

The Role of Politeness and Nation Building: The Igbo Perspective

Olachi Florence Okere (PhD)

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri
Email: olaedo1976@gmail.com

&

Onyinye Constance Amamgbo (PhD)

Department of Igbo, African and Communication Studies,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: oc.amamgbo@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

This study examines the role of politeness and nation building: The Igbo Perspective. The main purpose of this study is; to identify the good and wrong use of linguistic choice of words and utterances by the particular country people as shown in the text " *O Ji Ihe Nwata Welie Aka Ya Elu*" used for the study, to ascertain whether negative or positive politeness promotes nation building, to find out the extent to which polite statements helps in nation building. Three research questions were raised by the authors of this work. A descriptive research design was also adopted for this study. Data were generated through the internet, library and analysis in its methodology to arrive at its logical conclusion. The theory used for this study was the theory of politeness propounded by Brown and Levinson in the year 1987. The findings revealed that good use of language may promote peace and sustain national development either in a clan, community, and the nation at large. The study recommends that polite statements, speeches, etc. should be maintained as it also combats crisis between one another, nation to nation and communities as well.

Keywords: Politeness, Language, Nation Building, and Role

Introduction

Language plays a vital role in nation building. Languages can as well perform many functions in our societies such as; reformation, transformation, information and at the same time destroy a nation as the case may be. Human beings use language to exchange ideas which is paramount in whatever one does in life. Without language, life remains useless and boring. It is through language individuals understand themselves, exchange pleasantries, rub minds and solve their personal problems. More so, when we talk about nation building without its features, it seems meaningless due to the fact that, through communication known as "language" is meant for public enlightenment, sensitization, and feelings for both actions and reactions. This is more reason each ethnic group try preserving its indigenous language in order to maintain and sustain its cultural heritage and values. Thus, man uses language politically, economically, socially, culturally, etc which can also be used in influencing people's behaviour, either positively or negatively. As positive influence arises, it creates room for a sustainable development, but if it is negative, it may result to serious conflict which may have a negative effect on nation building.

However, nation building requires human participation and political stability as this enhances socio-economic growth and development in a society. The political stability involves both the leader and the led. It is a wise - versa which all hands must be on deck. Some Igbo scholars have written many works on the uses of language for peace building and nation development which is the primary aim of this work. Indigenous languages can be used to build a nation which is the main focus of this paper, which Igbo language is one of them. The people use their indigenous language to convey information which is paramount to them. Through language, nation building could be achieved by the people since it has to do with communication, conversation, bringing ideas that will move a nation forward, it has been achieved in so many nations with the help of collaborations, people working as a team with polite words and statements either by the leaders and the led. The major thing is the language used, because certain linguistic choices a speaker uses, indicates the social relationship between them and their hearers/listeners.

The concept of politeness as proposed by Godmarks (1955), Brown and Levison's (1987) & Lakoffs Robin (1999) theories show that people present a face to others and to other people's face. This particular method determines the way the hearer / listener reacts to the interaction between them and the speaker. To be polite means having good manners, being courteous, refined, and elegant. This paper therefore advocates proper language to be used at a given time and its sustainability to enable the users to use foreign language like English well in discussions in order to avoid conflict crises in clans, communities, families, states, and societies at large.

The research methodology used in this work was a qualitative method which gave room for thorough data collection by the authors from the text relevant to the study. This text carried the aches speeches / statements of the social and creates room for remedies for nation building.

The main purpose of this study is; to identify the good and wrong use of linguistic choice of words and utterances by the particular country people as shown in the text " *O Ji Ihe Nwata Welie Aka Ya Elu*" used for the study, to ascertain whether negative or positive politeness promotes nation building, to find out the extent to which polite statements helps in nation building.

The people know that rudely use of language both oral and written forms cause problems amongst friends, brothers, sisters, families, peers, groups, communities, and nations at large. This study ex-rayed those statements both positive and negative as to enlighten the entire world, especially those who are ignorant of the implications of the ache statements and stand to be corrected on the appropriate choice of words as to promote nation building.

Definition of Terms

Language is one of the attributes of man which differentiates human beings from other animals and an aspect of culture highly valued by the society (Anumudu and Okere 2018). Nzeakor and Osondu (2013) hold the view that; linguists and philosophers have tried severally in defining language without reaching an all-encompassing definition. They added that people tend to define language based on their fields of study. From all indications, language is said to be a system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country. It plays a vital role in human nature because, without language, life is meaningless.

Oboko (2013) posits that language is an indispensable tool in national development. The essence of language is not just for communication but it also helps in maintaining a variety of social bond, a shared sense of values and communal awareness among group of people who share the linguistic code.

Azubuikwe and Akpaka (2013) are of the opinion that, language is a human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals, such as voice, sound, gestures, or written symbols. Most importantly, in commenting on the need for attitudinal reorientation suggests that "we should revisit our attitudes to our languages" (Essien, 2010). He notes that, "in a bilingual or multilingual setting, there is usually one language, regardless of its size which invests its users with prestige, self-confidence and power". That is why in Nigeria today, the rate of expansion in the spheres of use of English language identifies it as the hegemonic language which is threatening to envelop and overwhelm the continued use of some minority indigenous languages from the views of these scholars, we can undoubtedly ascertain that language is the only tool that differentiates man from the rest of other creatures due to the fact that, it is an important tool for national identity and that which promotes man's culture. An indigenous language is a veritable tool for national identity and integration which plays a major role in nation building.

Role

This could be viewed as a character or part played by a performer or actor. It is an expected behaviour of an individual in a family, society, community and state at large. It could be seen as the function or position of something (wiktionary, the free encyclopedia). Ogburn and Nimkoff averred that, "a role is a set of socially expected and approved behaviour patterns, consisting of both duties and privileges associated with a particular position in a group". They added that, a role is the behavioural enacting of the patterned expectations attributed to that position.

Politeness

Anumudu & Okere (2018) defined Politeness as a culture which can be learnt. When learnt, it shapes the speakers use of language. Politeness has to do with language and more language use which warrants its classification within pragmatics. Politeness in communication is a risk to face, a risk to one's own face or other persons face. It is also a persons' public self-image.

As a culture, it is the expression of the speakers intention to mitigate face threat carried by certain face threatening acts towards another (Mills, 2003 : 6). In addition, politeness is also seen as a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure that everyone feeling affirmed in a social interaction. (Lackoff 1990) postulated two major types of politeness as; the positive and negative face/ politeness.

The positive face/ politeness involves a desire to be connected to others whereas the negative face / politeness refers to an individual's desire not to have their basic rights and freedom impeded by others.

Politeness expresses concern for others but also carries the intention of having this concern reciprocated. This means that we are polite because we want to allow others feel free and this in turn makes them more comfortable.

Nation Building

Nation building according to Eze (2013) is the process of creating unity and a sense of belonging among heterogeneous groups in the state. In addition, he states that it involves attempts at integrating the various groups in order to build a nation out of the state. For Izuegbu (2013),

Nation building is the conscious and focused application of our people's collective resources, energies and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that we identify as ours. He added that it involves the development of behaviours, values, language, institutions and physical structures that elucidate our history and culture concretize and protect the present, also ensure the future identity and independence of the nation.

Furthermore, nation building is a deliberate, keenly directed focused, energetic projection of national culture and the collective identity. According to him, nation building is more interested in conscious effort towards the unity of a nation which in turn is capable of making such a nation strong. Nation building has to do with peoples' willingness of a state to work together and live as one, so as to enhance a viable political and stable community. Finally, having seen the definitions given by some scholars, we added that, nation building simply means people of a particular nation coming up together, work as a team with one voice economically, politically, socially, etc. to promote stability consciousness of a particular thing in achieving aims and objectives.

Theoretical Framework

The politeness theory in the context of pragmatics can be glossed roughly as tact which is an important aspect of communication. As a socialization process, competent adult members in every society learn how to behave politely, linguistically and otherwise. Hence, politeness has been borne as instinctive, but it is a phenomenon, which has been constructed through socio-cultural and historical processes (Obioma 2018). In her view, politeness has to do with language and more especially language use. Politeness is seen as a phenomenon connected with the relationship between language and social reality. As a socio-linguistic phenomenon that connects language and its users to the social world that surrounds them, it can provide insights into the very structure of social reality and the process by which it is established and maintained.

The theory of politeness was developed in 1978 after researches done by husband and wife, Stephen Levison and Penelope Brown. It is a theory that has to do with ideas like being tactful, modest and nice to other people. There are different types of politeness such as positive and negative politeness. The positive one is the desire to gain the approval of others, while the negative face is the desire to be unimpeded by others or one's action.

Nonetheless, politeness theory is based on the concept that has a self-image that they consciously project and try to protect. This sense of self-image is referred to as "face". This theory accounts for the redressing of the affronts that face pose the face threatening acts to addresses. It is also a politeness model founded on the notion of "face" offered by Goffman and conversational logic proposed by Grice. In this theory, Brown and Levinson (1987) develop the hypothesis that a face threat directly affects the perceived relationship between the speaker and the learner. For instance, intrinsic face threats enumerated by politeness theory include: disapproval, disagreement, non-cooperation, challenge, etc.

Face threatening act (FTA)

Usually, it is nice to have "attacks" once in a while on one's public self-image, even though everyone wants his public self-image to be respected. This face threatening act is when a particular discussion is done face-to-face, that is to say verbally and not the written type.

The research methodology used in this work was a qualitative method which gave room for thorough data collection by the authors from the text relevant to the study. This text carried the aches speeches / statements of the social and creates room for remedies for nation building. The main purpose of this study is;

1. to identify the good and wrong use of linguistic choice of words and utterances by the particular country people as shown in the text (O Ji Ihe Nwata Welie Aka Ya Elu) used for the study,
2. to ascertain whether negative or positive politeness promotes nation building,
3. to find out the extent to which polite statements help in nation building.

The people know that rudely use of language both oral and written forms cause problems amongst friends, brothers, sisters, families, peers, groups, communities, and nations at large. This study ex-rayed those statements both positive and negative as to enlighten the entire world, especially those who are ignorant of the implications of the aches and pains and stand to be corrected on the appropriate choice of words as to promote nation building.

Justification of the Study

This study focused on the function and as well the roles of politeness language plays in national development. Using Igbo language as a grassroots language choice and preference with the aim of proffering solution to such problems among the people of each geographical area in our contemporary societies. If the Igbo language is extensively used in Nigeria across social class. The spoken form is almost performing the role expected of it by the native speakers, both in Nigeria and Diaspora. If the people can come up together, collaborate and improve in speaking their language politely, peace will reign in their midst.

Using people's language such as (Igbo), other than foreign languages or lingua franca in resolving issues among the people, the nation will stand a better chance for peace building and sustaining national development in the country, Nigeria. If the people realize the value of their native language, knowing too well, one of the characteristics of language is that, no language is superior to the other.

Extract 1:

In a text titled “*O JI IHE NWATA WELIE AKA ELU*” The characters from Xmuqma during the appointment of their Ezeship, some people from Xmuqma village did not agree to give honour to whom honour is due. This was as a result of love for money. One of the kingsmen suggested that the Ezeship should go to the right family but they turned it the other way round. Thus; “ihe a Ozuome na-ekwu abxgh[eziokwu. Kedx onye q bx n'ezinaxlq Isiguzo? Ha buteliri igu ewu tara maya fqdx [ch[kqta qha obodo Xmxqma Otuobi?

Source: (Okoro & Epuchie 2006:12-13).

For one to look down on someone by voicing out such bad negative (FTA) that; no one from the Isiguzo's family is capable for such throne. This is a public attack on one's self-image which negative face threatening act can damage the face of a person spoken to. Such is seen as a false criticism. If the speaker would have used positive politeness statement, there should not have been any crises in that community.

Extract 2

- [] During the crises in the community after they have succeeded in the coronation of the wrong Ezeship by the community named Eze Okparaku, having experienced some bad omens caused by the wrong elected Ezeship. The entire community tried finding out what was the cause of those anomalies. Isikote, being the only son of Ajuhiekwu volunteered to go to chukwu ukpabia. People knowing too well that whoever that goes to the chukwu ukpabia does not come back alive. That was the reason the mother was crying, tried all she could to stop her son Isikote from that trip but he insisted, rather, promising his mother that; “nne m jirinu nwayq, na mmadx kwerela qnwx apxtagh[na onye ahx ga-anwxr[r]. Q bx nd[mmadu na-aga be chukwu ma lotakwa n'udo. Ihe a i na-ahigbu onwe gi, qgagh[atx g[n'anya na m ga-agacha ebe ahx ma lqtakwa n'udo. Abx m nwoke abxgh[m nwaanyi”. Source : (Okoro & Epuchie 2006: 44).

Having looked at the statement above, the mother was a bit relieved of the ugly situation she was in, but with the manner of approach Isikote her son gave to her, “that I'm a man”denotes that, he was sure of his return on the trip to chukwu abiama. Finally, he conquered by coming back alive as he promised. This politeness is a positive one due to the manner of approach Isikote gave his mother. If he had used negative politeness, it would not have worked out on the side of the mother. Politeness in language use has taken effect for nation building.

Discussion on Findings

Having seen what the situation is like in our society (Nigeria), problems, crises conflicts, confusions etc. everywhere both politically, socially, morally, academically, etc. With polite manner, it can calm the ugly situation. The writers of this research work are of the opinion that, when people have the same level of integrity, they think alike. But if they do not match in the level of thinking, things do not go down well. The level of thinking must collocate linguistically before an expected result is achieved.

Conclusion

The paper has explained the role of politeness in maintaining nation building, with Igbo as a focus in the discussion. There is a clear evidence concerning the role politeness plays in maintaining peace in our society.

Most statements/speeches which cause problems between person to person, family to family, clan to clan, nation to nation, etc., were also outlined. The major two types of politeness were discussed.

Recommendations

After our investigations in this work, we recommend that:

- Every individual should be polite in speech and avoid using abusive words or statements in order to maintain peace and unity.
- People should know the grass root language and ways of using them to avoid confusion, crises, conflicts, etc., in the society.
- There should be mutual understanding amongst individuals as there is individual differences.
- Polite statements in indigenous languages especially (Igbo) should be encouraged among the people such as; “ biko nyere m aka mee ihe a...”, “ nweturu m ndidi biko...”, ndo/ gbaghara m...”, e nwere m ike...”, “ nyeturu m aka...”, “ I nwere ike..., etc.
- Self consciousness should be maintained by individuals before any utterance is made. This is to say, good language use is commendable other than wrongly used.

Having recommended these few things, this in effect will solidify peace between one another and push the nation forward.

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