

INVESTIGATING PEACEFUL LANGUAGE USE FOR SECURITY IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

Olágúnjú, Tòsìn Samson, Ph.D

*Department of Linguistics & African Languages
Federal University Lokoja
Lokoja*

*tosin.olagunju@fulokoja.edu.ng OR ayoolagunju677@gmail.com
+2348033894943*

&

Sani Salamatu

*Department of English & Literary Studies
Ahmadu Bello University
Zaria*

*salmahsan2@yahoo.com
+2348035076134*

Abstract

The question of how to find a lasting solution to insecurity in Nigeria has recently become the concern of both the leaders and the citizens. Amidst this, academics, especially in the humanities, are not left out in the quest, working on how language could be used as a panacea to insecurity challenges in the country. This paper, therefore, explores the possibility of drawing from the pool of linguistic resources using language of peace to tackle this menace to attain peace and security in Nigeria with reference to Kogi State. The study dwells on the theoretical framework of Traditions of Linguistics and Peace Education, as postulated by Francisco Gomes de Matos (2006). The theory upholds that language can be used as national resource to improve social life. Data were collected through personal observation, structured interviews, and audio recordings of public speeches of selected individuals (students, civil servants, traders, and politicians) in the three senatorial districts of Kogi State. Consequently, the study reveals that the security challenges and threats at all levels can be handled through language of peace inherent in indigenous proverbs, euphemisms, and idioms. The paper concludes that the government of the day should embark on aggressive language planning, supported by strong political will, ensuring that teaching and learning our indigenous languages are encouraged at all levels. Also, rather than seeing our multilingual and multicultural situation as a bane, it should be used as strong instrument for fighting the menace of insecurity and restoration of peace.

Keywords: Language, Security, Insecurity, Peace, Sociolinguistics

Introduction

Language forms part of what constitutes the world we find ourselves in today. This is because language expresses an individual's innate desire in relation to society. It is also viewed as social control "tool". In other words, language is used to control the society. Whenever and wherever language is used, conversation is inevitable. This validates the popular saying, "no language, no communication."

The analysis of "language use" is necessary in contemporary linguistic studies because of the importance of language to all human endeavours. According to Oyebade (1992), human beings express their views, feelings, and ideas with language. Maduekwe (2007) adds that it is one of the yardsticks, whether written or spoken with which intelligence is measured. Authorities in Linguistics have consistently emphasised the importance of language to humans. Harry (2014), in his summary of De Saussure's 'Course De Linguistique General,' says:

Language is no longer regarded as peripheral to our grasp of the world we live in but as central to it. Words are not mere vocal labels or communicational adjuncts superimposed upon an already given order of things. They are collective products of social interaction essential instruments through which human beings constitute and articulate their world.

In the above submission, language is presented as an essential social tool that transcends its sounds and structures, but which is inclusive of its capacity to facilitate the actualisation of human realities. Humans express their views, feelings, and ideas with language. It is a unique, indispensable tool that nature has bestowed on man. Language importantly serves the communication function in human relations as a social being. The language ability of a man is one of the attributes that shows his feelings and thoughts; using language (verbal and non-verbal), friendliness, hostility, and temperament are depicted.

Language is an indispensable tool for communication, socialisation and interaction with one another. Language has, for centuries, remained the driving force with which thoughts are conveyed. Whether it is in spoken or in written communication, language plays the role of transmitting ideas, knowledge, experience and thought. It has been extensively described by researchers based on their beliefs and orientations. Edward Sapir has been regarded as the most frequently quoted when it comes to the definition of language. He defines language as a "purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires using voluntarily produced symbols." (Sapir 1921:8). This definition, as Lyons (1981) notes, suffers from several defects. For example, a lot more is communicated than just ideas, emotions, and desires. Moreover, it does not say what kind of symbols are produced, whether light, electromagnetic, or sound (Essien, 2003).

Another popularly quoted definition of language is that of Bloch and Trager (1942:5), which describes language as “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates.” This definition does not refer to the communicative functions of language; instead, it emphasise its social functions, which is a narrower view of the role language plays in a society. However, as Essien (2003) observes, the definition advances Sapir’s voluntarily produced symbols by stating that such symbols are vocalic, that is, they concern sound. Chomsky (1957:19), the most influential and greatest linguist of our time, defines language as “a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements.” This purely structural definition did not say something on the communicative function of a natural or non-natural language.

The last definition considered and preferred for this study is that of Essien (2003:14): “a system of structural arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which human beings make meaning and communicate, meet, interact with each other in a given community.” This definition has made it explicit that language is a system, that is, a system of rules and principles in which sound, structure and meaning are integrated for communication. More so, language is a system because the components are ordered and not haphazard. It is primarily vocal in which the sounds correspond to meaning; otherwise, one would be making just noises. This implies that language, in all its ramifications is meant for meaningful communication. Words in any language are used to teach, inform, explain, direct, inspire or negatively deceive, mislead, lie, or insult. Thus, it is pertinent to investigate the language of peace for security in Nigeria with Particular reference to Kogi State.

Bio-Sketch of Kogi State

Since this paper’s scope is limited to Kogi State as a case study, it is imperative to provide readers with a little detail about the state. McKenna (2022) **upholds that Kogi** State, Central Nigeria, was created in 1991 from portions of eastern Kwara and western Benue States. Nassawara State borders it to the northeast; Benue to the east; Enugu, Anambra, and Delta to the south; Ondo, Ekiti, and Kwara to the west; and Niger to the north. Abuja Federal Capital Territory also borders Kogi to the north. The state consists of a wooded savanna region bisected by the southward-flowing Niger River; the Benue River, a major tributary of the Niger, forms part of the state’s northeastern border. The Igala peoples are the main ethnic group east of the Niger, while the Epira and Yoruba live west of the river. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. Major crops include yams, cassava (manioc), rice, sorghum, beans, corn (maize), and cotton. Riverine fishing is also important. Coal is mined for national distribution from the Okaba fields in the northern Udi-Nsukka Plateau, east of the

Niger River. Nigeria's largest iron ore deposit is on the Agbaja Plateau north of the state capital, Lokoja. Marble is quarried at Jakura, 20 miles (32 km) northwest of Lokoja, and the town also has a lime-processing plant. Ajaokuta is the site of a major iron and steel plant. Lokoja, on the west bank of the Niger River, is connected by road northward to Abuja and southwestward to Benin City. Idah, on the east bank of the Niger, is a major trading and ferrying port. The languages spoken in the State include but are not limited to Yoruba, Ebirá, Igala, Bassa, Egon, Oworo, Hausa, and Nupe.

Statement of the Problem

In the beginning of the global village called *the world*, history has made it a peaceful world, void of acrimony, violence, upheavals, riots and insecurity. But today, the story has changed to the opposite, all thanks to the level at which insecurity has eaten into the peace the world once enjoyed. In all of these, Nigeria is not an exception. The issue of insecurity in Nigeria could be described as the one visible to the blind and audible to the deaf. Though the nation has had several tales of insecurity over time, it seems not to have learnt from the experiences. That is perhaps why the present democratic experiment has been characterised by several shades of crisis, from her genocide in the name of civil war to several ethno-religious riots, Boko Haram insurgency, Niger Delta resource control agitation, Biafra secession threats, armed robbery cases, banditry, and kidnapping to recession. All these call for serious concern. Consequently, different approaches and measures have been deployed to curtail insecurity in Nigeria to no avail. Little wonder, Motanya and Toro (2015) uphold thus:

Ever since the marriage between the northern and southern protectorates in Nigeria in 1914, the country has been bedeviled by countless anomalies ranging from cultural, social, educational, economic, and political upheavals which have remained with us even after being granted our freedom. The worst of these anomalies today is insecurity which seems to have eaten deep into the foundation of our unity and it is gradually hazardously reducing this foundation. Part of these insecurity challenges are directly or indirectly caused by some of our leaders.

Drawing from the argument of Motanya and Toro, it is evident that tackling the menace of insecurity in present-day Nigeria has become the concern of all and sundry. The problem is the most appropriate measure to employ as lasting solution. This is because several measures have been employed, such as funding the security agencies' negotiation with bandits, Boko haram and kidnappers. However, none of these measures has yielded any positive result. Amidst this, academics, especially in the humanities, are not left out in the quest, working on how language could be used as a panacea to insecurity challenges in the country.

It is against this problematic backdrop that this paper investigates the possibility of drawing from the pool of our linguistic resources using language of peace to tackle this menace with a view to attaining peace and security in Nigeria with reference to Kogi State.

Peace Linguistics

Friedrich (2007) argues that in the 90s, the world witnessed a growing concern for issues of peace and an emerging awareness of the relationship between communication and peace. As part of this new order, Peace Linguistics has branched out of Linguistics as a specialised field in Peace Studies, hoping to influence how we communicate and educate. However, despite its potential contribution, Peace Linguistics has not been systematised into a theoretical model. However, with the submission of Francisco Gomes de Matos, the current paper attempts to explore Peace Linguistics as a theoretical framework for its analysis of data.

Methodology

Data were collected through personal observation, structured interviews, and audio recordings of public speeches of selected individuals in the three senatorial districts of Kogi State- Western, Central, and Eastern Senatorial districts. In each of the senatorial districts, both elderly and young ones were observed through structured interviews. Responses of five persons from each senatorial district were selected for analysis. In addition to this, political gatherings, social gatherings, religious gatherings, and schools such as Kogi State Polytechnic Lokoja, Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba, Federal University Lokoja, and Federal College of Education Okene were visited for personal observation, collecting data through interviews.

Theoretical Orientations

This research takes as its theoretical framework as found in the Traditions of Linguistics and Peace Education through their respective key concepts: Language and Peace as postulated by Francisco Gomes de Matos (2005). It holds that universally shared faculty of language is one of the prerequisites for humans to function as language acquirers, language users, and language makers. Thus, everyone's linguistic history starts with childhood language acquisition, followed by life-long communicative development in one or more languages. Humans are bio-neuro-psychologically equipped to learn languages and through social interaction to build up communicative competence. Thus, Language is a human cognitive system. which enables us to communicate via culture-specific systems called languages.

Peace on the other hand is a profound process of humanization, a system of humanizing oneself and others, or in less abstract terms, a system of becoming humanisers, that is, persons imbued with such values as compassion, dignity, human rights, justice, peace, solidarity, (cross)cultural understanding and the application of such ideals in everyday interactions.

Interrelatedness between Language and Peace

Language and Peace have long co-existed as two juxtaposed concepts, and little has been done universally, on a systematic basis, to integrate them, not just theoretically but by its applicability. The existence of such conspicuous gap has led to the Applications of Linguistics to Peace since 1993, when the concept of communicative peace was created. In such spirit, a book in Portuguese was published on a Pedagogy of Positiveness (Communicating constructively in Portuguese) in 1996, followed in 2002 by another book, also in Portuguese, on *Communicating for the good toward communicative peace* by Francisco Gomes de Matos. In both proposals, a case has been made for Peaceful Language/Communication focusing on the vital agents of language systems: language users. In fact, having characterised language as a cognitive activity, it is well to add that human beings are engaged in creative, language-using activities. To deeply humanise the language and peace connection, the phrase Peaceful Language has been adopted in this paper, with the noun *use* left implicit. Thus: *Peaceful Language (Use)*. As human beings, we are language users/makers but to what extent are we also peaceful language users/makers? The concept of *Language Use* as type of linguistic competence is universally shared but it is unfortunate that the concept of *Peaceful Language Use* is conspicuously absent from most educational systems, societal engagements, political rallies and discourses, religious gatherings, etc., if considered as a systematic programme for life-long education of peaceful language users.

Sequel to this argument, Francisco Gomes de Matos proposes four principles for peaceful language users, and these are adopted for analysis of collected data in this work. They are:

Principle 1 - Be a peaceful language bridge person between/among persons, groups, communities. This should be done by viewing and treating conflicts and controversies constructively, convincing others cooperatively rather than competitively or coercively, and contributing to a culture of compassion.

Principle 2 - Dignify your daily dialogue. This can be achieved by addressing other persons with respectful language and optimistic vocabulary, disagreeing through empathic language, that is, by placing oneself in the other's shoes, and using positivizers (adjectives and verbs that can enhance positive qualities/traits in people).

Principle 3 - Honour humanism and foster humanisation. This can be realised by avoiding/preventing verbal harm and humiliation, applying justice and peace to your communicative acts, and rephrasing potentially dehumanizing messages and/or texts.

Principle 4 - Act as a peace patriot always by perceiving persons as peace partners, promoting a passion for peace, especially in aggressive, hostile contexts, and monitoring your communication for their ethical, moral, and social values.

The four principles for peaceful language users, as proposed by Francisco Gomes de Matos have been considered adequate and adopted for the analysis of the data in this paper because, as it is evident in the study, they take care of the appropriateness of how language should be used in the society, especially a cosmopolitan and heterogeneous society like Nigeria and Kogi State to be specific. Another exciting justification for the use of this theoretical framework is the fact that, in the field of Peace Linguistics, it is an emerging theory for analysing data in Peace Linguistics.

Presentation of Data and Analysis

From the data gathered, which are naturally occurring utterances of individuals, 10 were purposively selected for analysis in this paper. This is so for the paper to account for adequate analysis. Also, time and space constraints were considered in the selection of speeches for analysis. These speeches were selected from different individuals and in different contexts. The selected data were presented and analysed in the table below under sub-headings: speech, context, violated principle, adhered principle and remarks.

S/N	SPEECH	CONTEXT	VIOLATED PRINCIPLE	ADHERED PRINCIPLE	REMARKS
1	<i>We cannot allow herdsmen to take over our ancestral land. We must chase away these Fulanis.</i>	During a television interview on NTA Lokoja	Principle 1 has been violated. The language use is not peaceful but violent. Principle 3 is also violated because humanism is not honoured to foster humanization.	NIL	The speaker does not consider the gravity of the utterance. Such a stern threat may provoke the Fulanis to anger for them to unleash mayhem on innocent people.
2	<i>Let us fortify ourselves and attack these bastards (referring to kidnapers and bandits)</i>	During a conversation between two elders at a sit-out in Lokoja	Principle 4 has been violated in that the speaker has not acted as a peace patriot who perceives persons as peace partners.	NIL	No one would ever entertain being referred to as bastard, especially in a society where culture and tradition are respected. So, such hostile and aggressive statement should be discouraged.
3	<i>If the government</i>	This is a statement from a citizen in	Principle 2 has been violated		The language used for the government

	<i>can no longer protect us, let us protect and defend ourselves.</i>	one of the structured interviews.	as the speaker does not dignify his dialogue. He does not believe the government can protect him. Vocabulary		is disrespectful and pessimistic.
4	<i>Me ah de pack my load de comot dis insecurity country (I am packing my luggage out of this unsecured country.)</i>	Observed at an interactive session among students of Federal University Lokoja	Principle 2 has been violated as the speaker does not dignify his dialogue.	NIL	Using Pidgin Language shows the intensity of the pessimism exhibited by the speaker. There should be some level of peaceful hope in the country for security purposes.
5	<i>This state is not for the influx of okada riders from Niger State. They should go back to their state.</i>	A celebrity commenting on the effect of recklessness of okada riders in Lokoja	Principle 1 has been violated because the speaker does not consider being a peaceful language bridge person between/among persons.	Nil	One would have expected the speaker to be pragmatic and diplomatic in the comment for it not to steer anger which could lead to issue of insecurity.
6	<i>Peace of the Father is what I always pray for Kogi State and Nigeria.</i>	From one of the religious leaders in a structured interview	Nil	Principles 2 and 4 are adhered to. The speaker dignifies himself in his dialogue and he is optimistic of peace in the state and in the country.	Such optimistic prayer in an explicit language should be encouraged.
7	<i>The love of our country should come first. So, let us encourage the government in the fight against</i>	One of the Political Science students of Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyingba in an interactive session	Nil	Principle 4 is adhered to. The speaker is seen act as a peace patriot by promoting a passion for peace, especially	The speaker sees the need to put the country first and above any other thing.

	<i>insecurity.</i>			in aggressive, hostile contexts of insecurity.	
8	<i>Let us all live in peace. War, insecurity, and banditry cannot take us anywhere as a country.</i>	One of the elders during a burial at Ogori which was attended by one of the researchers.	Nil	Principle 1 is adhered to as the speaker demonstrates being a peaceful language bridge person between/among persons, groups, communities, contributing to a culture of compassion.	Bringing all and sundry together in advocating for peace should be encouraged.
9	<i>The government should ensure something about peace and peaceful co-existence is taught in schools.</i>	An elder in Ayetoro-Gbede offering advice to the government during an interview.	Nil	Principle 4 has been adhered to in that the speaker has acts as a peace patriot who perceives persons as peace partners. He is also optimistic in the government to provide security.	The speaker has succeeded in convincing all and sundry that if the concept of peace is taught in our schools, there will be peace.
10	<i>No peace no language, no peace no communication, no peace no security.</i>	A school leaver in Okene, during an interactive session	Nil	Principle 2 has been adhered to as the speaker does dignify his dialogue by addressing other persons with respectful language and optimistic vocabulary.	Such optimistic and pragmatic submission in an explicit language should be encouraged.

Discussion

In the submission of Ogundepo, Oladeji and Adebajo (2017), a Yoruba proverb is brought to bear thus: *oro ni yo obi lapo, oro naa ni yo ofa lapo*, meaning words draw kolanuts from the pockets, while words also draw arrows from the quiver. It seems to capture the effect of communications on human actions very well. The expression clearly demonstrates that as words can provoke hospitality, it can also

provoke hostility! What is said and how it is said goes a long way to determine what reactions attend to the utterance.

As seen in the table of analysis above, the first five speeches are capable of instigating war and insecurity if care is not taken. Example can be drawn from Speech 5:

This state is not for the influx of okada riders from Niger State. They should go back to their state. The language use here is not peaceful. From our research, it was revealed that at some point in the history of Kogi State, there was an influx of okada riders from Niger State. These innocent persons were banned from operating in the metropolis of Minna, Bida and some Abuja suburbs; they saw Lokoja as habitable and viable for their transportation business. For anyone to come on national television to castigate them in the name of accidents is not encouraging. The question is, where would they get their daily bread and income? Crime rates may increase if they are banned in a state like Kogi. For peaceful language use, such speech as number 8 (*Let us all live in peace. War, insecurity, and banditry cannot take us anywhere as a country*) would have emanated from speaker of speech 5. This is because, even if there is the need to pursue the okada riders, the speaker should be pragmatic about it. After all, the okada riders, in their way, contribute to the gross domestic product of the state.

Speeches 6 to 10 conform with the concept of Peaceful Language-Use, which is conspicuously absent from most educational systems, societal engagements, political rallies and discourses, and religious gatherings if considered a systematic programme for life-long education of peaceful language users. Example can be drawn from Speech 9:

The government should ensure something about peace and peaceful co-existence is taught in schools.

A portion in one of the holy books upholds that one should follow peace with all men, thereby drawing goodness unto oneself. Speech 9 above is a pragmatic admonition for the government of the day to embark on aggressive teaching on peaceful language use in our schools. There is advantage in teaching this at all levels of education. This will enable sustainability of peace in place of insecurity.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explicate how peaceful language use could curb insecurity in Nigeria, with reference to Kogi State. Four principles for peaceful language use have been explored as theoretical orientations. The applicability of this theory has revealed that if these principles are adhered to without any violation, the state will be security-wise peaceful. Consequently, the government of the day is enjoined to aggressively teach peaceful language use, which will be supported by strong political will and ensure that teaching and learning our indigenous languages are encouraged at all levels. Also, rather than seeing our

multilingual and multicultural situation as a bane, it should be used as strong instrument for fighting the menace of insecurity and restoration of peace.

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