditions that Agbede (2009) agrees that language is the pivot on which all human activities, ranging from the most prosaic to the most profound poetic dexterities, revolve. As an exclusive human activity, the seemingly exploited potentials by man for business transactions, exchanging banter, swamping games as well as discussing and explaining issues are made possible through the use of language. Obiegbu (2015) says that language and society are so related. Indeed, virtually nothing can be effectively achieved in any human society without effective use and understanding one another's language. It is a means and principal weapon for growth and development of any nation.

Language as a tool and institute of culture is said to be an inexhaustible weapon used by mankind to develop potentials and activate the latent resident natural endowment in man. It should therefore be understood that as a means or a principal weapon, it also has the ability to destabilize people if not properly harnessed or used. Language can make or mar any organization or country. According to Joseph (2019), the tool of language is acquired or learnt

by man for improved understanding of other cultures, places and daily emerging concepts that constitute our dynamic world. Language also develops every individual and opens window of opportunities for profitable jobs that guarantee comfort and satisfactions in the competitive and ever-increasing challenging world. Onah (2013) sees language as a determinant of national consciousness, the foundation that generation of any national culture use to build their spirituality.

English Language in Nigeria

English is one of the languages of the world. The language remains the predominant means of international and inter-ethnic communication despite the attempt to weaken its roles in some regions (Onah, 2013). It is a living language with very powerful intrinsic potentials. Linguists believe that globalization changes the status of a language. Today, English language is used regularly by many people and second only to Chinese. English belongs to the Germanic languages. In Nigeria, before and after independence, English was an exoglossic language of the colonial masters. The indigenous languages of the people served as the first language of the native then. English language in Nigeria is a second language that a child learns after the acquisition of the mother tongue. Today, English is the first language of many homes in Nigeria. It occupies prominent place in the school system. Politically, one would have thought that the language should have gone with the burden of imperialism after the country independence but English language became strong and dominant in Nigeria as a result of the acute linguistic complexity existing in the country. It became an intermediary, or better still an alternative in the quest for a national language.

English language is playing many roles in Nigeria which makes it inevitable in the citizens' national life. The impact of English language in Nigeria is also felt in areas such as education, politics and administration, mass media, religion, business and commercial activities. English indeed has assumed the status of language of utility in Nigeria language community.

In Nigeria's Philosophy of Education, education is described as an instrument for national development. To this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education. FRN (1998) equally acknowledges that for the philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria's national goals, education has to be geared towards self-realisation, better human relationship, individual and national unity, as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress. The national education goals which derive from the philosophy are therefore the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society;

English language education should be seen as a necessary gateway to the survival of Nigeria nationhood. This statement derives its strength from the philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria. For instance, paragraph 9 of the National Policy Education reads:

In order to realise fully the potentials of the contributions of education to the achievement of these goals and values, all other agencies will operate in concert with education to that end. Government shall take various measures to implement the policy.

According to the policy education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change. In other words, any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be by educational revolution.

Paragraph 10 of the National Policy on Education reads: Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment.

Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian Languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

In specific term, secondary education shall raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and lives as good citizens;

Security Challenges in Nigeria

Nigeria is a country that is presently passing through some security challenges many of which are claiming lives and properties of the people living in the country. Some of the challenges are discussed below:

Ethno-Religious Conflict

Communal and society conflict according to Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002) has emerged as a result of new and particularistic forms of political consciousness and identity often around ethno-religious identity. In Nigeria, ethno-religious conflict has assumed an alarming rate. It has occurred in places like Bauchi, Lagos, Abia, Kano, Taraba, Ebony, Nassarawa and Enugu states respectively. It is sad to note that, groups and communities who had over the years lived together in peace and harmony now take up arms against each other in a gruesome "war".

Conflict over scarce resources, power, land, chieftaincy, and local government have resulted in large scale killing and violence among groups in Nigeria. These ethno-religious identities have become disintegrative and destructive social elements threatening the peace, stability and security in Nigeria.

Maritime Security

The insecurity in Nigeria's maritime environment is a major challenge to our national security. This occurs in many forms, such as piracy, illegal oil bunkering, oil theft, illegal fishing and hijacking. It has caused the government lots of revenue, making the port unattractive to foreign shipping lines. This situation today may be described as bad but certainly not hopeless.

The situation today has affected socio-economic development in the country. Some foreign contractors have had to abandon their projects for fear of men of the underworld.

Youths Unemployment

The high rate of unemployment results from a relatively slow growth of labour demand which is combined with a rapidly growing labour supply in erring economy, especially due to enhanced population growth and high level of rural- urban migration. Unemployment affects the ages that are active at work and this creates a great vacuum for lawlessness and unprecedented atrocities in the country. This marks a great threat to the domestic economy since it implies that many energetic youths are without gainful employment. Many graduates from the University are presently hit by the unemployment challenges in Nigeria. The outcome of this is the version of the language that engendered negative behaviour. Expressions like rationalization, downsize, recession, layoff, disengagement, austerity measures are words that express sorrow, frustration and generate an aura of uncertainty in the system.

Onah (2013) observes that there are faulty and unfavourable economic policies of the government in the past three decades that have acted as disincentives to employment creation which have dwindled the employment absorptive capacity in Nigeria. The problem of

unemployment has generated youth restiveness and possible resort to violent conflicts and other crimes.

Unemployment gives birth to political instability in any country. Unemployed persons can easily be enticed by antisocial elements. They lose all faith in democratic values and decent means of livelihood. They consider government as worthless since they have failed to provide them with work. This phenomenon is one social security challenge that the country is battling with. The engagement of these unemployed youths in criminality is a matter of concern.

Porous Border

The wide expanses of Nigeria's porous borders with contiguous countries are acknowledged as one of the security challenges. Porosity of the borders has many implications, apart from revenue loss to smuggling, small arms and light weapons are brought into the country in large numbers. With this pathetic situation, criminal gangs are in possession of heavy weapons in the country and are used to deadly effects.

Terrorism

In all academic circles, no definition of terrorism is ever all embracing and perfect.

Bearing this in mind, we shall attempt to give a simple definition of terrorism. In general, it is considered as the unlawful use of force or violence against persons, societies, cultures, religions or governments in order to create a desired change. The change sought may be political, religious or social in nature. It is interesting to note that terrorism does not always involve people from another country or background. The greatest and predominant security challenge in Nigeria today is terrorism or terrorism-related.

Islamic fundamentalist groups, the harbingers of terrorism in Nigeria today, include the likes of ANSARU and BOKO HARAM. The sects are predominately based in the North Eastern part of the country with their own ideology. The country has witnessed many attacks carried out by the sects with concomitant loss of lives and property.

Kushner (2002) opines that terrorism is the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or correct a government. It is crystal truth that this tool or means has crippled socio-economic activities in the country most especially the northern part.

It is worthy to note that these sects have demonstrated evil activities by taking people of different countries hostage apart from attacking public institutions, such as police, military and para-military through armed attacks, suicide bombing the educational sector is not free from such attacks.

Nigeria's chequered history has had to contend with the challenges of managing violent conflicts, partly arising from strong divisive forces of ethnic cleavages alongside cultural and linguistic permutations. Therefore, tolerance and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity should be at the core of any state language policy.

Kidnapping and Ritual Killing

Kidnapping and ritual killing are vocabularies that send fear down the spines of innocent citizens, seem to be on the increase in Nigeria. On daily basis there are more reports of abductions, missing persons and ritual killings than we used to have in the past. There have been reports of mutilated bodies found in different parts of the city and around the country. In some cases, different parts of the body are severed. Some herbalists require human parts to

make some idiotic fellow rich or powerful. This shows how insanely fetish and madly desperate some people can be. Youths' modes of expressions are tailored towards all these cultic gibberish. Remarkable developments occur in a system through a formal refined version of the Language of Wider Communication (LWC).

There is the superstitious and fetish belief that the life of a child or a mother or a stranger can generate wealth as the notorious 'yahoo' boys believe, but this act is unscientific, inhuman, wicked and barbaric. Some have been reported to use their own close relations for rituals. It has also been reported that some politicians also indulge in this inhumane act as a way of winning elections, maintaining power and getting on in life.

Farmer-Herder Clashes

The middle Belt region of Nigeria has faced prolonged violent clashes between the farmers and the cattle herders. At the core of the conflicts are disputes over access and rights to land and water resources with rapid desertification which has changed the grazing patterns of cattle. Njoku (2019) affirms that since 2015 the disputes have become more frequent and violent. He says in 2018 alone more than 2000 people were killed in such clashes (more than the number killed in the past two years combined). He reports that the conflict now claims an estimated six times more than the Boko Haram crisis. The dispute is being politicized and is stirring ethnic and religious tensions which are very dangerous to the peace of the country.

Utilization of English Language as an Instrument to Solve Security Problems

The place of English language is an essential entity in solving Nigeria security problems. It is the most commonly spoken language not only in Nigeria but throughout the whole world as international language. It can be used around the world to settle disputes and to promote peace.

Security is the state of being free from danger or threat, while insecurity is the state of being open to danger and calamities; however, there is no society that is absolutely free from conflicts and crises. Security and insecurity are integral parts of the history of mankind. Insecurity can have a major effect on language as they bring about language contact situations which can disturb or change the language ecology of a region. Language remains the major viable tool that can be used to mobilize people for good or for evil (Ogundepo, et al 2017).

Communication is an essential factor in bringing about a change in ideology and encouraging cohesion and collaboration, and this is achieved through the use of language. Considering the multiplicity of language, English language is the common language that maintains the unity of the country because it provides a link amongst our heterogeneous communities' linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds. Through the use of English Language, conflicts and disagreements can be resolved, and people who perpetuate violence due to misinformation or tribal differences can be properly educated and guided. Proper education will result in a more secured and peaceful nation.

Human societies employ systematic ways in training and educating youths for development. An educated man is described by Gbeyonron (2013) as one who is mentally, socially and physically well balanced. Teachers of English can assist the students to develop their ability to communicate effectively and efficiently in a variety of situations. The teacher can use listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in each case. The teacher is expected to provide a model in listening and speaking and writing. For example, in speaking, the teacher can encourage fluent, appropriate use of English in a sustained manner. The class may be organized into groups to ensure and encourage active participation by all members. They will be taught things like self-expression, polite request, honesty etc. Reading passages should provide the basis for writing so that the students can have the confidence to approach the writing task. The aim here is to instil efficient and effective communication skills in students.

They should be taught how to write correctly and clearly using correct sentences and punctuations, they should also be taught the morphology, syntax and general rules of using the language. The teacher can develop topics chronologically using different situations like social contexts, debate and government, expressing obligations and desires, human factors reflecting real life situations, interpreting visual information, firmness on crime through devices like: Listen and say, think and talk, look and say, listen and create etc. the teacher can use the methods mentioned here to bring a positive change in the behaviour and thinking of the students who would be adults in the near future.

Proper knowledge of English language will ensure that members of a society can effectively communicate their thoughts and believe in an organized manner. This will reduce crises and violence caused by cultural misunderstanding, or lack of communication. Also, the use of one language to communicate among people from different cultural background will encourage bonding and cohesion which will ensure peace in the society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the rise or fall of any nation, the degree of peace or instability of a nation is indexical of the language programme in such nation. When leaders of a nation acknowledge the importance of national and official languages and yet manifest lack of the political will to articulate an operational framework for the language or languages to survive, then ethno-religious crises and issues relating to cultural differences are bound to arise.

Obviously, Nigeria's security challenges are but the reflection of the failure of the government and the people to achieve internal cohesion. The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1987:190) defines cohesion as intermolecular attraction holding together particles in the mass. Unarguably, the internal factors that are supposed to integrate Nigerians have become the disintegrating forces; much faster than the positive patriots could imagine. For example, language, political party membership and ideological inclination, religious identity and ethno-linguistic chauvinism have all imparted the foundational structure of the Nigerian nationhood. One won't be wrong to say that most of the things we regard as national problems are indeed language problems. The cultural agitation in Nigeria has in a way crippled the usefulness of English language outside the school compound.

Languages can be used to foster peace and prosperity of any given nation. Using English language as a tool for combating security challenges is necessary at the present time in Nigeria, and will be vital in rebuilding Nigerian culture and society in addition to the security dimension. The Nigeria's security challenges can only be addressed adequately when language factors are addressed. It is hoped that Nigerians will start thinking as a people that share common identities, believing more in the survival of the nation than on their regional relics.

Recommendations

Students should be exposed to education based on critical thinking and creativity that encourages the mind of the students to critically analyse received information. This is necessary in curbing crises caused due to rumours and the spread of false information. Sound decision making ability and critical thinking skills will help prevent them from becoming easy preys for radical ideas, political thuggery and calls for violence.

People in leadership positions must appeal to the perpetrators of social, religious, political and economy unrest in the society to desist from their evil acts and make Nigeria a better place for all Nigerians. They should be educated that the harmful actions of a few persons can bring a bad name to a nation as a whole.

The media should not ignore the atrocities being perpetrated by miscreants in the society by organizing workshops, council meetings and using available media channels for enlightenment for positive changes.

Military force requires global capabilities, not only in terms of operational strength, but with regard to the quality of its people and their ability to adapt to different cultures and situations. In this dynamic and complex environment, language proficiency, and cross-cultural communication skills is imperative to solving our security challenges.

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