

The Role of Language in Peace Building and Conflict Management: A Case Study of Nnamdi Azikiwe University , Awka, Nigeria

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Abstract

Language holds a significant influence on human interactions, perceptions and the dynamics of conflict and peace. This study examines the intricate relationship between language and conflict resolution within the diverse community of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, emphasizing the pivotal role of language in peace building and conflict management. The article explores how language can either escalate tension or contribute to their mitigation within the university community. Through a review of existing literature and case studies, this research demonstrates how language can be used to build trust, resolve conflicts and promote peaceful resolution. The study also identifies language barriers and biases that can hinder effective conflict management and peace building. The findings emphasize the importance of language sensitivity training, cultural awareness and effective communication strategies in peace building and conflict management initiatives. This research contributes to the understanding of the vital role language plays in promoting peace and resolving conflicts, throwing more light in the need for language to be prioritized in peace building and conflict management efforts.

Keywords: Language, Conflict Management, Peace Building, Communication, Conflict Resolution.

Introduction

Language is a fundamental part of human communication and as such plays a very important role in shaping our thoughts, beliefs and actions. In the context of peace building and conflict management within the diverse community of Nnamdi Azikiwe university, Awka, which comprises individuals from various backgrounds, language therefore, can be a powerful tool for building or a weapon for fueling divisions. Application of language can either perpetuate harmful stereotypes and biases or promote understanding as well as empathy. In a multicultural environment such as Nnamdi Azikiwe University, the use of insensitive or derogatory language can exacerbate existing tension and contribute to an atmosphere of hostility and mistrust. Language, as a tool for peace building conversely, serve as a potent tool for peace building and conflict resolution. By fostering open and respectful communication, it can bridge gaps, promote mutual understanding and facilitate dialogue among diverse groups within the university community. The deliberate use of inclusive and non-discriminatory language can help create an environment of acceptance and unity, laying the foundation for effective conflict management strategies.

In years recent, the importance of language in peace building and conflict management has become increasingly obvious. International bodies, governments as well as civil societies have acknowledged the need for effective communication and language strategies to prevent and resolve conflicts. Moreover, the rise of social media and other digital platforms has highlighted the power of language in shaping public opinion and influencing political discourse.

Against this background, it is essential to explore the significance of language in peace building and conflict management in our tertiary institutions. Thorough examination of the ways language is applied in conflict and peace building will help this research to identify strategies for harnessing the power of language to build more peaceful and inclusive institutions. This requires a more in-depth understanding of the complex relationships between language, culture, power and conflict together with the development of effective language strategies for promoting peace and understanding.

Despite the crucial nature of language in communication, its impact on peace building and conflict management has not been adequately explored leading to ineffective conflict resolution strategies. This study has the potential of adding to existing knowledge on the role of language in conflict and peace studies, shedding more light on the importance of language in building trust, resolving conflicts and promoting peaceful resolution. Furthermore, it will enhance understanding of the complex relationship between language, conflict and peace, potentially leading to the development of new theories for analysing a language's role in conflict management.

The researcher makes use of mixed methods approach for the study- quantitative and qualitative method to collect data for this study and use qualitative design to provide a comprehensive understanding of a language's role in peace building and conflict management.

This research is anchored on the following research questions:

- What is the role of language in shaping identity, perception and

attitude in conflict situations and how can this understanding inform peace building strategies?

- How can language education and training be used to enhance conflict resolution and peace building skills?
- How does language influence the escalation or de-escalation of conflict?

Conceptual Framework

Language

“Language is the key to the heart of a people” says Sapir (1963 p.65). Therefore, language is conceived as a purely human and non-intuitive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. This functional knowledge of language symbols that human beings experience has achieved in the way of dealing with situation can be communicated through language.

Language is crucial in life. It has dual functions, that is, “management of social relations and transfer of information” as Spencer-Oatey(2008 p.47) observes. The dynamic nature of language use is such that can lead to conflicts together with its resolutions. Invariably, this dynamic nature of language use gives importance to an area of pragmatics that has come to be recognised as politeness. Politeness is a strategy in pragmatics used to minimise tension, trivialize issues for mutual understanding and to promote peaceful co-existence.

Furthermore, Kitembe (2018) is of the opinion that language is used to resolve or escalate disputes. According to him, conflict

resolution relies seriously on word choices because the word used by people in discourse escalate harmonious living or otherwise, (p.102). Lakoff (1973 p.292) also opines that “language uses us as much as we use language”. This is because, as much as our choice of forms of expression is guided by the thoughts we want to express, to the same extent, the way we feel about the things in the real world governs the way we express ourselves about these things.

However, language use can cause or reduce conflicts. Therefore, language users must carefully choose their words in order to have harmonious social relations instead of disrupting peace in the centre of man’s existence and survival as a social being. People can hardly co-habit in isolation of language due to its communicative function. Communication undoubtedly is paramount for harmonious living and face saving. Because of this, people should not strive to attain linguistic competence rather a set also learn pragmatic competence which is the knowledge of correct or proper use or application of strategies in an appropriate context

Language use and Conflict

The power of language in conflict is so influencing that it even controls the action of the user. Language has the power to entertain, insult, teach, satirize, reconstruct and even to destroy. A listener or reader held to complete attentiveness when appropriate language are in application. A reader smiles when one reads something that interests his /her person. The same reader may begin to cry when an account reveals of genocides and the members that perished are much.

Language has a strong role in conflict management from the perspective that it has the history of man as being a tool to igniting and escalating a conflict on the one hand and pacifying or checking the destructiveness of conflict on the other hand. In fact, language could be bad or good pending on the usage. It is a powerful indicator of any conflict-language, when a dominant language displaces other tongues, then the subordinate groups change.

Aniga, (2011 p.3) further explains “that language entails: language and conflict are synonymous for the very reason that language is an integral part of culture and a vehicle of interaction, inter-communication and a practical tool for state administration both in modern and ancient times”. Therefore, adopting a particular language by a particular speech community declares what identity it wants to show of itself and to the world. In the light of the above assertion, there is no gain saying that language being a vehicle of symbolic value becomes a source of conflict because two persons/groups during interaction usually disagree or clash. Depending on the usage, language is good or bad, its application can promote conflict or otherwise. When it is applied properly, conflict is averted, but when it is otherwise applied, conflict is ignited. Also, culture plays or determines whether or not language is appropriate. The language one uses in resolving conflicts matters a lot- mild/polite language facilitate speedy resolution while impolite language escalates conflicts.

Conflict Management.

Conflict management refers to the long-term management of intractable conflicts. It is actually the identifiable variety of ways which

people apply in handling grievances-standing up for what they consider to be right and against what is considered to be wrong. They are diverse phenomena in this regard: gossip, ridicule, lynching, terrorism, warfare, feuding, genocide, law, mediation etc. Ryan, (1990, p.25). Whichever form of conflict management will be used in any given conflict can be somewhat predicted and explained by the social structure or social geometry of the conflict.

It can also be referred as interference in an on-going or existing conflict process in such a way as to retain and possibly minimize the level of violence and destruction and to prevent the vertical escalation towards the use of verbal weapons also. Conflict management could be referred also as the act of transforming the potential or actual violent class into a less damaging form of interaction or the process of searching for temporary solutions which can prevent re-escalation and move the conflicting parties to either settling the conflict or otherwise through a ceasefire, Lund, (1997,p.2-3).

In conflict management two objectives are involved : the short -term and long term objectives. In short term objective, the most realistic target is conflict settlement in form of reducing the spread of crisis or the like. It is only this is done that the process of more fundamental solution of the conflict. This is to a large extent a more drawn-out process. Intervention in conflict may last within some days or weeks. Conflict resolution is more broad which can either be achieved within months, years or even decades of waiting patiently and incremental prodding according to Kleiboer, (1998,p.72).

Conflict Management

Rapport management is a politeness framework proposed by Spencer-Oatey, in (2000) and revised in (2008). It is a theory that explored the study of understanding the school of conflict resolution strategies. Spencer-Oatey identified such rapport strategies as change of topic, apologizing, accepting turns in discourse, using address terms and honorifics. “Managing gestures, eye contact and other body languages”. Rapport management is one of the theories that arose as a result of the short coming of earlier theories of politeness. One of the weaknesses in the earlier politeness theories it stands to remedy is that theories are individual-based rather than relationship and society-based. It considers social and contextual factors as well as cognitive notions. According to Spencer-Oatey “rapport management has three major motivational basis thus: face sensitivities, social rights and obligations and interactional goals”.

Further, Spencer-Oatey proposed a set of strategies applied to manage rapport. These rapport management strategies operate in diverse domains that are illocutionary domain; discourse domain; participant domain; stylistic domain and non-verbal domain. Moreso, she proposed a set of factors that might affect the choice of rapport management strategies. They are: orientation, contextual variables, participant and their relationships, message context, social or interactional roles, acting type and overall assessment of context that may change in the cause of interaction.

Conflict Resolution

The concept, conflict has received several definitions from different scholars. This study will pay particular attention to that of

Oboegbulem and Alfa (2013) that defines conflict as “a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aim of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired value but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rival” (p.91). Furthermore, Shahmohammadi (2014 p.630) defines it “as a form of friction, disagreement or discord arising within individuals and or a group when the belief or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group”. Again, Tschamon-Moran (2011 p.3) added that “conflict pertains to the opposing ideas and action of different entities resulting in an antagonistic state”.

Causes of conflict were identified by Shahmommadi as specialization, common resource, goal differences, interdependence, authority relationships, status differences, jurisdictional ambiguities, roles and expectations. Rahim (2001) gave diversity as a source of conflict. Again, he explained that increasing heterogenous factors as differences in age, cultural background, ethnics and values greatly generate conflicts among employees in workplaces.

Moreso, Oboegbulem and Alfa is of the opinion that effective administration of tertiary/school system depends largely on a cordial and collaborative working relationship among Deans and staff, staff and staff or students. This is a different task however, Kilonzo and Ivita (2019 p.1) posited that “conflict is an integral part of human organisations”. Therefore, efforts must be made to manage or resolve it and to promote development and progress. Accordingly, Shahmohammadi observes conflict handling strategies such as avoiding, collaborating, compromising,

accommodating and mediation which shall be applied through proper application of language.

Strategies for Promoting Positive Language Use

To leverage the power of language for peace building and conflict management at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, several strategic initiatives can be implemented, thus;

- Awareness and Education: Organising workshops and seminars to raise awareness about the impact of language on conflict dynamics can be an effective initial step. These initiatives can educate the university community on the importance of using inclusive and respectful language as well as the consequences of insensitive or inflammatory language.
- Inclusive Communication Policies: Developing and implementing inclusive communication policies can establish guidelines for appropriate language use within the university setting. These policies can address issues such as hate speech, discriminatory language, and the use of respectful terminology when referring to different groups or individuals.
- Conflict Resolution Training: Providing conflict resolution training to students, faculty and staff can equip them with the necessary skills to navigate conflicts effectively. This training can emphasize the role of language in conflict resolution, teaching participants how to communicate in a

constructive and non-confrontational manner.

- Promoting Multilingualism: Encouraging the utilization and appreciation of multiple languages within the university community can foster a sense of inclusivity and respect for diversity. By embracing multilingualism, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of different cultures and perspectives facilitating cross-cultural communication and reducing the potential for misunderstandings.

Peace Building

This is aimed at putting in place the social, economic, political and environmental mechanism which are necessary for a lasting peace making realistic. It is not a matter of constructing make-shift- temporal shelter as summarized by Albert, (2001,p.132). Peace involves putting structures in place for removing the roots of conflict.

Peace building can also be pre-conflict or post conflict. Pre-conflict tries to prevent any form of conflict from existing but post conflict is reactive and includes reconstruction of social infrastructure, the rehabilitation of displaced person and /or reconciliation or mutual cooperation as opine Idasa, (2004,p.30). Akinterinwa (2003, p.147) in his own opinion writes that peacebuilding is essentially non-coercive and comprises all efforts necessary to make the environment conducive for peace to reign.

Methodology

The researcher made use of descriptive survey research method. Abdullahi (1995) views survey research as a systematic

collection of data or information from a population or sample of a population through personal interviews and or questionnaire. This design is considered apt because this study collected data from the sample with the help of a questionnaire developed by the researcher through which an entire population under study were described.

Data collected were analysed using frequency count and simple percentage. The AGREE and STRONGLY AGREE options

Research question 1:

- What is the role of language in shaping identity, perception and attitude in conflict situations and how can this understanding inform peace building strategies

Statement	A/SA	%	D/SD	%	Decision
1. Antagonism from Dean makes you angry	104	21	392	79	Accept
2. Insult from staff makes you want to retaliate	24	5	472	95	Accept
3. When you shout at your staff, he/she shouts back	3	3	480	97	Accept
4. Referring to your fellow staff with address terms creates conflict.	29	6	467	94	Reject
5. Harmony is achieved when you talk politely To your staff.	366	74	130	26	Accept

as well as DISAGREE and STRONGLY DISAGREE options.

Results

The researcher presented and analysed data guided by the research questions for this study. The questionnaire items are gathered according to each research question and analysis done at once.

6. Turn taking in speech promotes peacefull Interaction.	275	55	221	45	Accept
7. Refusing to allow others speak in discourse Creates conflicts.	281	57	215	43	Accept
8. Refusing to apologise when faulty brings peace	490	99	6	1	Reject
9. Apologising when faulty creates good rappot/relationship.	492	99	4	1	Accept

Analysis

Table 1 above presented data that sought to uncover the role of language in shaping identity, perception and attitude in conflict situations and how its understanding inform peace building strategies in university under study. Data reveal that majority of the items were accepted out of 9 items only 2 items were rejected while other items were accepted. Hence, the HoD agree that antagonism from them makes staff angry (79%) ; insults from their staff makes them want to retaliate (95%); when they shout at

their staff, they shout back (97%); harmony is achieved when talked politely to staff (74%); taking turns in interaction promotes peaceful discourse (55%); refusing to allow others talk/take turn creates conflict (57%); apologising when faulty creates good relationship (99%); refusing to apologise when faulty creates good rapport /relationships (99%).

Research question 2:

- How can language education and training be used to enhance conflict resolution and peace building skills?

Table 2:

Statement	A/SA	%	D/SD	%	Decision
1. You interact amicably with your fellow Deans.	404	81	92	19	Accept
2. You interact calmly with your fellow Deans	384	77	112	23	Accept
3. Your fellow Dean is often rude to you	326	68	160	32	Accept
4. You are polite when you interact with your fellow Dean.	202	41	214	59	Reject
5. You impose your view on your fellow Dean	96	19	400	81	Reject
6. You give your fellow staff options when you talk to them.	158	32	338	68	Reject

7. You make your fellow Dean feel good when talking to them.
171 34 325 66 Reject
8. You're friendly when talking to your fellow senior colleagues
272 55 224 45 Accept
9. Your fellow dean makes you feel good when you talk
182 37 314 63 Reject
10. You apologise when you are wrong to your fellow Dean.
281 57 115 43 Accept
11. Do you allow your fellow Deans to take turn while interacting.
320 65 176 35 Accept
12. You apply polite address term to refer to your fellow senior colleagues.
277 56 219 44 Accept

In table 2 above, data presented expresses the awareness of how language education and training can enhance conflict resolution and peace building. Data available reveal that majority of the items (7 of 12) are accepted while only (5 of 12) are rejected. Items 1,2 3,8,10,11,12 were all accepted. Hence, the Deans accept that they converse amicably with their colleagues (81%); talk calmly with each other (77%); their colleagues are rude often (68%). On the other

hand, items 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 were all rejected.

Research question 3:

- How does language influence the escalation or de-escalation of conflict?

Statement	A/SA	%	D/SD	%
Decision				
1. Apologizing when wrong	204	41	292	59
Reject				
2. Changing to more acceptable topic	284	57	212	43
Reject				
3. Avoid imposition of opinion on others	223	45	273	55
Accept				
4. Giving others option when talking	52	240	48	255
Accept				
5. Make others feel good	321	65	175	35
Accept				
6. Accepting turns during interaction	54	228	46	268
Accept				
7. Applying polite address term when referring to others.	299	60	197	40
Accept				

In table 3 above, data presented how language influence the escalation and or de-escalation of conflict universities to redress conflict. The statements proffered were as a result

of strategies to adopt in order to avert conflict together with strategies to apply to reduce or minimize conflict. A large number of respondents accepted the strategies meant to avoid conflict and rejected those meant to minimize conflict. The Deans accepted that they avoid imposing their opinions on others (55%). Conversely, the Hods say that they neither apologise when faulty nor change to a more acceptable topic when the ensuing one is generating conflict.

Discussions:

Research question 1 sought to find out the role of language in shaping identity, perception and attitude in conflict situation and how can this understanding inform peace building strategies, the findings indicate that the Deans understand the effect of proper application in interaction, The respondents are aware that apology when offended, help to minimize conflict in discourse.

The second research question sought to investigate on how language education and training can be used to enhance conflict resolution and peace building skills. From the data the Deans are aware that in order to maintain peace in their workplace, there is need to have amicable conversation with each other which will make each other feel good during discourse.

Research question 3 varied information on language influence on escalation or de-escalation of conflict. From the data presented, it is discovered that in line with the

politeness model, Kisembe (2018) supports a withdrawal of imposition to interlocutors, which agree with Lakoff's (1973) aversion that conflicts can be avoided in discourse with discourant 'Don't impose' , 'Give option' and 'make 'A' feel good', these strategies are more avoidance-based and will not help a conflict situation that has ensued already.

Conclusion

Recognising the significance of language in peace building and conflict management at Nnamdi Azikiwe University can implement strategies to promote positive language use, foster inclusive communication and equip its members with the necessary skills to navigate conflict effectively. Through a concerted effort to harness the power of language, the university can create an environment conducive to mutual understanding, respect and lasting peace.

Recommendations

The researcher made the following recommendations:

- Language education programs will foster understanding of local languages and cultures is encouraged.
- Developing language sensitive policies which will acknowledge the importance of language in conflict management and peace building is necessary.
- The use of multilingual communication strategies and promoting multilingual campaign to accommodate diverse audience is of paramount benefit.

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