

FRENCH LANGUAGE: A REMEDY TO SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

Okumowe, Gloria E., Kure, Aishatu Mohammed and Adeyi, Godwin

*Department of French Language,
Niger State College of Education, Minna
Email: gloriaokumowe@yahoo.co.uk*

Abstract

National Security has been a challenging and disturbing issue in Nigeria. Several efforts have been made by national security agencies to provide effective and endearing security mechanisms, yet, the problem of national security has continued to rear up its ugly head. This paper is one of such efforts to show that ineffective language use can threaten national security while effective use can enhance it. Language use in interpersonal relationship is like a double-edged sword. It can be used to destroy as well as being used to mend. The present democratic dispensation in Nigeria has been characterized by several sheds of crisis situation, most of which have been connected to insecurity as a result of the entries of foreign nationals into the country. These foreign nationals are products of our existing francophone neighbors: Niger, Benin, Cameroon and Chad. The official language of these countries is the French language. This raises the question of “political correctness” which argues about the relationship between language and “diplomacy”. The thrust of this paper has been to examine how ineffective language use threatens the desired security of the nation. It also exposed how effective language use could enhance the management and resolution of the already threatened situation which affects interpersonal relationship. Thus, the researcher examined and analysed some excerpts from a selected print media which are comments credited to top political players in Nigeria. The analyses have considered both the semantic and pragmatic imports as they affect the sociopolitical situations in the country.

Introduction

Language is a universal activity engaged by both human beings and animals. It plays a crucial role in relationships, either strengthening or weakening it. Without language, life will be meaningless, static, boring and full of conflicts. Language makes for growth of the individual and the nation. Multilingualism is the way to go. According to Tonkin (2013) half of the world’s population speaks at least two different languages regularly every day. Many countries consider bilingualism to be the norm and may even require a third (or more) language to be

learned as part of the schooling process (Ugwu, 2019). Does Nigeria, an English-speaking country, surrounded by French-speaking countries, need to speak French? Does she need a second foreign language to grow and develop like other nations of the world? Are there any economic advantages derived from the ability to speak major international languages of the world especially as they promote diplomacy, trade and industry, scientific and technological development.

Language is a code used by a speech community to communicate. It makes for

peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding (Halliday, & Matthiessen, 2014). The importance of the role of language in the society cannot be over-emphasized. It is fundamental to a meaningful existence. One is bilingual when one can speak and understand two languages while multilingualism is the ability to speak more than two different languages fluently. The more languages you can speak, the more you make friends, the more you get on with people, understand them and learn from them (Cook & Newson, 2017).

Role of Language in the Society

Adelakun (2016) states that we live in a world of language, because we are always talking and are talked to everywhere, every time even in our dreams. They believe that “the possession of language, perhaps more than any other attributes, distinguishes humans from other animals”. Language is the source of human life and power. Language is used in the family, in religion, in education, in business, in health, or in the workplace, in friendship, or other social interactions. Ndimele (2015) states that language does not exist in a vacuum, it has no independent existence apart from its users and the uses to which they put it. Language is part of our culture. It gives us our identity. According to her, the culture of a people through the vehicle of language controls our behaviour. According to Daramola (2011), language is at the heart of all things human. It is not just part of us, it defines us. It is difficult to imagine much significant social, intellectual or artistic activity taking place without the opportunities for communication offered by language. Through language, we express

ourselves. We make known to other human beings our emotions (love, joy, annoyance), desires, wants, etc. We use it to teach, to pass on information even from generation to generation. Scientists, technologists, other professionals use language to express their discoveries and the way they affect us.

Benefits of Multilingualism

For UNESCO, cultural diversity and multilingualism play a key role in fostering pluralistic, equitable, open, and inclusive knowledge in societies. UNESCO encourages member-states to formulate language policies that encourage linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the society, the media and the internet. This will promote coexistence of different languages. Then conventions, treaties and recommendations can be reinforced at national levels. Being multilingual has a lot of advantages. It has been established that ability to speak many languages helps one to be able to multitask because one constantly switches from one language to another. It leads to having a better attention span and better adjustment to changes in one’s environment. Hence, it has cognitive advantages.

On the educational front, a bilingual or multilingual person has an advantage at school even outside his environment. He can easily adjust, understand, and participate in activities. He is less distracted and more focused on tasks. Experts have discovered that bilingual children perform better than monolinguals (Prasad, 2019).

Ability to speak more than one language makes one open-minded. You understand others; you see the world in different ways. You can easily adapt to a new environment each language allows you to access a culture that might have a different take on an idea under debate speaking more than one

language also opens up new opportunities. You adjust to new people, new activities, and new hobbies. You understand better other people's culture and there is mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence, you acquaint yourself with scientific and technological discoveries when you travel, you make friends more easily. You are able to communicate with locals and you enjoy your trips better being multilingual makes it a lot easier to travel around the world. It is said that language skills reinforce each other (Onuko, 2011). So, knowing more than one language helps you learn additional languages. When you are bilingual or multilingual, your children are so raised and this can pass through generations, resulting in better relationships among people of the world above all, when you are multilingual, you are not in the minority. Studies have shown that more than half of the world speaks more than one language on a daily basis you also have more career prospects available to you.

Nigeria as a Multilingual Society

Nigeria is a multilingual, multi-ethnic and multicultural country. Adedokun (2016) states that the lingual situation in Nigeria is complex and there are different accounts of the number of languages existing in the Nigerian polity. English is the official language, while French was once made 2nd official language. There is equally the pidgin English and what is known as Nigerian English. Wikipedia puts the number at over 500 languages in Nigeria. Ethnologue says 525 and breaks the figure down: 517 are living, 8 are extinct. Of the living, 19 are institutional, 76 are developing, 299 are vigorous, 81 are in trouble and 42 are dying this linguistic situation of Nigeria creates problems of understanding, cooperation and peaceful coexistence. Another problem is the fact that most of them are developing, in trouble, or are dying according to

ethnologue. Hence, they cannot fully serve their purpose or play the role of languages in development, in advancement and in international relations, we know that English is the official language which is widely used for education, business transactions and diplomacy in Nigeria, but during the regime of General Sani Abacha, French language was declared the second official language for many cogent reasons, which include security and most especially because Nigeria is surrounded by French speaking countries which include Chad, Niger, Benin and Togo. But that policy was never implemented.

Status of French as an International Language

Palet in his article "is French the language of the future?" Cites a study by natixis, an investment bank, as saying that French is likely to become the world's most commonly spoken language by the year 2050 because it is gaining speakers quickly and will be spoken by 750 million by that year. He states that French-speaking populations are growing faster than English and mandarin speaking ones. Stein-smith explains that multilingualism is a core value of the European Union (EU), which has implemented and supported plurilingualism (mother-tongue plus two) as a pragmatic educational objective. French is one of the major working/procedural languages of the European Community. With the Brexit, the role of English within the EU has been questioned, with suggestions made that French and German should be the sole working/procedural languages. French is a global language widely spoken around the world, with 280 million native speakers, and is the fifth most-widely spoken language in the world. French is used in international business and organizations.

Stein-smith quotes “la langue Française dans le mode” as saying that French is the third language on amazon, fifth on wikipedia. Knowledge of French gives one a personal and professional advantage and a tool to access information around the world. It is a language of international communication with international media like TV 5 monde, France 24, RF1 and fourth most widely used language on the internet. French language, culture, and lifestyle are gaining importance of the day. Many people are speaking and learning French today more than ever. English is spoken by only 25.0% of the world population according to British council. With Brexit now, the future of English language is difficult to predict.

Meanwhile only 36.0% of native French speakers live in Europe, therefore its future is global and its status is impacted by the same global forces that have led to the rise of English. The importance of French and francophone culture can no longer be ignored as foreign language skills are linked to business and professional success. Stein-smith in addition, reports that between 2010-2014, “the number of students learning French increased by 2.20% in North America, 7.0% in Middle East, 44.0% in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 43.0% in Asia and Oceania (Source:.. It is the 5th/6th most widely spoken language in the world after Mandarin, Chinese, English, Hindi, Spanish and Arabic). It has over 220 million speakers worldwide. It is the official language in 29 countries. It is taught as a foreign language in the education system of most countries in the world. It is the sole language used for deliberations of the court of justice of the EU and also the Universal Postal Union (UPU).

It is one of the working languages of many international institutions and organizations which include; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), International Labour Organization (ILO), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), African Union (AU), Federation International de Football Association (FIFA), and International Olympic Committee (IOC). France and French speaking countries play an active part in the world economy, accounting for some 20.0% of world trade in goods. There is therefore, the need to accord the language more attention than is being done now in Nigeria.

Security and National Security

Security or National Security gives the import of safety of lives and properties of individuals. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2021) defines security as things that are done in order to keep someone or something safe. Security involves some activities geared towards the protection of a country, building or people against attack, danger, etc.

Any nation that experiences security threat of any sort would always strive to restore peace for development to be achieved. The issue of national security in Nigeria has been a thorn in her flesh since 1999 and has been worsened by the Boko Haram menace. Odunlami (2019) believes that security for any nation is a very important element for any form of development to take place. It is very unfortunate that people strive for development but do not know how to

protect it when it is achieved, it becomes a fruitless effort. In view of this, Odunlami (2019) advises that as Nigerians think of how to develop the country, accumulate national wealth and live the good life, we must also be thinking of how to protect the above named from forces that may want to snatch them from us. Nnoli (2016) sees national security as a cherished value associated with physical and psychological safety of individuals, groups or nation-states, together with a similar safety of their other most cherished values. These definitions give the semantic import of freedom from threat, anxiety and danger.

People have talked about different kinds of security both at personal and national levels as: physical security, food security, human rights security, job security, family security etc. At the national level, the old school of militarist thinking which has conceived national security primarily as military response and management of threats has given way to the new school of thought which sees national security beyond military force.

Hence, Odunlami (2019) writes that: In a modernizing society, security means development. Security is not military force, though it may involve it, security is not traditional military activity, though it encompasses it, security is not military hard-ware, though it may include it. Security is development and without development, there can be no security. Language, national security and development have intricate relations. Every nation's target is positive development and to attain it, there must be maximum security ensured not just through military forces but something more subtle and powerful than that. Security is effective with the use of the generally accepted language for communication. In other words, right choice of words that will not

create threats, anxiety or danger for human existence.

The national security that has formed the major theme of many conferences recently, needs collaborative efforts of every one not just the duty of the government and security agencies. National Security has been a persistent problem that seemed to have defied solution in Nigeria since 1999. Different researchers from different persuasions have shown varying interests as they try to proffer solutions to this problem with its continued existence has called for the present exercise. National security is not only threatened by political exclusion, economic marginalization and social discrimination, etc as previous researchers have discovered but also by ineffective, inappropriate language use. Language, to a great extent, makes human existence worthwhile or chaotic. This paper sees it as a major factor in national security because the terms are themselves expressed in English language which is the nation's lingua franca. Most perpetrators of crisis in Nigeria have usually done it through this language communication and some have tried to calm the situation through appropriate use. Suffice it to say that language use in interpersonal relationship is a double-edged sword.

Conclusion

National security is a cherished value to many Nigerians. Yet, many do not care any longer about new development but go about igniting fire to consume the existing development. This is possible due to our ever-porous border and through the ineffective use of language. It is important that every citizen knows the importance of French language to him or her, and indeed Nigerians in general, should try to maintain continuity as well as achieve peace and success in language use by constantly, and

strategically figuring out what to say, how to say things and how to understand what others say in the process of interacting with others.

The problem of national security is not that of the government alone but what every Nigerian should collaborate to ensure through effective and appropriate use of words of the accepted language communication. That is, understanding the lingua franca of your neighbor is a plus, to attaining border security as well as national security.

Recommendations

Death and life, they say are in the power of the tongue. Language is never neutral as it can be used to build or destroy relationships, families and even nations at large. From what has been discussed in the paper, the following have been proffered as solutions to insecurity challenges caused by incessant use of inflammatory and unguarded language:

- i. French should be taught in all the school levels (Pre-primary to tertiary)
- ii. Speaking of French language should be made a compulsory criterion to work as personnel at all our borders.
- iii. A thought should therefore be given to what one wants to say, his receiver, the effect of his utterance on the receiver, the possible interpretations that might be given as his intended meanings. These are necessary because the insecurity in Nigeria has taken a shape that needed, more than any other thing, effective and appropriate use of French language as a more comprehensive measure to address diplomatic issues relating to our Francophone neighbours.

- iv. Users of French Language especially the elites and leaders should be conscious of the fact that there is a difference between having a language (langue) and being able to communicate effectively with language (parole).
- v. Sequel to this, they should know that different occasions demand different languages (context of situation).
- vi. Finally, French Language workshops should be made for teachers and public speakers to enable them acquire the correct rhetorical devices for different speeches.

Bibliography

- Adelakun, A. (2016). *French as Nigeria's Second Language*. <https://Punchng.Com/French-As-Nigerias-Second-Language/>
- Akin I. (2008). The utility of Close-Circuit Television (CCTV) in Intelligence Gathering By Security Operatives in Nigeria. Proceedings of Conference on Intelligent Security, Lagos.
- Beland, D. (2015). The Political Construction of Collective Insecurity: From Moral Panic to Blame Avoidance and Organized Irresponsibility, *Centre for European Studies working paper series* 126.
- Cook V. J. & Newson, M. (2017). *Chomsky's Universal Grammars: An Introduction* (3rd ed) USA: Blackedwell Publishing.
- Daramola, A. (2011). An Introduction to linguistics. In Fakoya, A. A. Ogunpita, S.A. (Eds). *The English compendium*, 3 & 4 (55-63). Lagos: Lagos State University. *Pristine: ISSN: 2250 – 9593*
- Gieselbrecht, M., (2009). *Pluralistic Approaches; A Long Overdue Paradigm*

- Shift in Education*". Scottish Languages Review, 20, Pp. 11-20
- Gieselbrecht, M., (2019). "Pluralistic Approaches; A long overdue paradigm shift in education". Scottish Languages Review, 20, Pp. 11-20
- Halliday, M. A .K. & Matthiessen, C. (2014). *An introduction to functional grammar*. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Igbuzor, O. (2011). Peace and security education: A critical factor for sustainable peace and national development, *International Journal of Peace and Development Studies*, 2 (1), 1-7.
- Ike, J. (2010). *Language and national development: The Nigerian experience*. Abuja: Websites educational books.
- Imobighe, T. A. (1985). *The OAU, African Defence and Security: Benin & Owerri*: Aden Publishers.
- Ndimele, R. (2015). *Understanding sociolinguistics*. Whytem Prints. Okigwe.
- Ndimele, R. (2015). *Understanding sociolinguistics*. Whytem Prints. Okigwe.
- Nimmer, L. (2011). De-contextualization in the terrorism discourse: a social constructionist view. ENDC proceedings, 14,223240 retrieved from <http://www.ksk.edu.ee/toimedised>.
- Nnoli, O. (2016). *National Security in Africa: A Radical Perspective*. Enugu: PACREP
- Odunlami, I. S. (2019). *Media in Nigerian's Security and Development Vision*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd
- Odunlami, I. S. (2019). *Media in Nigerian's Security and Development Vision*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd
- Onuko T. U. (2011). "Multilingual education for nation building: The Case of French Language". <https://www.Ajol.Info/Article>