
Language Misuse by Media, Individuals and Groups as the Remote Cause of Insecurity in West Africa

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Abstract

Currently, most studies only pay attention to socio-cultural, economic and political factors behind insecurity in Africa. The aim of this study is to rouse deserving attention on linguistic or language-based factors behind the increasing insecurity in West Africa, focusing on the case of Nigeria. It seeks to do so through the lens of applied linguistics. The study is anchored on Halliday's theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, which sees language as a social semiotic that presents users with a network of choices to create oral and written contents. From observation and secondary data, subjected to objective, descriptive and critical analysis, the study reveals that individuals, traditional and social media, and groups misuse language in the course of interpersonal and intergroup relations and communication. Thus, they cause and ignite insecurity in the study area. It maintains that this situation, arising from the deviant use of language, applies to every human society where language users are not mindful of how to use language effectively to avoid conflicts that lead to insecurity. The study concludes that language misuse is the remote cause of the consistent and alarming insecurity confronting West Africa; particularly Nigeria Majorly, the study charges the government to put in place strong legislations that could efficiently check against the misuse of language to cause

and ignite insecurity. Agents of socialisation are also charged to be up and doing in the use of language and matters concerning language misuse.

Keywords: Language misuse, Media, Individuals, Groups, Remote Cause, Insecurity

Introduction

Globally, the misuse of language by media, individuals and groups causes a lot of issues of interpersonal and intergroup relations. In other words, wherever in the world that language is misused by media, individuals and groups, various issues arise and confront the society in no little ways and manners. This study seeks to argue that language misuse is what remotely causes the endemic insecurity in West Africa, with the case of Nigeria taking the lead. Put the other way round, the misuse of language by media, individuals and groups is the ground cause of the recurrent insecurity confronting West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Although insecurity portends and concerns violence or war, it also extends to socio-economic and political wrongs and ills that threaten the safety, peace and tranquility of any society (Oyedeji, 2018, p. 3). It is to that end that this study concerns itself with making a critical exposition of how language is misused by media, individuals and groups to cause all that culminates to insecurity in society. By virtue of its concern, the study seeks to move away from the common trend of exclusively considering only the socio-economic and political factors behind insecurity to considering the language-based factors behind insecurity in society, as commonly obtained in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa.

The increasing spate of insecurity in the contemporary society as a whole is worrisome (Tukura, 2021; Alozieuwa, 2016). Peoples of diverse linguistic and ethno-religious backgrounds are susceptible

to ‘perennial communal and sectarian strife, fostered by hegemonic and resistance politics’ (Alozieuwa, 2016), religious extremism and tribalism or ethnicity. Language politics in such places is also hegemonic and thereby meets resistance. West African peoples, especially those in Nigeria, capitalise on their diversity for sustained intergroup and interpersonal clashes, violence and insecurity. The supposed peaceful and harmonious co-existence among individuals and groups in such settings get shattered by perennial communal and sectarian strife, political hegemony, resistance, sour intergroup and interpersonal relations, crises (interpersonal conflicts), ethnic hate and prejudices, religious fundamentalism, violence, terrorism, intolerance, disintegration, social vices and what have you. As the supposed peaceful and harmonious co-existence among individuals and groups in society becomes a mirage, insecurity takes precedence.

Theoretical Framework

For a theoretical backing, this study adopts Michael A.K. Halliday’s (1978; 1985; 1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics Theory. It gives this theory the abbreviation short form ‘SFLT’. SFLT will be used henceforth, almost all through here. Halliday, the proponent of SFLT, theorises that language is social semiotic, which offers its users a network of choices to create texts, both spoken and written alike (Halliday, 1985; 1994). It follows that SFLT considers language as a resource for making meaning. Contrarily, meaning resides in systemic patterns of choice. This view clashes with the conventional consideration of language as a system of rules that stifles creativity in speech, as Chomsky (1956) maintains. Halliday’s words grounding his consideration of language as a semiotic system read, “It seemed to me that explanations of linguistic phenomena needed to be sought in relationships among systems rather than among structures – in what I once called ‘deep

paradigms’ – since these were essentially where speakers made their choices” (Halliday, 1985, p. 1).

It could be understood from Halliday’s (1985, p. 1) above quoted words that although linguistic phenomena (elements, structures and other constituents of language) relate, in seeking to know and in the course of analysing their relationship, the systems among them rather than their structures should be given utmost consideration. In reflecting on Halliday’s above quoted words, Teo (2000, p. 24) rightly observes that the meaning of spoken or written texts (messages) is dependent on the choices made by users, especially speakers and writers. Making emphasis on speakers and writers stresses the fact that communication begins with speakers and writers, as those who encode/d the messages communicated across listeners and readers. Phenomena are given meaning using language. They are also made meaningless using language. That is to say language use either makes or mars interpersonal communication, and intergroup relations and interaction. That depends on how it is used by (a) given user(s) and the context of usage. As Halliday notes, there are three types of meanings available to speakers. Meanings are of three categories and every utterance encodes meaning on three levels, simultaneously. These are textual, interpersonal and ideational. Language users use their lexicon-cum-grammar over the course of a given utterance to:

- (i) Efficient structural information from a communicative point of view (Textual Meaning);
- (ii) Achieve interpersonal goals (Interpersonal Meaning);
- (iii) Represent experience (Ideational Meaning).

This encoding of meaning is regards as Metafunctions. In both conceptual and contextual applications, metafunctions are characterised by three terms that influence language use. These are field, tenor and mode. Accordingly, tenor refers to the socially

defined relations between the parties involved in an interaction. Field refers to the subject matter of the text. Mode is the medium and role of language in the situation (David, 2002). The implication of the foregoing is that language use involves two or more parties involved in the communication, who make up the parties in communication process. Next, there must be a subject matter (theme, aim and in every discursive interaction of the parties engaged in communication. Lastly, language must be used for the communication. That is to say communication between and/or among the parties involved require using a medium or several media, depending on the context. Also, it implies that there is functional connectivity between the systems and the parties involved in the whole exercise of communication.

The term 'lexicogrammar' is introduced by Halliday (1994) as an essential concept in understanding language functions. He avers that a language consists of more-or-less closed systems of words and grammatical structures, with our vocabulary constituting a relatively open system, and grammar a fixed number of relatively closed ones. It is from these systems that language users make choices in order to construct wordings and meanings (Halliday, 1994). In what theoretically sheds highlights on how users should use language well, let us reflect on Halliday's (1985, p. 1) expressed view. He is of the view that in explaining how language works, functional analysis should be basis of the explanation, since language had evolved to enable human beings and animals alike meet certain critical functions in their 'eco-social environment' in the course of their interaction, relationship and communication. The central implication of the foregoing expressed reality is that the functionality of human beings, phenomena and societal systems and structures is intertwined. The network of functional connectivity makes it obvious that the functional lapses or deviances of one, some

or all of the parties in communication results in a network of *malfunctionality*. *Malfunctionality* is used here to refer to the situation whereby systems, structures and parties involved in a process malfunction, and the issues arising from their failure to function accordingly and also the lapses or associate issues of their functioned functionality.

The textual metafunction relates to the mode, the internal organisation and communicative nature of a text. This comprises textual interactivity, spontaneity and communicative distance. The textual metafunction is that part of the meaning which builds up different coherent thematic structures into the main text. The textual meaning refers to the actual form of the way text is organised. It deals with information management, resources and genres. Through the combination of resources at different textual levels, it allows ideas and attitudes about themes, actions and events to be expressed. 'Textual' concerns the creation of text. It expresses the structure of information and the relation of each part of the discourse to the whole and to the setting (Halliday, 1973). Tenor consists of three component areas. These are the speaker/writer persona, social distance, and relative social status. The interpersonal meaning expresses judgments and assessments; gives guidelines; and deals with relationships between people. The relationship between texts and readers/viewers and the relationships within texts is interpersonal. This means that there is also the grammar of personal participation between them. The relationship expresses the speaker's role in the speech situation, and their personal commitment and interaction with others (Halliday, 1973).

The interpersonal metafunction relates to tenor or interactivity aspect of a text. Texts come under the four main types of mood in English language. These are declaratives, interrogatives, imperatives and subjunctives. Thus, texts come under one of them

at a time. These four main types of mood all develop different relations with the audience and the speaker. In addition to representing the context as they experience it, speakers of a language enact their roles as participants in the context, as they interact with each other. In a sense, in interacting, they create the context, as they negotiate their own roles in it and those of others. In the words of Ogunsiiji (2000, p. 77) ‘metafunction... helps to establish and sustains social relations.’ Having said the above, it is imperative to note that the central theoretical assumptions of SFLT are summarily highlighted by Anderson (2014) and Eggins (1994) viz:

- (i) SFLT postulates that language is functional. That is, it is concerned with how language is structured and used to make meanings.
- (ii) Language is semiotic. This means that the meaning of a text is dependent upon the choices made by the speaker from the options available within the language system.
- (iii) A text is understood within context. In this sense, a text is understood in terms of the information about the context within which it was generated, either the context of situation or the context of culture.

Given the foregoing, the Systemic Functional Linguistics Theory (SFLT) aptly suits this study in several regards. For example, through the lens of SFLT, it is understood that language users, who seek the relationship of linguistic phenomena in their structures rather than among systems of their entirety, make wrong choice of language use. This is what happens when language users make use of language in ways that lead to insecurity as the aftermath of

conflict arising from language misuse. Obviously, media, individuals and groups most often than not know that using language otherwise could easily lead to or bring about crises or conflicts between and among individuals, groups and nations. Yet, they go ahead go misuse language to attain their conceived goals. Regrettably, such usage causes communicational and relational problems between and among individuals, groups and even nations. Media could also get into intergroup (inter-media) issues arising from the deviant use of language. Insecurity could be averted and combated with the effective use of language. It could also be aggravated using language. In this case, language is misused, unlike in the case of the former in which language is used rightly, constructively and effectively.

In illustrating Halliday's theoretical assumptions of SFLT, Fowler (1986, p. 148) mentions birthplace, family, school and affiliated social groups, together with the patterns of interaction and the limitations of experience associated with them as evidence of the overall assumptions of SFLT. Essentially, worldview is revealed by texts to speakers, writers and even listeners and readers in the course of discourse. The meanings of the texts are realised and understood in the participants of the communicative exercise. However, in some cases, communicated texts are unrealised and misunderstood. Consequent upon these, crises or conflicts arise and soon afterwards or much later metamorphose to insecurity. According to Coffin (2001, p. 94), all speakers are influenced by the economic and social systems in which they live and also by the roles they inhabit within these systems. This expression emphasises Halliday's demand for considering systems rather than structures. Citizens of West Africa as well as Nigerians are influenced by prevailing socio-economic and political systems of their area. Linguistic or language-based factors influencing these citizens are of more concern to this study

than the non-language-based factors, such as influences of the prevailing socio-economic and political systems. This study argues that language is also central in the socio-economic and political factors behind insecurity.

Commonly Noted Causes/Sources of Insecurity

Although this study concerns itself with the language-based factors behind insecurity, it devotes this sub-section to discussing the commonly noted causes and sources of insecurity in society. The various causes of insecurity double as the sources too. These include kidnapping, armed banditry, political thuggery, hired assassination, Fulani herders' attacks on farmers and communities, hate speeches, elitist incitement, religious fundamentalism and crisis, ethnic hate, indigene versus non-indigene palaver, communal clashes, boundary disputes, chieftaincy tussle, unemployment, poverty, hunger and starvation, rape and gender violence women (Alubo, 2006; Lewis, 2011; Ayoade 2014; Odekunle, 2010; Alozieuwa, 2016; Robert, 2017; Odekunle 2018; Dibie, Gotau and Robert, 2016; Besong & Robert, 2019; Robert, 2020; Ahmed, 2021; Tukura, 2021).

Stating in specific terms, insecurity arises from conflicts over clash of interests or opposing capacities in relation to perceived or anticipated benefits or outcomes between the two or more parties involved. As Lammers (1959, p. 559) notes, conflict originates from the difference in timing, objectives, interests, efforts, approaches, and attitudes of people to issues. Socio-economic and political wrongs are the bane of social issues culminating to insecurity. Examples include unemployment, poverty, hunger and starvation, rape, gender violence against women as well as against men. Social issues cause insecurity, because those affected by them gradually take to it as a means of survival or getting back at the society that fails and incapacitates them perpetually. For example, unemployment causes insecurity because those who are not

employed and those underemployed get engaged in illegitimate activities as means of survival or getting back at the society. Being that unemployment engenders the tendency of engaging in evil or unethical means of survival, it is a factor behind insecurity because the evils lead to acts of insecurity. The youths are mostly unemployed despite the fact that a larger number of them are educated. They are deliberately incapacitated and impoverished and left unemployed by the state through – agents of the state (Amozua, 2016; Robert & Anura, 2018; Besong, 2019; Robert, 2020).

On her part, Okoye (2006, p. 6) observes that ‘extreme poverty, as obtained in many Third World countries, causes people to commit suicide. Frustration is a strong contributory factor to suicide.’ She goes on to observe that there are many more factors that cause individual and societal stress and tension in Africa and many other developing nations of the world (Okoye, 2006, p. 6). Okoye (2006, p. 6) notes that the most prominent of the factors are devastating poverty, loss of hope and not knowing where your next meal is coming from, while others are constant civil unrests, tribal clashes, religious rivalries, strikes, political killings, rape, destruction of public properties, unemployment, etc. Clearly, she agrees with most of the other scholars, such as those above, on the causes of insecurity, as she stresses poverty, social vices, heinous crimes against individuals and the state, institutional issues, etc. The frustrating situations many find themselves are what get them into dubious ways of life. The deviant ways of life cause tension, civil unrest, crises, violence, survival of the fittest, discrimination and exclusion, moral decadence, lawlessness, and what have you.

The reality that the aforementioned factors are both causes and sources of insecurity had once been expressed by Awolowo (1970), who noted that the aggressors against peace and stability in Nigeria are abject poverty, hunger, disease, squalor and ignorance, which

are more devastating in their ravages, more insidious, more thorough and more resistant in their operations, than armed rebellion. Thus, being that these factors are why insecurity rises and confronts the Nigerian society, it is logical to conclude they are the causes of insecurity. And, being the causes, they double as the sources of insecurity too. In fact, one realises from Awolowo's observation that the social issues, which he mentioned, pose more challenges to the security of the Nigerian society than the security challenges posed by non-state actors causing insecurity. Nigeria's peace and stability are threatened by these factors. That is why insecurity is now increasingly alarming, since the government does not care about combating it significantly but rather igniting it to their covert advantage and to the peril of the poor innocent masses. The menace of these causes and sources of insecurity is why Awolowo (1970) emphasised that these non-human enemies or aggressors ought to be crushed ruthlessly with immediate alacrity.

Similarly, Lula da Silva, former President of Brazil, is quoted to have once said, 'When I became President of this country, half of the population couldn't sleep because of hunger, while the other half could not sleep because of the fear of the hungry half' (Adamu, 2015, p. 24). Reflecting on Lula da Silva's observation, Adamu (2015, p. 24) observes that 'about 54.6 million people go to bed every night hungry in Nigeria.' In the same vein, Yagboyaju (2019, p. 50) laments that 'one third of the country's entire population goes to bed hungry every day.' As a saying goes, 'A hungry man is an angry man.' The hungry among us are angry with those who could get rid of their hunger but yet do nothing. They unleash mayhem on Nigerian society as well as other West African societies.

Reacting to the observation made by Awolowo above, Yagboyaju (2019, p. 34) says that Awolowo's assertion is apt because even after five decades of his observation, the issues he identified still manifest

in Nigeria, as most of the issues are the remote factors behind most of the cases of insecurity in present-day Nigeria. It means that those issues Awolowo identified are largely responsible for the contemporary security threats to peace and stability in Nigeria. The threats include abject poverty amidst abundant resources, hunger and starvation, unemployment, ignorance and illiteracy, prostitution, armed-robbery, theft, kidnapping, hired assassination, money ritual killing, menace, rape and killings, banditry, resource control contestation, communal clashes, ethno-religious conflicts, Fulani herders' sustained attempts to cleanse agrarian communities, chieftaincy tussle, and what have you (Lewis, 2011; Ayoade 2014; Odekunle, 2010; Odekunle 2018; Dibie, Gotau and Robert, 2016; Besong & Robert, 2019; Robert, 2020)

Politicians and other elites of West African nations mobilise and incite the same youths they incapacitate, impoverish, make jobless, and subject to abject poverty, lack, ignorance, illiteracy and various helpless situations of life to cause mayhem, disrupt and threaten peace, stability, tranquility and unity in diversity among the citizenry of this region. The number one example is the case of Nigeria, where its political leaders and other elites do nothing good for the youths among the masses, but only mobilise them for crimes, evil deals, violence, terrorism, political thuggery and electioneering, militancy, ritual killing, kidnapping for ransom, attacking and murdering political opponents, and so on (Robert, 2020, pp. 90-95; Besong, 2019, pp.11-14; Kia and Vurasi, 2013, p. 165; Amozua, 2016). In his contribution to the foregoing, Galadima (2016, p. 48) argues that most of the traditional rulers of these days join forces with the secular politicians to unleash mayhem on the society, as such traditional rulers and politicians politick with the lives and the belongings, peace and tranquility and development of their people and places for political gains. He adds that some of traditional rulers

either incite such conflicts for their own interests or their superior politician bosses' (Galadima, 2016, p. 48). And, where/when they do not incite or cause conflicts, such traditional and secular political office holders fuel the conflicts/crises, including financial support and donation of war weapons to either party at war, towards attaining genocide (Galadima, 2016).

Obviously, the misdeeds of political and other elites of West African nations, especially those of Nigeria, continuously cause, ignite and compound the insecurity confronting Nigeria as well as other West African nations. As Amozua (2016) argues, criminals and all kinds of other enemies of the state and its citizenry are the covert products of the heartless elites, who continuously gather the same youths they have frustrated and incapacitated to unleash untold mayhem, woes, pains, atrocities and insecurity on the society and its people for them, all for their selfish political and economic gains. In what lends credence to the foregoing, Oladiran and Adadevoh (2008, p. 103) note that the Nigerian social, political and economic spheres have been characterised by the following social symbolic indices due to ethnic politics:

- (a) The lack of an even distribution of wealth and income due to ethnic bias;
- (b) Mono-cultural and enclave economy;
- (c) Insecurity of jobs, lives and property;
- (d) High and increasing illiteracy rates;
- (e) Un-conducive atmosphere for healthy political bargaining and compromise;
- (f) Structural imbalances, corruption and increased per capita poverty.

At this juncture, this study makes a brief analytical exposition of how language misuse constitutes a cause of insecurity in society. It argues that language is one of the remote causes but not sources of

insecurity. It is only but a cause because humans are those who make it to be a cause of insecurity, as they misuse it. Here, the study reiterates the point that language misuse is one kernel cause of insecurity. In fact, language misuse is the first cause of insecurity in that everything one does include language use. First, language is used to communicate the mind-conceived evils that culminate to insecurity in practical contexts, when made manifest. Next, the manipulative use of language gets some persons into perpetrating the evil of insecurity. In the simplest sense of language use as the bane of insecurity, consider a situation in which what is said to some individuals provoke them to react violently to a situation they had been calm about erstwhile. A study reports that violent conflict leading to insecurity could arise upon calling any (or certain) Jos men 'women' to denote that they are not as strong as men, but weak like women (Krause, 2019). For example, upon being mockingly called 'women' – *weak men*, who do not fight, Jos Dadin Kowa men changed from being peaceful to being violent, just to prove their masculinity and gallantry in war/conflict (Krause, 2019; 2018; 2017).

In the bids to prove their masculinity that they are not women, such men resort to being violent. Consequently, conflicts often arise and in most cases degenerate to violent conflicts that threaten and take lives, property and the environment. Clearly, the above situations of violence and insecurity aroused from language misuse on gender lane to degrade peaceful men, like those of Jos Dadin Kowa. Language use for peace-building had earlier informed their attitude towards situations of conflict, violence and insecurity. That is why they were largely peaceful and never engaged in violence and insecurity of various phases. Thereafter, the orientation got altered by the use of derogatory gender label for them. Then, in response to that, the Jos Dadin Kowa abruptly altered their age-long or erstwhile

internalised orientation on non-violence, just to prove their masculinity and gallantry. They became resolved to show that they just never wanted to be violent. Otherwise, they could even do worse than the men of some other areas, who consider themselves ‘men’, not ‘women’ and consider their fellow men in Dadin Kowa as ‘women’. Krause (2019, p. 1742) posits that men in the most violence-prone neighbourhoods of Jos often make use of ‘*violent masculinity* to access status and resources’, as a good number of them are excluded ‘from regular income activities.’

Traditional and Social Media and Language Misuse for Insecurity

Here, the study makes an exposition of how the media misuse language and insecurity arises as its consequence. Both traditional and social (new) media are simply referred as ‘media’ or ‘the media’. The central argument here is that in the course of reportage (dissemination of information), broadcast and anchoring various media programmes, the media misuse language in such manners that conflicts arise and sometimes metamorphose into insecurity. This argument takes centre stage of the analysis to be made here, with a view to showing how language misuse by the media causes insecurity. Accordingly, Edogor, Ojo, Ezugwu and Dike (2015) are of the view that the reportage of any conflict is non-negotiable for the media. That is, the media do not negotiate with anyone to report a conflict. This is true. That view focuses on the traditional media. The case of new (social) media is even more non-negotiable than that of the traditional media.

The traditional media most often have to be invited or told by someone to get into the matter or to the scene of the conflict. That is not the case with reportage of conflict or any other matter on social media. Even news gathering and the coverage of an event do not wait for invitation or follow formalised processes. A passerby could

just snap or video-cover an event without the knowledge of those involved in the event or the actions making up the event. Afterwards, s/he uploads the videos and/or photos with news features (articles) explaining the circumstances behind the photos and/or videos. The implication of the foregoing is that both professional and non-professional users of the mass media report events and as well give news online. Those who give factual or real news of various events show the proper or ideal use of language, which helps to combat insecurity rather than to cause, ignite or aggravate it. Conversely, those who give fake news, penchant/sensational reports, and misinformation, etc. to the masses, using language and other means of mass communication, evidently show the misuse of language as well as those other communication media. This otherwise use of language and the mass media results in insecurity, or rather causes, ignites and aggravates insecurity.

Just as this study argues that conflict is the underlying factor behind insecurity, resulting from language misuse, Adamu (2013, p. 82) cites Manoff (2011) to have noted viz: 'Journalism is the handmaiden of conflict. The epistemology of journalism is inherently conflictual in the same way our system of jurisprudence is inherently adversarial.' It implies that there is a nexus between journalism and conflict, just as there is a systemic similarity between epistemology of journalism and that of jurisprudence, as both are characterised by conflict. The nexus lies in the former being *conflictual* and the latter being adversarial. In what lends credence to the foregoing, Adamu (2013) avers that news given by journalists is usually predicated on conflict and individual's definition of conflict; audiences love and savour conflict; conflict is the framework within which journalists labour. Obviously, in giving the news, journalists make use of language for news gathering, dissemination (reportage) and analysis. At any point in time that

journalists misuse language for any media purposes, problems arise. These include the rise of fake news, misrepresentation of facts, misinterpretation of facts and/or what is reported, propaganda, penchant or sensational broadcast, spread of rumours and/or falsehoods, incitement, rhetoric, and/or what have you.

In the course of bringing image-making and agenda setting roles of the mass media to manifestation, the press misuse language against those labelled for indictment or condemnation. On the other hand, they use language effectively to assert those set aside for image-making and agenda setting. Obviously, whatever and whoever the media pay attention to and make their image, with significant media contents and jingles, they automatically become popular, relevant and prominent (Chiakaan & Ahmed, 2011; Chiakaan, 2013; Robert & Besong, 2016; Robert & Besong, 2016). In doing so, the mass (traditional) media make good as well as positive use of language to talk, write, act and perform about the persons and/or the things drawn out for image-making and agenda-setting. This applies to the role of the mass media in insecurity. There are ways in which the mass media would talk, write, act and perform about certain persons, nations, cultures, themes and things, they would un/consciously rouse the attention of the masses to insecurity itself or what culminates to.

The mass media, like the new (social) media, could cause, ignite or aggravate insecurity by the ways they use language in producing media contents characterised by what generate, heighten or lead to insecurity. Next, the kind of reportage they make, using language negatively, also tells of how the mass media could cause, ignite or aggravate insecurity in society. By being sentimental and unprofessional in terms of breach of media and conventional ethics, the mass media play a significant role in causing and fuelling security in society. The kind of information given by the media

about insecurity could end up causing tension, psychological trauma, mixed feelings, conflicts, and/or insecurity. Of course, it is language that is used to give out information. So, when the information disseminated is as such, it implies that the mass media have misused language in the dissemination of the given information. The media's penchant for exaggerating details of ethnic, religious, political, communal and other related crises, which thereby fuel their intensity is commonly known and affirmed by both oral and written sources (Kukah 1993). This character by the media caused the gravamen in the 1987 Kafanchan religious disturbances.

News reports monitored on Radio Kaduna, immediately after the commencement of the Kafanchan upsurge, alleged that Christians were killing Muslims indiscriminately, burning their Mosques and copies of the Holy Qur'an, and banishing them from the town. The broadcast further alleged that an itinerant preacher had misquoted the Qur'an and blasphemed the name of Prophet Mohammed, urging Christians to kill Muslims and burn their Mosques (News Watch, 1987, p. 10, cited in Tsaku, 2017, p. 30). These reports ignited reprisal attacks by Muslims all over Kaduna State, causing an invaluable loss of lives and property (Gofwen 2004, p. 91-3). Most religious leaders in the country have therefore, accused the media of fanning the embers of religious violence by their provocative and emotive reports (Kukah, 1993; Gofwen 2004). Obviously, it was a case language misuse by the media, which caused as well as ignited the murderous violence in Kaduna that year. Of course, that was a serious situation of insecurity. That was also a clear case or indication of how media cause and/or ignite conflicts, war, violence and/or insecurity.

The proliferation of media technology has made it easy for some of these emotive reports and images of slain persons to be transported

far and wide, generating intense hatred between belligerents and reprisal attacks in a cycle of violence (Tsaku, 2017; Gofwen 2004; Kukah, 1993). The dissemination of gory images of victims on the internet either triggers violent conflicts, as reprisal attacks, or ignites conflicts, as sources of insecurity. According to Edogor et al. (2015, 87), journalists reporting conflict situations are coerced into a quadruple dilemma. Hetsroni (2007, p. 759) captures the allegation levelled against the television in particular with reference to portrayal of crises and violence by observing that ‘for decades, the networks have been loudly accused for causing irreversible mental damage to innocent viewers by exposing them to explicit violence.’ In a nutshell, journalists have been accused over the years of deliberately feeding the audience with crises and violence scenes for the sake of promoting their organisation’s profit motive mainly (Edogor et al., 2015, p. 88).

Meanwhile, the term ‘user’ came to be associated with those who consume some media contents with the advent of web 2.0 technologies, software or applications (Edogor et al., 2015, p. 87). These are technologies that enable media consumers not only to read, listen or view messages, ideas, information, experiences, values etc., but also to contribute in generating the contents offered for public consumption. The web 2.0 applications promote the audience from being mere recipients of mass media contents as hitherto churned out by the journalists to becoming contributors in the media packages delivered to the public (Edogor et al., 2015, p. 87). As Ezeah, Asogwa and Edogor (2013, p. 23) observe, ‘by their nature, the social media have the capabilities of inflaming the audience.’ Hate speeches are also everywhere online. Inciting news, capable of causing security threats immediately or in the nearest future, is everywhere online. Fake news on social media is just everywhere on the internet. Facebook, as the giant of social media,

is characterised by pronounced propaganda. For example, it is reported that that Facebook altered the nature of American Democracy (Olan et al., 2022). Fake news is one way through which Facebook has altered American Democracy. McPeak (2014, p. 581) lends credence to this observation by noting that ‘social media data is changing the face of civil discovery in many cases, and informal discovery of social media content on sites such as Facebook can prove extremely valuable for litigants’ (McPeak, 2014, p. 581). Recently, fake news was spread on social media about a young driver in Lagos, indicting him to be the one drove round with the foreigner who brought in Covid-19 to Nigeria. He suffered stigma, isolation, humiliation, and so on until he had to make and post round his own self-made real video, disclaiming the fake news about him and clarifying the public on the indictment. See one of his self-made video clips, disclaiming the fake news about him:



On the whole, excessive exhibition of crises scenarios could inflame the audience to act in a manner that could be inimical to orderliness and peaceful co-existence of people (Edogor et al., 2015, p. 87). One often realises that media contents have or receives more audience than non-conflict contents. Given this reality, it appears that the prime news value of the media is conflict or disorder, negative events. Good news stories receive less media attention than bad news. Okoye (2011, p. 268) cautions that ‘media contents that portray... scenes of... violence should be handled with caution.’ In the same vein, although Yoroms (2009, p. 25) admits that media objectivity barely obtains, he argues that one has to apply ‘the right standard of significance, because conflict is more pervasive once the media reports are based on imagination.’ He stresses that once the media fail to be objective and rather show partiality, conflicts can be escalated. Dul (2007) argues that media objectivity is usually affected by ownership, economic interests, religious affiliation and cultural factors. She insists that this issue can only be overcome through reorientation of practitioners, training on conflict management and provisions of adequate funding for media houses.

Individuals’ Misuse of Language and Insecurity

Different persons hold and express personal ideologies that generate insecurity in several regards. Individuals’ words incite insecurity. Profane words are capable of causing or igniting insecurity. Threats to security come from individuals in various ways as a result of the way they make use of words. Some individuals use sweet-tongue to get many persons into acts that threaten security. Of course, there are many wars and violent conflicts different societies have suffered as a result of the kind of words individuals used and at the end they got into a battle that cause a war between their people. Individuals in positions misuse words against some persons and groups and at last, violent conflict or insecurity arises. For example, the Ombatse

crisis in Nasarawa State is an ample example. It is alleged that the then Governor, Tanko Almakura had decided to use language to criminalise the Ombatse people with their ethnic cult group, labelling them as insurgents. That was to prevent him from fulfilling the share power and resources he had promised them, for which he got the physical and spiritual support leading to his success. Then, he mobilised and sent in force men from Abuja to wipe out the cult shrine. But unfortunately, the security personnel reached there and rather began shooting one another or themselves (Alozieuwa, 2016). It is language individual elite use to cajole the masses into doing things that promote violence and insecurity. This is a common practice among politicians and religious leaders. Individual clerics have misused language to deceive the faithful into doing what led to or ignite conflicts and other phases of insecurity. The misuse of language is the ground factor behind the successful formation and transformation of the Boko Haram sect in the Northeast. Using language in manipulative manners, Mohhammed Yusuf, a secondary school dropout from Yobe, mobilised and convinced many Almajeri's in Maiduguri and Yobe and introduced his radical Islamic ideologies to them. He learnt his radical Islamic ideologies from Chad and Niger Republic, where he later went and studied Quran. It is with manipulative use of language that he convinced some political and Islamic elites and gained their support and sponsorship. Consequently, he secured political, national and international links, funding and support; and embarked on aggressive recruitment of members.

Before Mohhammed Yusuf came on board in 2002, Abubakar Lawan had used language in negative light to form Boko Haram group in 1995 (Mukhtar, 2015; Abimbola, 2011). Then, it was formed as a reborn of Marwa Maitasine, and called Sahaba. Abubakar Lawan later left for studies at the University of Medina in

Saudi Arabia and handed over to Mohammed Yusuf, who was appointed then the then leading clerics (Mukhtar, 2015; Abimbola, 2011). From the Maiduguri complex, Mohammed Yusuf relocated the school to later become Boko Haram, disguised to be a normal Islamic school, to his village, Kanamma in Yobe, close to the Niger Republic border (Mukhtar, 2015). The complex was built by Governor Ali Modu Sheriff, with a school and mosque that had students of poor parents of Nigerian, Chadian, Nigerien and Malian origins, most of who could understand and speak Arabic (Kanu, 2016). Yusuf used language technically to preach against the government for allowing these children to wallow in abject poverty, illiteracy and various frustrating issues.

Groups' Misuse of Language for Insecurity

Language misuse is the remote factor behind group conflicts. Religious groups discriminate and war with and against one another because of the misuse of language against one another. Muslim faithful call the faithful of Christianity various names or derogatory terms, which rouses religious intolerance between the faithful of the two religions (Dibie, Gotau & Robert, 2016; Robert, Besong & Dibie, 2016; Robert & Besong, 2017). Their leaders use language to incite religious hatred against each other. Hate speech is a mechanism of language-based factor behind conflicts, violence and insecurity. The religious of different religions make use of hate speech to condemn faithful of other religions that are not theirs. Nasty comments, hate speeches, foul language, fake stories, etc. about one religious group by another gradually pile up to become what cause and ignite insecurity arising from religious conflicts and violence.

Apart from religious groups, various other societal groups misuse language against each other and one another. There are male and female folks. The persistent gender issues between males and

females are rooted in the misuse of language by either folk against the other. For example, the males use language loosely and negatively to associate females with weakness, evil, sin, and what not. Consequently, the efforts for self-assertion have led to gender streaming and a sustained violent and non-violent war by women against men. Gender violence against men is a result of gender streaming and a sustained violent and non-violent fight against men. Next, consider inter-cult rivalries. These happen when one cult group uses language negatively against another group. It is language that leaders of a cult group use to take oaths with their subjects and new members and to boast about that they have the power to do and undo this and that for members. The conviction gets members acting anyhow to members of other groups. The manifesting consequence of such misuse of language by cult groups is the recurring inter-cult clash between one group and another. For example, as one group sees and declares itself the most rugged, the strongest, the bloodiest, that with the highest number of elite that always order the released of members in police net, and so on, its members become more volatile and troublesome. They resort to always looking for trouble and perpetrating all kinds of evil.

Militants, militias, terrorists insurgents and other crime monger groups use language in bad light about the government in particular and the society at large in order to get and keep its members. They misuse language even in the course of carrying out their evils acts. For example, the Boko Haram sect members use ‘Allah kubar’ while murdering victims or members who are found wanting. Their use of this phrase is clear case of misusing that phrase coined and used initially by the Muslims for positive deed or when what is good before Almighty Allah. One need not be a Muslim to know that Allah is not supposed to be mentioned by this sect members or anyone else carrying out evil. It is just like one saying, ‘In the name

of God or Jesus, I slaughter or kill you.’ The misunderstanding that arises among sect members, leading to the formation of new groups within the broad umbrella of the sect is a result of misuse of language in expressing this or that. Consequently, clash of interests arises. Boko Haram has gradually got split into AlQa’ida, Taliban and Ansaru. The misuse of language also causes inter- and intra-group clashes among Al-Qa’ida in the Lands of Islamic Maghreb (AQLIM), Ansar Al-Dine of Mali, the Movement for Oneness Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Azawald National Liberation Movement (MNLA), among others (Kanu, 2016; Mukhtar, 2015; Abimbola, 2011)

It is language misuse by group that occurs between orthodox medicine and traditional medicine. The practitioners of orthodox medicine use language in negative light about and against traditional medicine. As they damn traditional medicine and its practitioners, most members of the public believe them and conceive only but negative thoughts about and against traditional medicine. The practitioners of these two medicines continuously war against other in mute. Tribal wars and clashes arise from the misuse of language by one tribe against the other(s). Ethnic hate and prejudices are formed using language in negative light about other (or certain) tribes, while using language in positive about oneself.

Language Use and Security: Government and Socialisation Agents’ Task

Government and all agents of socialisation ought to rise to the challenge of combating insecurity and installing security in society, making effective use of language. It is language misuse that causes the whole problem of insecurity in society. Yet, it is the effective use of language in positive light that would cause the deserving change and bring to place security, peace, unity and what have you. The task of combating insecurity is supposed to be endless, because

once the state fighters relent, the non-state actors are bound to take advantage of their relenting efforts against them. The government and other stakeholders are undoubtedly agents of socialisation in various regards.

Most of them are parents. All of them are members of different families. They belong to different religious, peer and pressure groups. Some of them are of the media professionally and/or otherwise. Government and other stakeholders ought to be proactive and always ready to unceasingly fight against the non-state actors, who are making the public to be dissatisfied with their significant efforts, diligence and service delivery. The failure to adequately combat the diverse phases of insecurity, inclusive of terrorism, militancy, kidnapping, unemployment and other forms of threats to peace and safety of a nation and its people, undoubtedly leads to violent (civil) war (Oyedeji, 2018, p. 3). It is an indisputable fact that once state actors duly rise against the non-state actors, causing the insecurity posing serious challenges to the wellbeing of the state and its citizens, the alarming insecurity in Nigeria would be brought to the barest minimum, if not completely eradicated.

So, the kernel problem is the poor attention paid to them; or simply put the other way round, the major problem lies in the attitude of negligence or naivety to the problems at stake, causing insecurity. It is imperative to note that there are some cogent measures that have not been evolved, employed and sustained by Nigerian security agencies and political office holders, for which the insecurity continuous to strive. The public, being aware of the ideal might, capability, resources, logistics and technicalities of these two sets of state actors, is left with the temptation to conclude, from inference, that security agencies and political office holders are behind the diverse phases of insecurity, which is why they willingly blind their eyes over the spate of security in the country and allow it to

continuously strive. This is because they can fight the non-state actors to the barest minimum and win them hands-down. The willingness to do so is all that is needed to efficiently combat insecurity through flushing out the non-actors unleashing insecurity on Nigeria.

Conclusion

So far, this study has successfully demonstrated how language is misused by media, individuals and groups in various ways and manners to cause and ignite crises, violence and all other forms of insecurity in society. Given the realities from its analytical exposition, the study concludes that language misuse is the remote cause of the consistent and alarming insecurity confronting West Africa as well as Nigeria. Language misuse lies solidly behind all the known causes and sources of insecurity. Thus, effective language use in positive rather than negative light is the panacea. Basically, the study charges the government to put in place strong legislations that could efficiently check against the misuse of language to cause and ignite insecurity. And, the agents of socialisation are charged to be up and doing in the use of language and matters concerning language mis/use.

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