

NIGERIAN LANGUAGES AS VERITABLE TOOLS FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

A.N.E. Chima

Abstract

Language can be seen as a repository of knowledge about the personality and culture of the individual. It may also be argued that language to some degree influences social change and development. Characteristically language is believed to be the mirror of culture, because it glaringly reflects a crystallized thought and life pattern of a people. It is through these traditional functions of language that it is expected to play a major role in conflict management. This is because language enhances communication between man and his fellow man and amongst individuals in the society. This paper therefore investigates the extent effective conflict management can be achieved through judicious use of indigenous languages. The paper goes further to define some relevant concepts and explain a lot of issues relating to conflict. Finally, it examines Nigerian languages as veritable tools for conflict management and make some recommendations.

A careful study of human history has revealed that conflict has been in existence since the cradle of human creation. In the household of God, we experience conflict when Lucifer rebelled against God and other Angels. In the household of Adam, Cain rebelled against the family by killing his brother, Abel. Esau and Jacob were in logger-head in the household of Isaac. Absalom and Adonijah were tearing each other apart in the household of David. Coming down to the Nigeria context, the Igbo, Hausa Yoruba and other minority tribes are at one another's throat for one ambition or another. The Christians and Moslems compound matters *in* this issue. The leaders and the led are like cats and rats. No one looks at one another with good eyes in fact, the list is endless.

According to Owoeye (2009:2) the incidence of conflicts in Nigeria has led to the emergence along cultural ethnic lines, of some groups made up of males and females. Such groups include Odua people's congress (OPC), Arewa people's congress (APC), Bakassi Boys, Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB).

Following the above submissions of Owoeye; Uzochukwu (2002) opines that: "in seeking to promote their ethnic or group interest, in asserting their rights and in seeing that peace and justice are maintained, their mode of operation is often belligerent in approach whether they are succeeding or will succeed in achieving their aims in entirety is a different matter but their existence is an indication of a country beset by conflicts crying for resolution".

This phenomenon logically demands a conflict management school of thought. Such schools should endeavour to discover the root causes of these conflicts, ways of management and preventing them. In the light of these prevailing circumstances, this paper will shade more lights on some conflicts within the Nigeria context, define some of the major concepts of this study and among other things discuss how Nigerian languages can be used as veritable tools for conflict management. Furthermore, some relevant concepts which are closely related to this study will be defined as explicated below.

The Concept of Language

Wardhough (2006) asserts that "language is what a particular society speaks". Atolagbe (2004) opines that human language is a useful tool of communication to mankind while Adeyanju (2004) also observed that "Language is incontrovertibly central to all human activities as it is crucial to either peaceful co-existence or disunity among members" The above definitions have made us to know that language promotes communication and mutual intelligibility amongst individuals and the society at large. It is the key to all human endeavours. It motivates social interaction thereby

promoting active involvement in public life. From the foregoing, it is apparent that the importance of language in conflict management cannot be overemphasized.

In the issue of Nigerian languages; Elugbe (1990) opines that "... every language which is indigenous to Nigeria; which has definite location, and is part of an indigenous culture, is a Nigerian language".

The lesson learnt from Elugbe's view above is that such a language must have its root in Nigeria soil and must have native speakers who are Nigerians. Nigeria is a multilingual nation endowed with many languages that scatter all over the surface of the country.

According to Bamgbose (1991), there are about 513 languages in Nigeria. The fact remains that Nigeria is a multilingual nation. Given the multiplicity of languages, it becomes necessary that a decision must have to be taken on the role each of these languages would play in the scheme of things. This was why the National Policy on Education (NPE) specified the roles and status of each language in education and in our polity. The languages policy statement with regards to the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages as L2 states that:

as a means of preserving the people's culture, the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that a child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

The above statement emphasized the need to use indigenous languages as a means of fostering unity and preserving the culture of the country. Besides, it will minimize ethnic antagonism, hostility and conflict which over the years have been the bane of the country's unity

The Concept of Conflict

According to Himmes (1980:14), "Conflict is a purposeful struggle between collective actors who use social power to defeat or remove opponents and to gain status, power, resources and other scarce values ... "While to Kriesberg (1982:7), conflicts exist when two or more parties believe they have incompatible objectives.

According to Fernandes (2008), the word conflict conjures up associations of tensions, disruptions, and violence with the expectation of making anything in form of life uncomfortable. With this view in mind, conflict is something to be avoided or even suppressed for it is an evil wind that blows no good to anyone. Stagner in. Nwolise (2001) sees conflict as "a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other but not by both. Each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal and each party perceived the other as a barrier or threat to the goal".

According to Dougherty and Pfaltgrat (1981), conflict is "a condition which one identifiable group of human beings is engaged in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable groups because these groups are pursuing what are or appear to be incompatible goals". To Isumonah (2001), it is "a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests". Suffice all the above views of scholars on conflict to mean that "conflict is the product of institutionalized disagreement over ideas, needs or interests" (Owoeye, 2009:3).

The Concept of Management

Management in this content under review is settlement, control, and the likes which is administration of justice, equity and fair play for the attainment of peace and unity. The safer terminology or academic jargon often used in the place of management with regard to conflict is "resolution".

The Concept of Conflict Management Cum Resolution

Nwolise (2001) sees Conflict Resolution as "the removal of the root causes of a conflict and the progression, transformation or amelioration of the relation between the parties involved in the conflict". Nwolise (2003) further includes that in conflict resolution, truth, justice and objectivity are inevitable tools for generating lasting peace. However, this can be done by a third party through negotiation, mediation, intervention, or by war etc.

Miller (2003) sees conflict resolution as a "variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict". Miall et al (1999) are of the view that with the term "conflict Resolution", it is expected that the deep-rooted sources of conflicts are addressed and resolved and behaviours are no longer violent nor attitudes hostile any longer. In a similar vein, Mitchell and Banks (1996) see conflict resolution as an outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self-sustaining in the long run and productive of a new positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries.

From the above views of scholars, it is clear that conflict resolution, according to Shedrack (2003) as reported by Owuoye (2009:4) connotes a sense of finality where the parties to conflict are mutually satisfied with the outcome of a settlement and the conflict is resolved in true sense. Having deliberated on the above concepts that conform to this study, it becomes necessary in this paper to trace the root causes of these conflicts and how maximum utilization of Nigerian indigenous languages can enhance effective management cum resolution of these conflicts.

Causes of Conflicts

A lot of events, occurrences, actions and happenings that have negative connotations might lead or result to conflicts. These are characterized by religious intolerance, political instability, economic meltdown, misappropriation of public fund, looting of state treasury, class discrimination, etc. These emanate from the leaders to the led, the managements to the subjects, the superordinates to the subordinates.

Besides, conflicts could equally arise between one state and another state; one tribe and another tribe; one religious sect and another 'religious -sect, etc. As earlier claimed, a lot of factors lead to the causes of conflicts and they are too numerous to mention. According to Bassey (2000), the lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion, animosity, violence and disunity, which characterize Nigeria today, and threaten her peaceful co-existence are traceable to these factors.

The tremendous diversity presented by the ethnic composition, social economic structure and physical characteristics of the country has had far-reaching consequences for the nature of protracted social conflict in Nigeria. As a matter of importance and on a more serious note, Imobighe (2002) condemned, in very strong terms this negative view of ethnicity often canvassed as the 'malignant' cause of instability in Nigeria. According to him:

Ethnic excessiveness is not part of the normal process of inter-communal interaction in Nigeria. If it were so, it would have been difficult for ethnic groups to welcome the arrival of other ethnic groups in their midst and provide land for them to settle, a phenomenon which has led to the intermingling of different ethnic groups within the country.

Types of Conflict

The resultant effects of conflict vary according to their motivating causes. The recorded ones range between youth restiveness, labour down tools and protest, students' riot and religious riot to mention but few. The list is endless but we use these few examples to buttress the fact that conflict has never given birth to any favorable atmosphere, that is why, it demands immediate resolution to allow peace reign supreme because without peaceful co-existence, there would not be economic and political growth and without the "duo" as mentioned, there would not be national

development. That is why everybody clamours for conflict resolution in all strata of human endeavors.

Agents of Conflict.

The agents of conflict among numerous others include political leaders, religious leaders, federal, state and local governments, managers and directors of parastatals and firms, etc. Government policies from both federal, state and local government often cause conflict owing to error in policy formulation and implementation. Every leader, manager or director is in one time or the other guilty of unfavorable policy formulation and implementation and these brew anarchy and chaos which are the mother of conflict.

A society comprises various classes of people and their aims are to achieve goals which can only be done in a peaceful and favorable atmosphere; an atmosphere that breeds uninterrupted peace, harmony; justice and equity and love of one another. Jomoh (2006) states that: "human society is dynamic and yesterday solution may not be sufficient in answering today's questions. Change is therefore inevitable and when those who have to bring it about are insensitive to the dynamic of social and economic forces, a conflict situation is created".

The lesson adduced from the above submissions of Jimoh is that it is the people at the helm of affairs, the leaders so to say that breed conflict through their obnoxious policies and implementation of same without considering the welfare and wellbeing of their subjects. At this juncture, conflict resolution or management is needed and efforts should be made to map out solutions and strategies aim at restoring peace and eradicating conflict and this gesture will take us to the subsequent heading which is ways of managing conflicts.

Ways of Managing Conflicts

There is no problem under the sun without its attendant solution; so also it is in the case of conflict. Once conflict crops up from any of the intending causes, the next thing to do is to find ways of managing it or eradicate it totally. At this premise, it is necessary to note here that there are many ways of managing conflicts; the most popular among them are round-table negotiation, use of force and coercion like retirement of the ring leaders, suspension or dismissal of the entire group or only their ring leaders as the case may be; banning of the labour unions; etc. Moreso, favourable and peaceful strategies might be used to manage or resolve conflict such as promotion, salary increment, provision of essential commodities and amenities etc. It is pertinent to reveal in this study that most a time some of these measures highlighted above in eradicating conflict do not yield much positive result in achieving this feat especially in our Nigeria context. Many reasons have been advanced to explain this ugly trend. These include poor logistics, lack of cooperation by major stake holders, non-implementation of white paper or recommendations made by panels or commissions of inquiry; etc.

In view of the above, Imobighe (2003) suggests that there is need for civil society to intervene. At this juncture, the question that could bother us here is, who are the actual managers of conflict, that is, those solely saddled with the responsibility of looking into conflict matters? Let us attempt to address this issue in the next heading.

Managers of Conflict

Wherever there is a thick forest, there must be a shrine which libation is poured to at daily basis. In the same vein, at the birth of any conflict, there must be people appointed to look into it so as to recommend ways of eradicating it. The people solely appointed to oversee the issue of conflict are numerous but we have, for the purpose of this study mention some of the apparent ones to include government and stake holders, panels and commissions of inquiry, management, labour and union leaders, etc.

In view of the above, Ikelegbe (2003) did not hide his feelings in his critique of the manner in which the Nigerian state handles ethnic and religious disturbances without recourse to the role

social society could play in the process.

He, (Ikelegbe 2003) States that: The management of societal conflicts has largely been a political process in which the state plays a dominant role with international and multinational involvement in large scale conflicts.

In order to ensure vibrant and rapid response or solution to the incessant cases of conflict in Nigeria, James (2003) as reported by Davis (2009:26) identified what he calls perceptual prism' that could help Nigerian civil society plan an effective partnership role in the management of religious conflicts in the country. According to James, Civil society groups should focus attention on the following:

- i. The social organization and structural patterns of interaction.
- ii. The modes of violence employed.
- iii. The values of the parties in conflict
- iv. Changes in the hierarchy of values
- v. The degree of incompatibility of goals
- vi. The genesis of conflict
- vii. The perception of symmetry and asymmetry among the conflict parties
- viii. Symmetries as to power potential and loyalties, and
- ix. The way in which the conflict is terminated

Results of Conflict Management

In fact, when conflict is actually erupted as it is inevitable and immediately resolved, the following positive results are recorded:

- i. Peaceful co-existence of the citizenry
- ii. Security of lives and property
- iii. Favorable working- conditions
- iv. Good standard of living
- v. Employment opportunity
- vi. Attraction of both local and foreign investors
- vii. Economic growth, and
- viii. National development.

Nigerian Languages as Tools for Conflict Management

Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language use and society. Language builds the nation. It is in language that we perceive realities in life. That is why scholars believe that language permeates life. Based on this premise, we claim in this paper that language especially that of the immediate community, the mother tongue (MT) so to say, is a formidable tool for conflict management. It is used to resolve conflict quicker especially when the parties involved understand the context of the language used. Language can be intimate, educative, informative and persuasive as the case may be. Therefore, a mediator in a conflict management must be articulate and deeply rooted in the mastery of the target language and must know how to handle the languages in the attainment of the desired goal. He must also put into consideration the social class, age, sex, religious background, etc in fashioning appropriate registers to mediate effectively in a conflict. This is necessary because linguistic incompetence may result in bad usage, which will adversely affect communication and attract unfavorable reaction from the people concerned. Subtle use of language is necessary in a conflict resolution. Indigenous languages also play vital roles in conflict resolution through effective use of the power of words (Uzochukwu, 2002). Nigerian indigenous languages employ different media in resolving conflict such as idiomatic expression, figurative expressions, local adages, proverbs, anecdotes, Wellerism, etc These expressions are usually used by elders or whoever acts in such capacity as mediators to resolve conflict in the society.

For conflict to be resolved amicably, Nigerian languages must play a prominent role. The languages should be used to preach for the peaceful co-existence amongst the citizenry so that resolution of conflict will not be seen as a hard nut to crack. It can be during festivals, in churches,

mosques or during social gathering. All these attempts must go a longer way to yield positive results.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to define the concept of language and highlighted on its importance to mankind. We took much time and space to explain the concept of conflict and conflict management cum resolution. There, we inferred that dispute and conflict are inevitable facts of life, a normal part of living. If we shall therefore develop our understanding of conflict management, we need to develop open mind towards conflict, knowing full well that it might be an opportunity for positive change and development if properly managed and not avoided or left to result into anarchy and chaos. To achieve the aforementioned, we managed to trace the causes of conflict, the nature of conflict, the perpetrators of this evil wind that blows no good to anyone. Here, we pointed accusing fingers to people at the helm of affairs in all strata of life or human endeavors. Ways of managing conflict if erupted and the people who will do the job are equally mentioned. The resultant effects of successful management of conflict are also enumerated.

To what extent can maximum utilization of Nigerian language as a panacea to eradicate conflict which is the main focus of this paper is exhaustively treated. Here, we stressed that the development of Nigerian languages will help promote inter- ethnic commendation, peaceful co-existence and social harmony. Language and culture are interwoven and dynamic. Both should reflect the interest of the nation and be geared towards unity. There should, through the use of Nigerian indigenous language, inculcate in the citizenry especially the youth, the culture of respect, tolerance, peace, unity, love and co-operation in cultural festivals and sports competition. To support this view; Iwara (1997) Opined that: "Language is at the heart of human activity and no investment however huge can be said to be expensive".

We conclude by saying that the diversities of language, culture and religion notwithstanding, we should nourish, harness and use our indigenous languages for the enrichment, unity and peace of the nation.

Recommendation

In the light of the above, the following recommendations are made:

1. The federal government should vote sufficient fund and work assiduously towards achieving a national language that will serve as a lingua franca. This will go a long way reducing diversity in culture and at the same time diffusing suspicion and intolerance amongst the ethnic groups but foster national unity.
2. More literary works should be written in indigenous languages to reflect our traditional ways of settling or resolving conflicts where impartiality, fairness and justice, tolerance and genuine reconciliation would be used as major themes.
3. More emphasis should be laid on acquisition and proficient use of indigenous languages in resolving conflicts because in the use of the languages of the people, the realities of life are apparently seen.
4. Seminars, conferences and short terms courses and workshops should be established from time to time for the citizenry especially the youths where the virtues of love, peace and unity in juxtaposition with the evil effects of hatred, conflict and war will be effectively taught.

References

- Adeyanju, D (2004). *Historicity and Language Function: A case of the English Language in Nigeria* in Oyeleye (ed). *Language and Discourse in Society* Ibadan: Hope Publications.
- Atolagbe, A.A. (2004). *Addressing Societal Problems through Communication in Social Works in* Oyeleye (ed). *Language and Discourse in Society*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Nigerian Languages as Veritable Tools for Conflict Management

- Bamgbose, A.I. (1971). The English Language in Nigeria in Spencer, J.(ed) *The English Language in West Africa*. London; Longmans Green and Co. 36.
- Dougherty, J. & Pfaltzgraf, (1981). *Contending Thesis of Internal Relations: A Compressive Survey"* New York: Harper and Row.
- Elugbe, B.O. (1990) National language and National development in Emenanjo E Nolue (ed) *Multilingualism, Minority Language and Language Policy in Nigeria* Agbor Center Books Ltd. 10
- Imobighe, (2002) (ed), *Civil Society and Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum, 16-27.
- Isumonah. V. A. (2003). Obasanjo Administration and the management of Nigerl Delta Conflicts in Nigeria" in *African Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*1,2.
- Miall, et al (1999). In Shed rack (ed). *Introduction to peace and Conflicts Studies*. Geneve; University of Peace.
- Miler, C.A. (2003). *A Glossary of Terms and Concepts in peace and Conflict Studies*. Geneva; University of Peace.
- Mitchel, C. & Banks, M. (1996). *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: The Analytical Problems-Solving Approach*. Printer A C A. sell imprint.
- Nwolise, O.B.C. (2002). *The Fate of Women and Children in conflict situation*, lecture note delivered at a seminar on Armed Conflict,
- NwosJisc, O.B.C. (2003) War-Making, Peace and Conflict Resolution Africa.
- Owoeye, O. O. (2009) Language, Linguistic, Literature and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria. In Ojelade, K. (ed), *Journal of Language and Literature Teaching (JOLAL)*. 8(1),1-16.
- IJzochukwu, S. (2002). *The Role of Indigenous Languages and Conflict Resolution: The Nigerian Situation*. Paper Presented at the 5th Annual Public Lecture held at F.C.E. (S P) Oyo, 3rd September, 2002.
- Wardshaugh, R. (2006). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Uk: Black Well Publishing.