3.   Effective Inclusive Communication Strategies for Unity, Peace, And Progress for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The current state of the Nigerian nation expressly portends the necessity for national reconciliation and peace-building strategies to enhance the development and sustainability of the nation. From a semantic perspective, this research examines inclusive communication strategies that could be implemented to consolidate the unity, peace, and progress of the Nigerian nation. The method of this research is qualitative. The methodological paradigm is interpretive, based on content analysis. The significance of this research project is its relevance for national synergy and advancement.

Keywords:

Semantics; Inclusive Communication Strategies; Unity; Peace; Progress; Development; Nigeria

Introduction

The potency of positive communication is so relevant to the actualization of progress and sustainable national development that this research aims to investigate, from a semantic perspective, the inclusive communication strategies that could propel manifestations of unity, peace, and progress, coupled with security and development, in the Nigerian nation.

Adedimeji (2023) points out that for life to be made meaningful, peace, security, and development are critical. He also notes that for peace, security and development to be achieved, studies in language, literature and communication play significant roles. So, the focus of this research on projecting inclusion strategies through effective communication is relevant to achieving unity, peace, and progress for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Every situation that threatens the peace of a nation results in insecurity, which consequently harms the development of the nation. To the extent that language is a powerful means used to create, maintain, and sustain social harmony, then, appropriate language skills should be adopted to foster unity, peace, and progress for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Corroboratively, Ogunsiji (2023) notes that language is a tool that can be used to maintain and sustain mutual understanding among members of society because it is the key to the heart of the people. Moreover, Olerede & Olorede (2015) point out that language must be consciously used to achieve peace because human perception and conception are conveyed through language in the form of messages, and messages are

transformed into meanings.

Essentially, it is important to emphasize that words have power and can influence the psyche and mindset of the people. In this connection, language must be used appropriately and never misused, to avoid conflicts which could cause upheaval and destruction of lives and properties, thereby mitigating development in the nation. So, proper use of language should be adopted to achieve the needed unity, peace, and progress for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Communication, Peace, Security And Development

The security challenges prevalent in Nigeria show that there is a pressing need to safeguard security and address insecurity in the nation. Invariably, no nation develops amidst conflicts, violence, terrorism, and insecurity. Therefore, the promotion of peaceful communication is an effective strategy to entrench the peaceful conditions required to establish security and progress in the nation.

Ewetan & Urhie (2014) point out that insecurity, in any form it is experienced, constitutes a serious threat to lives and properties, hinders business activities, and discourages domestic and foreign investors, all of which retard a country's socio-economic development.

So, to combat the consequences of insecurity in Nigeria, this research highlights the importance of promoting peaceful co-existence in the nation to achieve the needed security required for progress and sustainable development. The relevance of peace in national development is such that it is pivotal to creating stability and social cohesion that facilitate advancement.

The online *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* describes peace as follows:

1. A state of tranquility or quiet: as (a): freedom from civil disturbance. (b): a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or customs.
2. Freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions.
3. Harmony in personal relations.
4. (a): a state or period of mutual concord between governments. (b): a pact or agreement to end hostilities between those who have been at war or in a state of enmity.
5. Used interjectionally to ask for silence or calm or as a greeting or farewell – at peace: in a state of concord or tranquillity.

Several perspectives of peace have been expressed by different peace scholars over time, across the globe. For instance, as presented by Sandy and Perkins, Jr. (2008: 1), Albert Einstein's popular view of peace states:

> Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law,
> of order – in short, of government.

Kin (2008: 83) explicates the meaning of peace as advocated by a famous human rights activist, Martin Luther King, Jr., that states:

> True peace is not merely the absence of tension: It is the presence of
> justice.

Adedimeji (2023) describes the concept of peace as a state of harmony characterized by a lack of

violence, conflict behaviours, and freedom from fear of violence.

Distinctively, peace is a state marked with the presence of justice, good law and order, respect for human rights, prevailing security of public places, absence of war or other hostilities, a pact or treaty to cease hostilities, freedom from conflicts or disputes, absence of violence, absence of anxiety or mental stress, harmonious relationships, and good government. Interestingly, all the various manifestations of peace are entrenched through communication.

Inherently, to achieve peace and security for sustainable national development, effective communication is paramount through the appropriate use of language. The capacity to communicate is a vital feature of humans and it influences all human activities. Communication is the act of giving, receiving, and sharing ideas, information, signals, messages, or expressing emotions through a medium. The process of communication involves sending and receiving messages through verbal and non-verbal methods. Communication is cyclical, so it is a two-way means of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, opinions, and messages between two or more individuals to build an understanding based on accurate comprehension.

Communication is carried out through language skills such as speaking, listening, writing, and reading, with words as the building blocks. From a semantic perspective, there are various types of meanings that words generate which could be conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic. Irrespective of the types of meanings that words constitute, words significantly impact communication.

Words are so powerful that they could be used to either build or destroy any nation. Therefore, for unity, peace, and progress to be established in a nation, positive words should predominate the communication dynamics of the polity to align the people's mindset positively, as well as foster the degree of security required for sustainable national development. Semantically, the conceptual meanings of positive words such as love, peace, protection, provision, empowerment, justice, unity, equality, success, progress, prosperity, respect, value, integrity, dignity, etc., denote powerful expressions that significantly influence the psyche of individuals in the right and wholesome direction. Such efficacious expressions promote security and generate positive motivations for nation-building and sustainable development. On the contrary, the conceptual meanings of negative words such as oppression, corruption, tension, protest, crisis, threat, violence, attack, kill, displaced, hijack, bandits, terrorism, insurgency, kidnapping, etc., instil fear, anxiety, depression, frustration, despondency, in the psyche of individuals and cause destruction, as well as escalate insecurity, which hinders national development.

So, to achieve peace, security, and development, it is critical to intentionally use positive words to communicate appropriately, especially through the media which significantly impact the populace. The media, both traditional and new, are strong channels of communication that could be used to build unity and peace in the nation.

Inclusive Communication Strategies, Unity, Peace, And Development

An inclusive approach to peacebuilding strongly encourages people to express their perspectives, without being marginalized, devalued, discriminated against, or excluded from activities that pertain to the nation. One of the inclusion strategies to promote national unity is through peaceful communication couched with appropriate use of language. Proper language use fosters social cohesion and unity which invariably creates

a suitable environment for progress and development in the nation.

Intrinsically, peaceful communication is a constructive nonviolent means to prevent violence, manage conflicts through conflict resolution and transformation mechanisms, as well as promote post-conflict reconciliation. Peaceful communication is relevant at all levels of society to establish and sustain harmonious relationships among people, across ethnic, religious, gender, class, national, and racial boundaries.

In explicating nonviolence, Gandhi (2003) asserts that:

> Nonviolence means allowing the positive within you to emerge. Be dominated by love, respect, understanding, appreciation, compassion, and concern for others rather than the self-centered, selfish, greedy, hateful, prejudiced, suspicious, and aggressive attitudes that dominate our thinking.

According to Rosenberg (2003), Nonviolent Communication (NVC), could be summarized thus:

> NVC helps us connect with each other and ourselves in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish. It guides us to reframe the way we express ourselves and listen to others by focusing our consciousness on four areas: what we are observing, feeling, and needing, and what we are requesting to enrich our lives. NVC fosters deep listening, respect, and empathy and engenders a mutual desire to give from the heart. Some people use NVC to respond compassionately to themselves, some to create greater depth in their relationships, and still others to build effective relationships at work or in the political arena. Worldwide, NVC is used to mediate disputes and conflicts at all levels.

On the platform of the United Nations Academic Impact (un.org), Seid (2019), in discussing the topic titled "Unlocking your Emotions to Achieve the SDGs: Nonviolent Communication", states that:

> Nonviolent Communication is a tool that guides practitioners in reframing how they express themselves, how to hear others and resolve conflicts by focusing on what they are observing, feeling, needing, and requesting. It is a tool that leads us toward a compassionate connection between people in which everyone's needs are valued and are met through collaboration.
>
> Through Nonviolent Communication, conflict resolution becomes easier, avoiding simple disputes and resolving difficult ones more effectively. Nonviolent Communication is highly connected with Emotional Intelligence because it relies on people understanding their own emotions and motivations as well as understanding and empathizing with the needs of others.

Peaceful communication promotes positive social change through empathic connection and cooperation

with others, thereby transforming our hitherto reactions and responses to life. Strategically, peaceful communication encompasses crucial aspects of peacebuilding that engender sustainable peace required for national development, which this research presents as follows:

- Refrain from hate speech.
- Avoid conflictual language.
- Abstain from abusive language.
- Desist from verbal violence and threats.
- Avoid acts that threaten people's face or social image.
- Desist from negative ethnic stereotypes.
- Refrain from discriminatory language.
- Abstain from derogatory language.
- Keep away from divisive language.
- Avoid fake news.

Inclusive communication strategies that should be adopted to mitigate conflicts and face threatening acts, and violence is the engagement of meaningful and impactful dialogue entrenched in empathy and compassion towards others. Ogunsiji (2023) points out that dialogue is a process, a deliberate, planned, and sustained conflict intervention effort where people commit to listen, reflect, and question with a curious mindset to seek a shared understanding in situations that touch on peace and security.

Fundamentally, dialogue fosters mutual understanding and facilitates mutual agreement and consensus between conflicting parties. Dialogue helps to dig out the grievances of conflicting parties with the target to resolve the conflicts, restore respect and dignity, and ultimately achieve peace and security for sustainable national development.

Dialogue could be deployed to activate the following peace-building processes:

- Negotiation.
- Intervention.
- Reconciliation.
- Adjudication.
- Prosecution.

In addition to the appropriate use of language, peaceful communication derives much relevance from Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication which stipulates that people must know what to say when to say it, where to say it, and how to say it.

Moreover, positive expressions that advance nationality and instil patriotism in the psyche of the populace should be encouraged and emphasized as an effective inclusive communication strategy. For instance, Nigerians should first define themselves as being Nigerian, before ethnic considerations, to promote unity and peace. In this connection, this research strongly recommends the following powerfully unifying expression:

I'm a Nigerian.

Emphasis should be on inclusion strategies rather than divisive diversity, to achieve the suitable degree of unity, peace, and progress for sustainable national development.

CONCLUSION

Although Nigeria is highly multiethnic, and the ethnic groups and cultures should be preserved, however, the national unity should not be undermined. The requisite unity and peace could be achieved

through the adoption of the effective inclusive communication strategies discussed in this research. It is when there is unity and peace that there will be progress and sustainable development in Nigeria. Further studies on the relevance of inclusive communication strategies are strongly recommended.

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