

English Language: A Catalyst for Complementing Government Efforts in Fighting Insecurity Challenges in Nigeria

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Abstract

The level of insecurity in Nigeria has risen to an unprecedented height in recent times. The spate of killings in different parts of the country, banditry attacks on lives and properties, herdsmen and farmers' clashes, high rate of kidnapping, Boko-Haram insurgency and more recently, unknown gun men attacks; are all indices of insecurity in Nigeria. People live in fear and uncertainty as no one knows who the next victim will be. The Nigeria society has become so chaotic that something urgent needs to be done to allay people's fear and calm the situation. This paper looked at how language (English) can be used as a catalyst for complementing government efforts in fighting insecurity challenges in Nigeria, so as to bring about restoration, peace and security in Nigeria. This paper examined the concepts of language and insecurity, language and insecurity: The power of language in combating security challenges in Nigeria, security status in Nigeria, overview of the causes of insecurity in Nigeria and Nigerian government and the security challenges. At the end, the writer offered recommendations.

Keywords: Language (English) and Insecurity.

Introduction

Security is the backbone of any society and it is equally linked with social, political economic, educational and cultural growth. Security matters are vital matters that can affect all facets of life. Nigerians are indeed living in a state apprehension caused by insecurity of lives and properties. Cases of banditry in the Northern parts of Nigeria, for example: Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi, to mention but few are now the order of the day. Snatching of cars, kidnapping, armed robbery, looting of banks, communal fighting and inter-ethnic violence of various kinds are some of the unpalatable security challenges the country is facing, culminating into psychological depression, economic downturn, starvation, rapid relocation of people to new places to start life all over. However, issue of insecurity in Nigeria is a critical issue that needs to be giving urgent

attention. Hence, English language can serve as a tool to complement government efforts in fighting security challenges in the country.

It is against these backgrounds that it will be worthwhile to have an in depth understanding of Language and Security as they constitute the bed-rock for easy deciphering of the argument in the paper. In the same vein, the roles of English language in complementing government efforts in combating insecurity will equally be explored.

Concept of Language

There are many definitions of language as there are experts and linguists. The concept of language is a universal phenomenon which is highly essential for human and national development. Language, according to Egbokhare (2004) opines that, “Language permeates all aspects of human endeavour. It exists in a socio-political, historical, cultural and temporal milieu. The fortune of language is close tied to the fortune of the people who speak it”. Sapir (1963) opines that “Language is the key to the heart of a people”. Language is, therefore, conceived as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.

Similarly, Brumfit (1985) definition of language is in line with Sapir’s (1921) definition, who sees language as the relationship between words and experience and it could be produced and received in form of the verbalisation of experience or experience of verbalisation. These two terms according to Brumfit have different meanings, which explain language as a means by which we represent our experiences. By verbalisation of experience; we mean the act of speaking and writing; that is putting our reactions to experience within and around us into words. On the other hand, experience of verbalisation are the acts of listening and reading, making sense out of the words of others and understanding them in their contents.

Concept of Insecurity

Zubairu (2020), sees security as a situation that emerges from the establishment of ways of protecting individuals, information and properties from hostile people, influences and behavior. Security has to do with a situation in which people can travel around within a given natural space, without threats to their lives or properties. Straton (2001) quoting the American Heritage Dictionary defined, ‘Security’ as, “Freedom risk or danger safety, freedom from doubt, anxiety or fear, confidence, something that gives or assures safety.”

On the other hand, insecurity is the opposite of security. Insecurity is a menace and a ‘dragon’ that processes inestimable destructions and calamities. Achumba (2013) posits that, insecurity is lack of safety or the existence of danger, hazard and uncertainty. It is not being adequately guarded or protected. Zubairu (2020) opines that, insecurity is the state of being subject in every respect to terror, threat, risk, molestation, bullying, harassment, etc. Without security, it will be difficult for individuals within a state, society or community to participate in productive activities. The security of a nation must be constructed in term of the security of the individual citizen, who lives in peace with access to basic amenities of life.

Language and Insecurity: The Power of Language in Combating Security Challenges in Nigeria.

Language, the highest form of human communication has the power to escalate or contain the various shades of insecurity in different parts of the country. Wallwork (1969) posits that, “Language is an instrument of action, of influencing and persuading people, of conveying orders and information, as well as a thought process”. Thus, language can be used to usher in the desired change, which is security as well as harmonious co-existence in Nigeria.

To achieve this, there should be reconstruction and rebuilding of individuals and societal attitudes, values and preferences. There should also be transformation from hostility to amicability. Bloomfield (2003) opines that, the process of reconciliation includes the search for truth, justice, forgiveness and healing which enables individuals to co-exist and to develop a degree of co-operation. All these can be attained through dialogue, negotiation and mediation and not through force. We have seen visible efforts of the military and other security agencies using lethal force and combat missions to tackle insecurity in Nigeria, yet the situation is still escalating. Hence, this paper recommends non-kinetic language based approaches to tackling problems, especially dialogues, awareness campaign, political inclusion and social empowerment.

Insecurity can be curbed through dialogic and mediation processes. Dialogue and mediation cannot happen without the use of language. Thus, language plays a pivotal role in human and societal existence. Language has the capacity of either fermenting conflict or resolving conflict depending on the way it is used. When we communicate, we are involved in the act of giving and receiving messages. The response that a communication act evokes could be negative or positive. The negative or positive response to the act of communication depends greatly on language use. Appropriate use of language here means making the right choices of words, knowing when, where and how to use the words. Thus, communicative competence is a necessary skill a communicator needs to acquire. This is important so that meaning intended in a communication act will be understood and not be misinterpreted. It is when meaning is misinterpreted that rancor and altercations occur. This in turn degenerates to violent and chaotic situations. Appropriate use of language makes for a peaceful and harmonious society, while inappropriate language use fuels crises and leads to traumatised and chaotic society.

Security Status in Nigeria

The issue of insecurity in Nigeria is a major concern to all stakeholders in the country, as it is a "monster" that is causing serious havoc in the society. Nigeria is experiencing insecurity of lives and properties on daily basis. So much, that it creates havocs, destructions and killings. Boko Haram cases have resulted to loss of many lives and properties, people migrating from the northern parts of Nigeria to the south, east and west. These nefarious problems have great impact on the lives of upcoming generations.

For many families, the year 2011 will not be so easily forgotten. It was the year terrorism visited homes, streets, offices and places of worship, major attacked places include: United Nation Building in Abuja, it continued in the year 2012 with the Massacres in Saint Theresa Catholic Church Madalla, Niger State and multiple bomb blasts in Kano.

Armed robbery is yet another security challenge in Nigeria. During robbery attacks at homes, markets, banks, many innocent people are killed while lots of money is taken away. Similarly the issue of kidnapping is worrisome as it has become one of the means of extorting money from innocent people all in a bid to get rich. Sexual harassment is equally a serious security challenge Nigeria as many has fallen victim to this menace.

Overview of the Causes of Insecurity in Nigeria

Insecurity in Nigeria stems from monetization of the labour market. As a result of high unemployment, graduates without jobs have gone a lot of mental torture in the process of security jobs, these sets of people have been involved in all sorts of fiscal indiscipline and corruption and other social vices. These army of unemployed force themselves into the police force and other paramilitary and military sectors (The Punch, August 30th, 2012). The fallout of such a situation will be trying cover lost ground by enriching themselves illegally with criminal gangs after been brainwashed negatively with language by their counterparts. Oladepupo (2005:13), posits: It is irony of the Nigerian situation that the nation's law enforcement agents are even more corrupt than though they are supposed to..... This has sometimes been blamed on the manner and caliber of men and women recruited in the Nigerian security outfits. Merit and good character are thrown to the wind during recruitment as men and women of questionable characters including Criminals, bride into the force... little wonder, therefore, that many of the recruits hide under uniform to wreck havoc in the society.

Similarly, aside the bad eggs in the force, the poor welfare of the police, military paramilitary personnel, with lack of adequate working tools to facilitate their job further worsen the situation. Inadequate personnel are another factor that promotes insecurity in Nigeria. Hunger is equally, one of the remote causes of insecurity in Nigeria. Most Nigerians cannot live above one meal per-day. This unhealthy situation tends to lure people is to stealing, dealing with drugs and other forms of evil vices. Poor remuneration of workers is equally a course. Gross party indiscipline and fighting among political gladiators is another.

Nigerian Government and the Security Challenges

No meaningful progress and development can be made when a country is faced with serious security challenges. Nigerian government has made effort at combating these challenges. However, the government in its attempt to fight insecurity in the country, has in 2012 budget made lion share of N921.9bn for security alone (Daily Trust of September 5th, 2012). All over the country, military personnel and police are seen everywhere trying to contain the massive internal security situation.

In the same vein, the police station is regarded as a place where people flee for refuge in Nigeria. However, it is a place where people avoid at all cost; a place Nigerians have described satirically as "business centres" where extortion is the order of the day. The Federal Government in its bid to improve security lapses has approved the reformation of police which include: The introduction of a new camouflage uniform, professional training and workshops.

Despite all the efforts made by the government to improve security situation in Nigeria; lapses are still found as trained and well-equipped set of individuals who have been brainwashed by some sets of "sugar coated tongue" individuals are still perpetrating evils all around.

Aside the new camouflage, Adepegbe reported that the Federal Government has inaugurated 40 light armored vehicles for Highway Patrol. The vehicles were meant to facilitate crime control, enhance speedy response to distress calls on the highways and boost the capacity of the police to maintain round the clock presence on the roads (The Punch August 30th, 2012). However, in spite of all human and capital efforts, insecurity is still a very big challenge.

English Language: A Catalyst for Complementing Government Efforts in Fighting Insecurity Challenges in Nigeria

The roles of English language in complementing government efforts in fighting security challenges in Nigeria are very vital. It is an important tool that can be used to spur people into believing that they are one irrespective of their cultural differences and languages. Hence, English language serves as a unifying force. Most politicians in Nigeria today won their election as a result of their efficiency in public speaking. They used their sugar coated speeches to convince voters to vote them. Same applies to security issues in Nigeria, English language can equally be used to create a positive effect on the masses, thus, fighting the dragon (insecurity) Nigeria is facing today. English language can be used to convey information to the masses and the masses responds to not only to the sound but to the semantic import it carries and the emotional overtones. For instance, as reported in one of the Nigerian Newspapers, (Daily Trust of 6th May, 2013), Dokubu said, "There will be no peace if Jonathan losses 2015 election." Dokubo's speech in the caption can spur people into riot as his use of language (English language) is pregnant with meanings, as man's behaviour is determined by the effect of language.

In addition, English language is a language for specialised education. It is used as a medium of instruction from elementary to the university level, since it is regarded as language of instruction at all levels of education. Pupils at the primary level should be exposed to the consequences of not living in harmony caused by segregation of one sort or the other due to ethnic or language differences. This can be carried out with English language.

English language is also a language of mass media. This means that English is predominantly used in mass media. Over the radio most of the non-musical programmes, such as: Feature talks, news items, lectures and other educational programmes as well as advertisements are in English. Programmes related to civil unrest, political thuggery, arm robbery, kidnapping and the likes can be staged or discussed on radio or television in English language with the accompanying effects of such devilish acts on the perpetrators for people to watch and learn moral lessons from.

Equally, English language can serve as a tool for complementing government efforts in curbing security challenges in Nigeria via the pivotal functions it plays. English language is used for controlling the behaviour of people through such practices as: Warning, advising, persuading, encouraging, correcting and directing through various forms of control like:

- (1) Prohibition: Examples: "You should not take things that are not yours", "You must not bomb places of worship", "You should never pay attention to negative talks", etc.

- (2) Threat of reprisal if behaviour is not discontinued. Examples: "I will punish you, if you do that again," "You would seize to be a citizen of Nigeria, if you do that again", etc.
- (3) Categorisation of behaviour governed by rules. Examples: "That is not allowed in a country like Nigeria", "It is a taboo here", etc. These and many more are the regulatory functions of English language. Behaviours channeled towards destruction can be withdrawn via the regulatory functions of English language.

In addition, language is essentially to interaction as long as individuals in the society do not live in isolation. To have effective and meaningful interaction devoid of suspicions or unhealthy living, every participating member has to communicate in a language. Since, it is communication and understanding that lies at the heart of language. The argument is that, English language can be used to establish smooth and cordial relationship with people. The heart of man pre-occupied with evils can be revealed on the ground that cordial relationship has been established. The heart already pre-occupied with evil waiting to explode and cause havoc in the society can turn around for good through the instrumentality of English language. An extremely silent man is usually considered dangerous because, he will not interact with others. Linguists encourage conversation between people to facilitate cordial relationship.

English language is an official language used in government. It means that government transactions (verbal or written) are carried out in English language. Memoranda and letters are written in English and it is the language of protocol, including but not limited to speeches/broadcasts by government to the people. Government educate the masses on the dangers of protests and campaign of calumny through verbal or written communication. Ogu(1492) states that, "The stand of government policy is that English is the national language in Nigeria and it is to be used in political administration and for education purposes."

Conclusion

No matter how endowed and secure a country is, security challenges are inevitable. Insecurity in Nigeria sign posts high level of moral decline in Nigeria. As such, English language can be used in controlling the behaviour of people through such practices as: Warning, advising, persuading, encouraging, correcting and directing people's behaviour positively. Thus, the language has proven it worth as a veritable tool in complementing government efforts in combating these security challenges in Nigeria.

Recommendations

For any meaningful democracy to exist, there must be peace and security to be enjoyed by every citizen. Nigeria needs peace and concentration for its continued existence, development and security. It is in view of this that this paper offers recommendations in order to enhance national security. Based on issues raised/discussed in this paper concerning insecurity challenges and how English language can help in tackling them, the following recommendations are offered:

- (1) Teachers of English language should endeavour to educate pupils/students and community on appropriate use of words when communicating whether verbally or in written form.

- (2) Parents, teachers/scholars, media and the society at large need to give their ultimate support in utilising language (English) properly which can serve as an avenue towards promoting peace and unity.
- (3) The federal government effort should be geared towards formulating language policy calculated to promote English language as a catalyst in combating insecurity challenges in Nigeria.
- (4) Government should create communication channels to effectively disseminate information, create awareness and give the people a sense of belonging and inclusion.
- (5) Political officers should be mindful of the linguistic choices they make as they engage in communication transactions.

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