

LINGUISTIC ISSUES IN CONFLICTS RESOLUTION IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF IGBO NATION

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Abstract

Oftentimes human beings are involved in conflict resolution and management, employing different strategies such as: oath taking, imposition of penalties, threat, punishment, appeal, reward, etc. to settle disputes. Little or no consideration is given to the role of language in settling disputes or dispensation of justice. This paper x-rays the place of language as a conflict resolution strategy amongst other usages especially in Igbo Cultural Area of Nigeria. In Igbo traditional societies for instance, orators exist. The job of the orator is to use appropriate words, diction, and expression to address fundamental issues when people are gathered. Such addresses form the bedrock of the resolution of conflicts depending on the manner of presentation. This work explored this linguistic role of language as a conflict resolution mechanism and observes that it is fundamental and significant and suggests that it be given its pride of place. Investigation also reveals that many leaders, teachers, administrators, counsellors, arbiters, etc. apply it without realizing its import. The application comes in the manner of proverbs, assonance, alliteration, ejaculations, wise sayings, and songs. Data were collected via native intuition, interview, observation, and literature.

Keywords: Conflict, Language, Issues, Resolution.

Introduction

Conflict can be assumed to be part of the nature of man. Biblical account of creation started with man faced with conflict. Immediately Adam, the first man came into being, he noticed his incompleteness and recognized the need for a partner

suitable for him. That was the genesis of conflict of interest which God the Almighty resolved by giving him a suitable partner in the person of Eve. The creation of Eve made Adam more comfortable and sooner or later brought radical changes in his life. Eve ate the forbidden fruit which she also gave to Adam, her husband. The consumption of the forbidden fruit brought a serious disagreement between them and God. Another aspect of conflict was thus ushered in. They were driven out of the comfortable and beautiful garden. They now dwelt in a world filled with conflicts as they wandered from place to place. Cain their first child assassinated Abel his brother out of jealousy. Since then, the world has been filled with conflicts.

Conflict is a kind of sour or an unpleasant relationship starring between two individuals or groups. One can also experience conflict within himself or herself when he or she can no longer feel a complete emotional balance. Conflicts come with sadness, dissatisfaction and sometimes emotional trauma. The only antidote to the above is resolution.

People have tried to find ways of resolving conflicts that rear its ugly head in their midst. Scholars have even propounded theories of conflict resolution. Some of these theories or resolution strategies were the product of civilization and experience in nations, communities, hamlets, etc. People have their various methods of resolving conflicts. There is the western approach, and indigenous approaches to conflict resolution. The western approach employs mainly courts and juries to resolve conflicts. The indigenous or African traditional approach includes mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, arbitration and negotiation (google.com).

In all these approaches, not much attention is given to place of language in such resolutions. The linguistic factor is either neglected, overlooked, or goes unnoticed. Yet it is a fundamental factor in conflict resolution. This neglect or oversight calls for investigation into the issues involving language in conflicts resolution. The result will go a long way in giving language its due place in theories underlying conflicts resolution. It will add to the strategies and its full utilization shall in no mean way assist in the speedy resolution of conflicts.

Conceptual Studies

Many authors have tried to explicate the concept of conflicts through various ideas.

Linguistic roles in conflict resolution can appear in varied forms. Language occupies a significant position in resolving conflicts. The place of language in fixing conflicts cannot be over-emphasized. According to Minute Mediation, language plays a very significance role in shaping the pattern conflicts come about and are resolved (minutemediation.com). The group states that language is the key to the hearts of the people and can be provided in many forms of verbal, non-verbal and written forms. They explained that language can play a role in escalating or de-escalating a condition or situation of conflict. The group pointed out that most often, non-verbal

of language communication can provide an insight into someone's thought and behaviours towards the other individual. For them, words are not always required to generate a conflict, it is the actions or non-verbal cues that can trigger events. A child of about 15 years beat up the sibling who started wailing loudly. When the senior sister was asked what happened, she said that her junior glimpsed her in an unpleasant manner. This is a kind of non-verbal cue that generate conflict. In another instance, someone mistakenly matched on a person, the person matched on, pushed him down without waiting for an explanation or an apology. One can imagine what follows. Of course, a serious verbal exchange that created tension and enmity. In some instances, a similar scenario can lead to a serious fight and even maiming of a human being. A gifted peacemaker can nip the matter on the board by persuasion and pleading for calm and peace. He or she can also apologize on behalf of the misunderstood party. The use of such good and convincing words can restore normalcy to the situation.

It is often stated that language is an integral part of cultural and that human beings attachment to a language indicates that one shares a connection with a unique culture. Grammatical structures unveil increasing complex insights into linguistic thought processes and actions (minutemediation.com). Linguistic focus can be on unity and reconciliation where there is an existing harmony or calm atmosphere. The use of language on the other hand can heighten tension, segregation, retaliation, suspicion, misunderstanding, acrimony, neglect, etc. The above if not well managed can escalate to a serious dispute, conflict or war.

Human beings employ language as a conveyor belt of communication to activate or engage with one another for multi reasons and purposes. Culture and values influence language use for different occasions and intentions. Minute mediation group agrees that language plays vital role and beneficial function as one of the means of non-violent ways of dispute settlement (minutemediation.com). According to them, the use of language is a very impactful tool, and core to reduction of unnecessary conflict and its effective management. It is a common knowledge that language is "filled" with euphemisms, metaphors, and clichés, which are veritable ingredients of language that ease conflict resolutions. Minute Mediation state that in some instances, the words used may appear to be insignificant but when one realizes that language is capable of influencing perception, the implications become substantial (minutesmediation.com).

The influence of language in peace negotiations and conflicts resolution can appear in the following ways:

Proverbs

Similes

Metaphors

Use of examples

Supplication

Apology
Tonality
Wise counsel, etc

Proverbs

Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* defined proverbs as the palm oil by which the Igbo people eat their words. This is exemplified in proverbs such as:

- i. Onye atụchaara ilu kowaara i mara na ego e ji lụ nne ya lara n'iyi (one who cannot understand a proverb should know that the bride price paid on his/her mother is a waist).
- ii. A tụtọ ilu nkiri nkata, agadi nwaanyi elee onwe ya anya (when a proverb a scattered old basket is mentioned, an old woman looks at herself).
- iii. A tụtọ ọmara, a mara, a tụtọ ofeke, o fenyé isi n'ọhịa (when a proverb is pronounced to a wise man, he understands but when given to an unserious fellow, he fumbles).

Proverbs are vital in discussions in Igbo traditional settings. It is employed in very important discussions especially on issues of paramount importance. It is mostly employed by the elders and the experienced. It is used as a good tool in the settling of disputes or misunderstanding. The words and semantics of most of those proverbs are born out of past experiences and stand out as undeniable truths. In ushering peace or resolution of conflicts, the use of such proverbs helps to buttress good points made and truths exposed. The parties involved, because they understand the truthfulness of the proverbs, do their best to abide by it. When close relatives have a conflict, the following proverbs can go a long way in dousing tension:

- i. Ka anyị matakwa na iwe nwanne anaghị eru n'ọkpụkpụ (Let us remember that anger against a brothers or sister does not touch the bone).
- ii. Onye gbuo nwanne ya, ya na onye ebiri? (If one kills his/her brother, whom shall he/she live with?).
- iii. O metu ọnyụ, o metu imi (once it touches the mouth, it also touches the nose).
- iv. Onye kpọọ ọba ya mkpọkọrọ, ndị iro ejiri ya kpoo ahịhịa (if one calls his or her basket useless and spoilt, the enemy will use it as a dustbin).
- v. Onye ekotaghị, ọgọdọ ya ekotara ya (if misses or avoids a problem, a relation can attract it to him or her).

For settlement of quarrels among neighbours or distant relations, the following proverbs can be of help.

1. Egbe bere ugo bere, nke sị ibe ya ebela, nku kwapụ ya. (Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch, anyone that says otherwise, let its feathers pluck out with force).
2. Ụwa bụ onye biri, ibe ya ebiri. (The world is live and let live).
3. Agbataobi onye bụ nwanne ya (One's neighbor is his/her brother/sister).

4. Nwanne dị na mba (A brother/sister also exists in diasporas).
5. Nwa mmọọ emegbuna nwa mmadụ, nwa mmadụ emegbuna nwa mmọọ (Let there be peace).

For those who are having quarrels out of competition or jealousy.

- i. Ebe onye ọsọ ruru ka onye ije ga-eru. (Where a runner hurriedly reaches, the walker will also reach).
- ii. Chi awụ otu (gods are not the same. (Everybody has his own fortune).
- iii. Onye buru chi ya ụzọ, ọ gbaghuo onwe ya n'ọsọ. (If one runs before his god, he will be tired of so much running).
- iv. Ụwa bụ onye na chi ya. (The world is you and your god).
- v. Oge chi ka mma. (God's time is the best).

Similes

Similes used in conflict resolution can be any of this kind:

- i. Ka onye dị ka ibe ya dị (No one is so different)
- ii. Aka adị ka uche. (The hand is not as the mind).
- iii. Madụ ka e ji aka (Man is of highest value).
- iv. Ọ na-eme ka ndị ikwunne ya. (He acts like his mother's kinsmen).
- v. Ori ka ọzọ ọdụrụ. (Eating as if there is more food).

Metaphors

Metaphors used in conflict resolution can appear in this manner:

- i. Ụmụnna bụ ike. (Brotherhood is strength)
- ii. Igwe bụ ike (There is a strength in solidarity).
- iii. I bụ agụ (You are a tiger).
- iv. Ọ bụ onye dị umeana ga-eme ụdị ihe i mere (Only a humble individual can act the way you did)
- v. Anyị abụghị ọchọnganoko (We are not troublesome people).
- vi. Ha bụ nnu na mmanụ (They are wonderful friends/neighbours).
- vii. Ọ bụ aka aja-aja na-ebute ọnụ mmanụ mmanụ (One who sows reaps)

Use of Examples

This is another linguistic skill employed in conflict resolution. Parties in conflict can be given examples of how people who found themselves in similar situations of their conflict resolved it or endured some aspects of what caused their disagreement. Such examples can bring a rethink and help in relaxation of tension.

Supplication

The language of supplication can go a long way in ushering peace among parties in conflict. The manner of approach and the voice an individual who finds himself in a conflict situation employs will go a long way in healing the wound of

quarrel. A soft voice can be appealing. An Igbo adage says, “Okwu dị nlo na-ewepụ ọnụma” (Soft words of appeal can drive anger away). This supplication can come from a neutral individual settling the dispute, appealing to the parties involved to calm down.

Apology

The skill of making apology can also be of much help in peaceful resolution of conflicts. In apology, one admits he has erred and asks for forgiveness. The tone of the voice of the one apologizing and the feature of his face can determine the acceptability of his apology and peaceful resolution.

Wise Counsel

Experts in conflict resolution can give wise advice to a party or all the parties in conflict. The way such advice flows out also goes a long way in determining its acceptability by the parties. Parties in conflict are often suspicious of advice rendered to them. The voice and the manner of such advice will convey the sincerity associated with it. Once the parties are convinced of such sincerity, there exists a greater likelihood of its being accepted.

Tonality

In all the above skills, tonality of the voice is fundamental for a good impact to be made to resolve conflicts. Whether it is advice, apology or proverbs, the way the words come out from the mouth makes the difference. Such words can mar or unmar the peace process. Soft calculated words unveil peace more than hard uncoordinated words.

Conclusion

Language plays a vital role in conflicts resolution. It is a tool often neglected but that is pivotal in settling disputes. The use of language comes in varied forms. In all, the artistic use of language and its nice blending, its categories, its tone, etc. are some of the items that make language unique as a tool for conflicts resolution. Its predominant use in Igbo traditional conflict resolution mechanism makes the Igbo language a good example of the use of language in amicable settlement of disputes.

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