

## *The Role of Language in Enhancing National Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Case of Nigeria.*

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### ***Abstract***

The paper focuses on how language can play a role in enhancing national security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century using Nigeria, a multilingual nation as case study. It begins by examining the effect of speeches made by highly placed politicians and political office holders in the country. The paper advocates a restraint in the use of hostile utterances that could result in the disintegration of the country and suggests the use of subtle utterances in order to promote national security in Nigeria. It further tries to elucidate the importance of appropriate use of language in promoting understanding among the populace in the country. The data generation technique for this study is through the content analysis of secondary data such as previous researches, journals, magazines, newspapers, text books, publications on the web. The study is purely a historical one and the analysis is descriptive in nature. The paper also seeks to determine the implications of inappropriate use of language on security, peaceful coexistence, the business operation and investment in Nigeria. It advocates the use of subtle/ appropriate language in politicking, our mundane activities, and the appropriate formulation and accomplishment of policies capable of tackling the basic causes of insecurity in Nigeria.

### ***Introduction***

National security has been of great concern to the citizenry and to all the successive governments because some glaring security challenges in Nigeria are emerging. “Security challenges can be traced to the early years of military rule when large quantities of arms were imported into the country for the use of the military during and after the Nigerian Civil War, some of which got into the hands of the civilians. Soon after the Civil War these arms were used by civilians and ex-military men for mischievous purposes such as armed robbery” (Olabanji, Ese 2014). Conversely, there cannot be any meaningful development in the country without an enabling environment, which is the peaceful co-existence of the citizenry and the government. The past

governments have employed the use of different forms of strategies such as intelligence services, marshalling economic power to facilitate or compel cooperation, etc. and above all, the use of military might to end insecurity in the country but to no avail.

It is pertinent to adopt the use of another form of effective strategy that will bring an end to national insecurity. The study proposes the use of appropriate language as the vanguard to end national insecurity in the country if seriously put into play by the government at all levels, coupled with other strategies bearing in mind that language has the power to destroy or to uphold the peaceful cooperation among the populace and the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria. Finegan reiterates that “people use language principally as a tool to do things: request a favour, make promise, report a piece of news, give directions, offer a greeting, seek information, extend an invitation, request help and do hundreds of other ordinary things”(2012 302).

As earlier stated, appropriate use of language is a powerful tool that inspires the peaceful co-existence of any nation especially in Nigeria, an illustration of a multilingual nation because of its diversified ethnic groups in the twenty first century (21<sup>st</sup> century). An appropriate use of language which means to think first about what you say and how you say it should always be the catchphrase for any leader at any level, be it at the first tier, the second tier or the third tier of government. However, to communicate effectively, it is not enough to have well organized ideas expressed in complete and coherent sentences and paragraphs as some people will believe. One must also think about the style, tone and clarity of his/her writing, speech and adapt these elements to the reading audience or listeners and the best medium to send the much needed message across using appropriate language. The fast and commonest media of information these days is the Internet and other Social Media like WhatsApp, 2go, Facebook, email, Twitter, and Google. This is possible because even in the remotest area people use cell phones to make calls and even browse the Internet, send and receive messages and chat with friends.

In order to choose the most appropriate language, the writer or the speaker must consider the objective of the document or the speech, the context in which it is being written or spoken, and who the audience will be or who will be delivering the speech.

### ***Methodology***

The data generation technique for this study is through the content analysis of secondary data such as previous researches, journals, magazines, newspapers, text books, publications on the web. The study is purely a historical one and the analysis is descriptive in nature. The objective of the

study was to see how language usages by political figures could cause insecurity or otherwise in Nigeria through the utterances they made at any given time.

The study analyses different utterances made by six (6) political actors in Nigeria. It is intended to showcase the utterances, explain the implications and to suggest restraint in the use of hostile utterances by Nigerians, especially the political figures to promote peace and national security. Firstly, is President Muhammad Buhari's inaugural speech on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2015 shortly after being sworn in as the Nigerian leader. Secondly, one of the speeches made at one time by the former President Olusegun Obasanjo about the person of the Vice President, Atiku Abubakar; the former INEC chairman, Professor Athahiru Jega's and Elder Godsway Orubebe's speeches at the presidential election results collation centre, Abuja and Niger Delta militant and leader of the Niger Delta Volunteers Force, Asari Dokubo's speech which was a fresh threat then to peace in the country if Goodluck Ebele Jonathan loses election.

### *The Concept of Language*

There is no one universal definition of language but several definitions which have been advanced by respective scholars. For example, (Sapir 1921) defines language thus: "Language is a purely human non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols." (McLaughlin 2006 19) speculates that, "Language is the system of arbitrary verbal symbols and non-verbal means that speakers put in order according to a conventional code to communicate ideas and feelings or to influence the behavior of others." The means available to us in communicating ideas and feelings is usually the symbols of a language which we choose either to speak, write, gesture or all at times.

It is categorically clear that language is not only done by speech-sounds alone but also exists in other forms such as written and non-verbal. No matter what, it is used daily for communication between one or more persons and other entities. Language has some characteristics such as, productivity, arbitrariness, dynamism and cultural transmission; it is human entity, etc.

To know a language means to have communicative competence or the knowledge of a language. Therefore, one should use language appropriately in order to promote peace and national security in Nigeria, which means the speaker, should have sociolinguistic competence that involves politeness, pragmatics, and social register – the speaker/ user of the language should show appropriateness in

context and situation. More so, strategic competence which entails the ability to get a message across – effectiveness should be seen in the use of the language by the user.

### ***The Concept of National Security***

“National security at the academic level is an intricate network of systems of defence measures, aimed at ensuring the safety of government, the state and their nationals. Through overt and covert measures of military intelligence operations, under-cover disruptions of the sinister activities of men and women with misplaced consciences, the security of the people, their state and government is ensured.” (Esiemokhai, Emmanuel Omoh 2010). National security then is the ability to preserve the nation’s physical integrity and territory; to maintain its economic relations with the rest of the world on reasonable terms; to preserve its nature, institution, and the governance from disruption from outside; and to control its borders. Security involves some activities geared towards the protection of a country, building or person against attack, danger, etc. National security could then be seen to have to do with the protection of people and their properties in the country in a holistic way.

### ***Discussion***

The following are utterances made by some political figures in Nigeria to showcase samples of appropriateness and inappropriateness of such utterances because of their (utterances) implications.

#### ***Illustration I: Inaugural Speech***

President Buhari’s inaugural speech after he was sworn in on the 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2015 said, “I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody.” The statement clearly implies that he will work for the betterment of the country as a whole not the part he came from only. In addition, it is a persuasive piece to make people believe he is out there to work with all the citizens not minding where he/she comes from and will not be compelled by anybody to do anything contrary to his volition. The statement made those that were thinking otherwise to come on board and contribute their quota in the best of ways in the development of the country. The statement made many aggrieved Nigerians to sheathe their swords because of the wise choice of the words he used in addressing the nation.

#### ***Illustration II: Inaugural Speech***

Similarly, President Buhari further stated: “The federal executive under my watch will not seek to encroach on the duties and check the legislative and judicial arms of government.” This was a clear testimony that he was not going to be a dictator and will not encourage dictatorship in spite of

the fact that he was taken as such during his past regime as a military leader because of his ethics on indiscipline “War Against Indiscipline” (WAI for short) campaign and others. He made it point blank that he will be a democrat and reassured Nigerians that there will be no cause for alarm. He reinstated his commitment that the legislative and judicial arms of government will work independently. Similarly, he will not use force in ruling the country but will allow democracy to work uninterruptedly.

### ***Illustration III: Acceptance of Defeat Speech***

The historical phone conversation between Buhari and the incumbent President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who was the People Democratic Party presidential bearer in the 2015 general election conceding defeat, is an illustration of the effective use of language. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan conceded defeat following the plea by Attorney General and Justice Minister, Mr Mohammed Bello Adoke, SAN; Aviation Minister, Mr Osita Chidoka and Special Assistant to the President on Democratic Affairs, Mr Waripamo-Owei Dudafato that effect. “...And with that call, Jonathan pulled Nigeria back from the precipice, saving the country from what would have been a serious crisis, the ending of which nobody could foretell” (Adeniyi, Olusegun 2017). This exhibition of statesmanship in Nigeria was the first of its kind in history. The wisdom has certainly averted the outburst of violence which would have happened if he had refused to accept defeat since he was then the incumbent leader. He was supposedly believed to have everything within his reach to refuse to hand over if he had wanted so. But he did not. Therefore everything went smoothly and that was, “a stitch in timesaving nine.”

### ***Illustration IV: Former Chairman of the INEC, Attahiru Jega’s Speech***

The former Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Attahiru Jega, said he remained calm while Godsdan Orubebe, a former minister of Niger Delta, disrupted election because he as well as his colleagues was determined to conduct credible elections... “So, we were determined to ensure that no matter the provocation we would ensure that the results were tabulated and announced,” he said. (Premium Times online news August 11, 2015). It was evidential that there was effective use of language by the former Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Attahiru Jega. In spite of the accusation that he was biased, he remained calm and chose his words carefully and fine tuned them in the speech he made. “...Please, let us be careful

about what we say or do. Let us not disrupt a process that has ended peacefully,” (Premium Times online news August 11, 2015).

“Mr Orubebe, you are former Minister of the Federal Republic. You a [sic] statesman in your own right. You should be careful about what you say or what allegations you make and certainly you should be careful about your public conduct,” Professor Jega said. The control to be provoked by Mr. Orubebe’s utterances by Professor Jega saved the country from falling into chaos as a result of the interruption in announcing the final result, that is to say the result will have been an inconclusive election results. The Peoples Democratic Party trailing behind while the All Progressive Congress was leading the count and Mr. Orubebe being a Peoples Democratic Party stalwart thought it wise to disrupt the collation and the announcement of the final result. The implications of the action were, Nigeria being plunged into divisions and consequently war will be inevitable.

### *Inappropriate use of Language on National Security and its Consequences*

Conversely, the inappropriate use of the language causes hubbub in any peaceful country by those who felt aggrieved because of reasons best known to them. They (the aggrieved ones) put the peaceful coexistence of a nation at stake by their speeches or write ups and such ginger the teeming youths into mass destruction of government properties or the individuals’ properties, unrest or even the killing of innocent souls in the country.

#### ***Illustration V:***

General Muhammad Buhari in the 2015 electioneering campaign was quoted as saying, “I will make Nigeria ungovernable if Jonathan became president in 2011.” This is an instances of the inappropriate use of the language was the speech attributed to the All Progressive Congress presidential flag bearer, However, it was later debunked and purported to a People Democratic Party politician, Alhaji Lawal Kaita. Some were of the belief that it was concocted by Reuben Abati, Jonathan’s media spokesman to put General Muhammad Buhari as a leading protagonist of violence, thereby denting his image and narrowing his chances of winning the 2015 election.  
<https://m.facebook.com/NigeriaUniversityNews/posts/834596023263138>

#### ***Illustration VI:***

The electioneering campaign slot supposedly sponsored by the People Democratic Party carried on by the NTA in order to discredit the All Progressive Congress political party and its presidential

flag bearer, General Muhammadu Buhari and to show the wise choice people will make in re-electing Jonathan as the president come 2015 presidential election. This propaganda was intended to damage the All Progressive Congress party and his person, that is, Buhari's dignity. According to (Longe and Ofuani 1996 17) "... The sole purpose of propaganda is to misinform and mislead and to consciously indoctrinate." They further argue that propaganda is derogatory because it tends to "damage or take away credit" from something or someone. Propaganda could be in form of exaggeration, rhetorical questions, vague and abusive utterances, etc.

### ***Illustration VII***

The words by President Olusegun Obasanjo about the person of the Vice President, Atiku Abubakar in which he said, "Atiku turned out to be such a person that when he says good morning to you, you should open the window first to check what time of the day it is before you answer him. I apologise for making the wrong decision" (Vanguard Feb 26, 2007 43). It is an instance of inappropriate use of language.

President Olusegun Obasanjo's description of Vice President Atiku Abubakar is clearly inappropriate. In Vanguard newspaper of (February 26, 2007), he states: "Atiku turned out to be such a person that when he says good morning to you, you should open the window first to check what time of the day it is before you answer him. I apologise for making the wrong decision" (p. 43). This is an instance in which the inappropriate use of language fosters enmity between people and tribes, a situation that led to national insecurity.

### ***Illustration VIII***

The former Minister of Niger Delta Affairs, Elder Godsdan Orubebe, at the final collation centre in Abuja during the collation of presidential election results from each state accused the then INEC chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega, of being "tribalistic, selective and partial" in dealing with issues of irregularities raised during the just-concluded presidential and National Assembly elections. (Channels TV 2015). By implication he is accused of extending his partiality to favour the candidature of the President Muhammad Buhari, who coincidentally came from Northern Nigeria as the Independent Electoral Commission chairman does.

The attack by former Minister of Niger Delta Affairs, Elder Godsdan Orubebe, on the INEC chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega, is also an instance of inappropriate use of language. According to the report on Channels TV.com, at the INEC centre in Abuja and on the occasion of collating

presidential election results in ....(2015), Orubebe accused Jega of being “tribalistic, selective and partial” in dealing with issues of irregularities raised during the just-concluded presidential and National Assembly elections. The implication of being tribalistic is a person takes side with someone who is not qualified or fit to be a position he or she is meant to be and such actions promote disharmony in the country with a divergent ethnic groups.

### ***Illustration IX***

The following is an instance of inappropriate use of language by the Niger Delta ex-militant and leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, Asari Dokubo as he issued fresh threats against opposition politicians including the All Progressive Congress Presidential candidate, Muhammad Buhari, promising a series of action against him and some opposition party leaders and voters from the Niger Delta should the February 2015 general elections not go the way of President Goodluck Jonathan in the region as reported by (the Sahara Reporters February 3, 2015). “Asari must be arrested over 2015 war threat” APC tells SSS (February 5, 2014) when he said President Jonathan “must complete the mandatory constitutionally–allowable two terms of eight years or the militant will make Nigeria ungovernable...”.

These statements sent fear to the peaceful co-existence of the masses in the country when it was done by the militant leader, Asari Dokubo. People knew the militants had the capabilities of causing chaos in the country and therefore such inappropriate utterances were not taken lightly.

### ***Some Consequences of Inappropriate Use of Language (Hate Speech)***

The inappropriate use of language by some political figures in the country caused the following:

- a) The inappropriate language (Hate speech) made by Kanu earlier and the reaction by the Arewa Youths and reported by (Adetiba 2017) in the Vanguard online news.

“At a breakfast meeting of veteran journalists the other day, the host asked his guests, many of whom were former Editors and top columnists, what they thought of the ‘Quit Notice’ issued by the Arewa youths to the Igbos in their domain”.

“...Of course, it was wrong to order any Nigerian out of any part of the country. But it is the kind of reaction you get when you goad and needle a people the way Kanu and his Biafra adherents have been doing in the past two years”. The consequences of the inappropriate language (hate speech) that nearly tore the country into divisions.

(<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/08/hate-speeches-consequences/>)

- b) People who feel aggrieved by utterances made by either ruling party or opposition political figures easily ginger their followers to take laws into their hands by engaging in the killing of the innocent ones and destruction of government and people's properties such as vandalisation of pipes; PHCN cables; MTN, Airtel, Etisalat, Glo masts and other government properties because of the insinuating statements made by the highly placed in the society.
- c) There were low economic activities such as farming, trading and other commercial activities such chaotic state of the nation this result into thefts, armed robbery, rituals etc.
- d) Communal clashes sometimes do occur because of the inappropriate use of the language by the political figures in the country especially if the political figures are from different ethnic background.
- e) The inappropriate use of language caused economic recession in the country because of low investment which in turn gives rise to inflation, devaluation of the currency and unemployment, increase in crime, prostitution, smoking, drug abuse and so many other security challenges. In some parts of Northern Nigeria States like Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Bauchi, Adamawa, etc. there were political unrest which resulted in the declaration of Goodluck Jonathan as the president elect in 2015 and with that some felt aggrieved by the pronouncement. It should not be forgotten that the Niger Delta region also experiences the vandalisation of oil pipelines apart from political killings, kidnapping and many more crimes soon after President Muhammad Buhari has assumed power

### ***The Role of Language in Enhancing National Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

Language plays a very vital role in any human society. It occupies a very important place more than it appears to all. We shall however be using Nigeria as case study. The aim of any human society is to have peace and security, many nations of the world today are facing different degrees of conflicts, and Nigeria unfortunately is one of such countries. This paper is set to examine the role language has to play in enhancing national security in Nigeria.

Language has held Nigeria together up to date despite the numerous ethnic groups that are in existence. People respect each other's culture and language that has bound us together and created national security.

Another area that language has been helpful in keeping us together in Nigeria is in the area of academics, this is because English language is the medium of instruction in our schools. It to a great

extent helped to bridge the gap between the elite and non-elite, rich and poor, the privileged and the less privileged. Hence we have English as the link between the high-class and the low-class in Nigeria.

In religion, language has played an important role, in various religious gathering; English has served as the medium of communication because the followers are from different ethnic background, hence bringing the people together under the same umbrella. Many religious proceedings are carried out in English language and this of course has contributed significantly to the peaceful co-existence and created security in our beloved country. Although, some time past we have had various religious disputes and have had one conflict at one time or the other.

Our culture is embedded in our language. If we embrace our language with keenness and self-importance and uphold what we have together and then our differences will become a thing of the past. This will promote national security in Nigeria. Language has a very vital role to play in our quest for national security.

### *Summary of Findings*

The analysis of the data has shown that language convinces, persuades or otherwise changes other people's minds. It is equally used to elicit information, confirmation, to seek someone's opinion on some issues, and also to show disappointment/enchantment. The study found out that language, if used appropriately and subtly, may enhance national security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through the social media which is vibrant in the country. Conversely, the inappropriate use of the language brings chaos, economic recession and insecurity in the nation. Similarly, when there is national security it implies that there is peaceful coexistence of the citizens, who are well fed (most of them working class) robust and healthy. National security does not only stop at protecting the lives of people in the country and their properties but goes beyond that. It includes food security, job security and economic security among others. Finally, the country has a vibrant economy because of the above indicators which are achievable through appropriate use of language.

### *Conclusion*

This study has shown that there is a rise in the wave of insecurity in Nigeria during and afterwards. In spite of the modernization in the methods of combating crime of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, crime the increase. The study highlights the fact that despite the security measures put in place by private and

public organizations, crime rate remains un-abated. The study notes that the teaching and learning of language education and the use of appropriate language in our schools, places of worship, markets and politicking activities will enhance national security.

### ***Recommendations***

The insecurity challenge in Nigeria has become a frightening one for the Nigerian government and its citizens. This paper advances the following recommendations in order to enhance national security in the 21st century:

Nigerians, especially the political players, should avoid making confrontational and unguarded utterances that may threaten national security. They should be wise in their choice and use of words so that they do not cause upheavals in the country.

During political campaigns despite the freedom of expressions by all citizens caution should be observed in using utterances that will hurt an opponent or group of people that in the country.

The government should introduce in our school curriculum language education which will spell out clearly what, who, how, where and when appropriate language should be used to get across the intended meaning. This should be at all levels of education from primary up to university level not minding the discipline of a student- arts or sciences. It is believed that this measure will go a long way to improving the level of consciousness and augment the literacy level of the citizens. This is because the more the citizens are educated the more security conscious they are of themselves and their environment and such will promote peaceful coexistence and national security.

There is the need for the appropriate use of language which includes the use of subtle words and expressions in addressing issues especially serious issues in our socio-political and economic activities in order to maintain the hard earned, existing peaceful coexistence in the country. In the crusade for enhancing national security through the use of appropriate language the government should involve the religious leaders and the mass media, both electronic and print media. Even the social media should not be left out because the youths and young-at-heart are constantly online. The masses will be well educated on the pros and cons of the use of appropriate/ inappropriate language for national security/insecurity respectively.

As a result of the peaceful coexistence in the country which is achievable through appropriate use of language, the government should create gainful employment opportunities at all levels (state, local and federal government) so as to reduce the number of idle citizens, because “an idle mind is the devil’s workshop.”

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