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International Digital Organization for Scientific Research  
IDOSR JOURNAL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES 3(3): 24-30, 2018.

ISSN: 2579-0773

## Language in Conflict Resolution

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### ABSTRACT

Language as a means of communication has been used to define and distinguish different ethnic groups and cultures. Through language people build, understand and express their emotions, intentions and values confirm social relations. The paper examined some basic causes of conflicts in Nigeria. The study adopt listening and content analysis of qualitative methodology for some influential personal or ruling class in use and miss use of language in addressing populace, that can fuel or resolved conflict. The study revealed that Peace cannot necessarily be achieved by force; it can be achieved by understanding which is the use of language. As a bullet which triggers off conflicts of whatever nature; language similarly also, the panacea of conflict management and resolutions. This paper suggests ways of using language to ensure sustainable peace in our societies; the study concludes that the paramount objective here is to bring to notice, the fact of language use for the purpose of achieving harmonious and peaceful relationship in general and to resolve conflict situations through the use of language.

Keywords: Language, Communication, Panacea, Peace, Conflict and Resolution

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### INTRODUCTION

Language is the organized system of speech used by human beings as a means of communication among themselves. It is an important gift given to man by God for communication. Language is universally accepted as the most effective instrument used by man as he attempts to interpret the phenomenon he encounters in his daily activities. "Language universally, is venom which triggers off conflicts of whatever nature. Similarly, it is also the panacea of conflict management and resolution" [1]. We can deduce from the Jija's view that language is venom

(bullet) that fight conflict and win, and also language is panacea (cured/managed/control) conflict and language is resolution (decision/determination, solution, collective opinion, process) of solving conflict. Communication refers to the process of sharing and exchanging information between personalities, groups and potential parties in a conflict situation. This implies that despite conflict situations, individuals or parties involved can still talk. Whenever it is possible to have a communication link between the two parties in conflict situations there is

possibility of exchanging perceptions, assumptions, and attitudes, which have been built up by conflict groups *vis-à-vis* others. However, poor communication or the absence of communication can easily escalate conflicts between the parties or individuals in conflicts. The exchange and sharing of information can help in a great way to resolve crises and build confidence between the parties in conflicts and bring about peace [2].

Panacea according to Webster's [3] is a "remedy for all diseases; a cure-all". [It is also described as:] "An herb credited with remarkable healing virtues: formally all heal". From this we can deduce that, panacea is manager, cure and controller of something. That is language is panacea of conflict management and resolution. Peace is generally conceived as the absence of war or physical violence. According to Longman dictionary of contemporary English (new Edition), peace is, "a situation in which there is no war between countries or in a country". It is a direct opposite of conflict or crises. It has been stated that: "Peace is a direct or original state of security and absent of social, political or religious tensions that can debar progress in human societies" [4].

Conflict can be defined as, "a clash, a fight or simply a confrontation between individuals or groups". It has been conceived that: "Conflict is opposition or antagonism toward other individuals or things" [5]. It also refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group, when the beliefs or action of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. It can occur between two individuals, groups of friend, within and between families, within ethnic groups and between organizations etc. conflict is a common phenomenon which has become present at one time or the other in every environment [4].

Resolution is the process of resolving something such as problem or conflict, or a determination to achieve a purpose.

Most of the non-violent methods of conflict resolution, according to [6] quoted by [4], thus: "such as collaboration, negotiation and dialogue as well as third party interventions like mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication, are largely dependent on effective communication." In a situation whereby the parties in conflict can talk together on issues tearing them apart with the genuine purpose of finding a solution to the conflicting situations, it is envisaged that the resolution of such conflicts is at sight. The same process can also prevent crises or conflicts.

### Organization of the study

The data used in this study was collected while listening to news broadcast and precisely while reading from books, journals and newspapers numerous conversations among the ruling class. The paper is structured into the following parts:

- a) Basic Causes of conflict in Nigeria
- b) Conflict Resolution in Nigeria
- c) Use of Language in Conflict Resolution
- d) Suggestions
- e) conclusion

### Basic Causes of Conflict in Nigeria

The situation of conflict in Nigeria has recently reached quite unprecedented heights that no day passes without gory (bloody) pictures and heart-rending details of excessive destruction and senseless killings on the television screen, radio broadcasting, newspapers and magazines. The basic causes of conflicts in Nigeria mostly are seven: these are ethnicity, religion, oil or resource control, politics, poverty, unemployment and, above all, poor leadership [7].

Nigeria: "characterized by diversity of norms, values and beliefs, a distinctive multiculturalism that makes it vulnerable to variety of conflicts" [8]. This view, is true as in typical of multicultural society, each of the divers groups making up the country has a value and interest which sometime conflict with those of the

others. For example, illustratively Niger Delta unrest, the incessant Benue-Taraba crisis, the Hausa and Kataf, Jos unrest, Ife-Modakeke unrests, the resent Ife Yoruba - Hausa clash, herdsmen crises as well as a horde of others are just a part of quite an endless list of rifts in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. The consequences of these on peace and national unity are only circumstances of imagination.

[9], observes that problems of Nigerian state are not different from that of Africa, were he listed as follows:

- i. Nigeria inherited a foreign form of government that is alien to its norms, values and cultures; thus, anything imported is usually associated with problems. There is no doubt therefore, that governments are usually epileptic in anything they do.
- ii. There was the African problem of instability in governance, ever before the coming of our colonial masters. African countries, states and colonies used to wage war against one another prior to colonialism, that psyche has continued in Nigeria up till today; where societies and communities fight one another on issues that could be resolved without any blood-letting.
- iii. The problem of corruption and mismanagement of government scarce resources. Nigerian leaders have the problem of trying to grab more than they can consume. This can be tied to the monarchical form of government that was prevalent before the coming of the colonial masters. Nigerian leaders are so corrupt and not prudent in the management of states resources. They want to accumulate, to grab and to siphon government's scarce resources; for reasons best known to them!
- iv. The problem of disease and starvation: most of the Nigerian societies are in object poverty, thus diseases and starvations have cropped into the fabrics of the

Nigerian population; hence, constituting a hydra headed monster for the government to grapple with.

- v. Illiteracy is another problem in this country. Due to abject poverty and misinformation, some communities in Nigeria do not send their wards to school; thus, constituting a big problem for even development of the societies in the country.

[4] states that:

In Nigeria today, peace is the prime value and sine qua none for development, yet the most elusive. In the recent time, the country is bedeviled by series of violent conflicts that have denied its citizens peaceful coexistence which have accounted for socio-economic and political challenges. For instance, the Niger-Delta conflicts, ethno-religious conflict in Jos, Kano riot, Boko- Haram insurgency in the northern parts of Nigeria, [Fulani herdsmen] among others.

These, among other problems, have contributed to the problem of civil unrest in this country. The problems degenerated to the level of causing conflicts in some societies of Nigeria. If these problems are not nipped in the bud, they may degenerate to causing another civil war in the country, may God forbid!

### **Conflict Resolution in Nigeria**

[10] views conflict and conflicts resolution as thus:

The history of conflict is as old as human history. From the dawn of human history, communities have been competing for control of resources and for dominance. These competitions inevitably led individuals as well as social, political, economic and religious groups to conflicts. It

is true that conflict has devastating effects and it is unwanted. It is also true that conflict is unavoidable and it continues to occur. Since the causes of conflict are different, it would be better to use different mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. By avoiding conflict, we avoid not only one of the hindrances of economic development but also foreign powers' intervention, which may exacerbate the domestic conflicts. Therefore, more than anybody else governments, whose main duty is maintenance of peace and security, are responsible for providing their respective peoples with alternative conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, popular and widely used among these are the African Traditional mechanisms.

Nigeria is a country of multilingual and multi-cultural society. These ethnic nationalities could belong to the different religious groups represented in Nigeria as Islam, Christianity or African Traditional religions. Impliedly therefore, within a family, it is possible to find adherents of Islamic, Christian and African religions co-habiting. This is a clear indication that Nigeria is also a multi-religious country with large number of followership of all these faiths, especially the two messianic traditions of Islam and Christianity. Religious pluralism therefore signifies the importance of recognizing the existence of other faiths by the state and its peoples. It is necessary to observe that multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies are prone to conflicts because of contested interests of the distinct groupings. Nigeria, like other African countries had had its own share of conflicts from pre-colonial times. These conflicts often arise from petty communal inter personal relations like stealing of farm products, abduction of wives,

encroachment into neighboring community's land, ponds and economic trees, etc. These conflicts challenges were however taken care of by the urgent application of extant conflict resolution. In its social role or function, language has the characteristics of a double edged sword especially in circumstances of crisis or conflict.

Conflict resolutions adopted by government are both long and short term measures; aimed at curtailing conflicts and civil unrest in the country [11]. Though more still need to be done, these peace initiatives, instituted by government, if well pursued, will go a long way in resolving conflicts in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large.

The institute of peace and conflict resolution has been established to look into the problems of peace and conflict resolution in this country. Also, courses associated with peace and conflict resolution are being offered in some universities across Nigeria to curb menace of treat of peace in Nigeria. Moral philosophy, which is one of the prerequisite courses for graduation in the university, is being taught in virtually all the universities of this country to enhance peace and unity in the country, [9], [1], and [11].

### **Use of Language in Conflict Resolution**

As a medium through which human societies interact, language, is also the tool to curb civil unrest and conflicts. If peace is to be attained in Nigeria, the use of autocratic forms of language and speeches by our leaders must be stopped henceforth words such as 'must', 'will be dealt with', 'with immediate effect', 'will be hanged' 'will face the wrath of the law', 'lunatic government', 'supremacist', 'sex workers' should not be used while addressing the populace of this country. For example "We must reject the idea that every time a law is broken, society is guilty rather than the lawbreakers" [12]. Instead, softer words such as: 'government plead with you..', please do it', 'might not be accepted', 'could be punished', 'called upon to please..', and 'no victor no loser' and etcetera, be used

in addressing the Nigeria populace if a particular task is expected to be performed by them. For example “we must teach our children to resolve their conflicts with words, not weapons” [12]. In present speeches to the Nigerian populace, or during political rallies, and in places of worship; such as churches and masaaqid (mosques) as well as in writing sign posts or billboards, newspapers, magazines, letters and other viable instructions; soft words should be used instead of military or autocratic form of words or sentences which might trigger civil unrest and conflict. For instance, the situation where political rivals are castigated or insulted openly, such also needs to be discouraged henceforth. For example Asari Dokobo in Utazi (2016:6)[13] said:

The victory of Muhammadu Buhari is a historical reminder that we are conquered people who are mere appendages existing at the pleasure of the supremacist and regional overlords. We remain a people with separated ideologies and interest; we are not integrated or reconciled. The conditions that advanced the need to embrace the creeks have been sadly re-energized, it is clear that a vicious government who may maim and murder the voice of the so called minorities may have just been birthed.

The rhetoric statement like ‘conquered’, ‘supremacist’, ‘regional overlords’ and ‘murder’ to indicate hatred for the winning party to the public may lead to conflict. Also, the use of softer words and sentences should be imbibed upon by all and sundry in order to tackle these problems of tribal, political, religious, economic and psychological conflicts, if Nigeria is to grow to greater heights. Nigeria should note that, it is only through peaceful coexistence (communication through proper use of language), and harmony that this country

would grow to greater highs and be able to achieve its millennium goals.

### **Suggestions**

This paper suggests the followings:

- a. Our language policy should be revised so as to contain all these outfits of language usage on public places. Everyone should stop campaigns of calumny and character assassination; especially the politicians, who are head-bent on winning at all cost.
- b. Language and communication skills should be effectively used during the process of sharing and exchanging information between individuals, groups, communities and parties in conflicts or disputes.
- c. Government should desist from paying lip service to issues that borders on the provision of social amenities to its citizens. Good road networks, drinkable water, electricity, schools, hospitals and dispensaries should be provided to the Nigerian populace to prevent tension and consequent civil unrest issues relating to the norms and values of Nigeria should be given priority attention so as to create a peaceful nation where all Nigerians will live together in peace and harmony (Busa, 2008:28).
- d. Government should be more proactive on issues that affect human rights. It should also ensure that justice prevails in this country.
- e. Nigerian leaders should desist from corrupt practices in order to create society that will be for everyone. Leaders by examples should be the watchwords of our leaders, so that this syndrome of ‘winner takes all’ and ‘chop and quench leaders’, will be thing of the past.
- f. Personal and collective achievements should be rewarded instead of re warding thieves and individuals of shady character.

- g. To organize seminars and workshops to newly appointed leaders on how to use desirable and pleasant words when ruling or

passing out judgment among their leads as this will minimize conflict and subsequently resolve it.

### CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that language should be carefully, responsibly and politely used so as to advance individual and group co-operation in social affairs. Effective communication capacity or skills are necessary prerequisites to cartel conflicts. This is to do away with the use of wrong and misconceived words or lexical elements while referring to ourselves in our relationships and style of communication. If Nigeria is to develop to greater heights and its resources well

harmonized, aside from being prudent and transparent our leaders need to develop a sound language policy for the country. Also, proactive measures should be adopted in dealing with issues relating to clashes and menial wars. Also the term 'military language' should be faced out in our scheme of things; through these, we can find peace and coexist peacefully for a better Nigeria.

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