

THE PLACE OF LANGUAGE IN CURBING SOCIETAL VICES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper discussed the place of language in Curtailing Societal Vices in Nigeria. It was mentioned that there is high rate of vices in Nigeria. Among the societal vices identified were youth and political thuggery, youth restiveness, cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, sexual violence, insecurity, and examination malpractice, which are causing a setback to national development. Various functions of language in the society were discussed. It was also mentioned that language is key in curtailing such vices because it is through language that parents, teachers, religious leaders and government can use to enlighten the Nigerian populace to desist from the societal ills. It was concluded that language is very important in human society and no nation can succeed without given priority to language education.

Key Words: Language, Curtailing and Societal Vices.

Introduction

Language is a global phenomenon, a mark of identity and the means of transmission of cultural heritage. Its flexibility can be seen in politics, conflict resolution, education, governance, religion, and many other areas of human endeavour. Language can be used to do a lot of things and it is controlled by man. Language is as old as man. Since God made man, He gave him a language to communicate with him. Hence forth, the descendants of Adam and Eve continue to use language in their day today activities. There are many activities that man uses language to perform. For example, language is an interpersonal and interactive tool in the sense that it forms our behaviour and helps us influence the behaviour of others, teaching and learning in the classroom, commerce and industry both local and international, religious activities (Christianity, Islam and traditional worship), government, hospitals, transportation both local and international, etcetera, use language as a means of

communication. This shows the supremacy of language to man in this earth. Human language is essentially functional in that it is used for various purposes in the society. Looking at the importance of language to man, it would not be out of place to state that it can be used to curtail some societal ills that are destroying the nation. Societal ills are deviant behaviours such as sexual violence, drug addiction, murder, examination malpractice, thuggery, kidnapping and so on. They are unethical and unhealthy in the society. Apase and Yawe (2019) observe that these vices are at variance to social norms and values which include beliefs, attitudes, honesty, hard work, customs and traditions, ideals, skills and taboos which a society cherishes and passes on from one generation to another via formal and non-formal education. These vices are on the increase in Nigeria and the government is working hard to stop them but it seems the situation is getting worst.

Ukachi (2021) adds that every generation has a responsibility to mentor the next generation to ensure that they are not carried away by deception and wrong social vices and by implication, it is adults that have such a responsibility to mentor children and the youths. He emphasised that the future of our youths, who are the next generation, are being threatened by many social vices, such as drug addiction, Internet fraud, pool betting, examination malpractices, pornography, unbridled craving for materialism, kidnapping, banditry, unemployment and occultic practices, to mention a few. Except we act now to save our future generation, they will be derailed completely by the overwhelming societal problems they face. Hence, language whether local or foreign has a role in curbing these vices in our society.

Societal Vices

Some of the vices that are common in the country are discussed below:

Youths and Political Thuggery

Politics in Nigeria seems to be a do or die affair. According to Gidigenius Link (2013), the political atmosphere in the country has been one of tension and violence as various vices operate. The politicians use any means to get into power and this is usually made manifest during election periods when various terms of election malpractices become the order of the day.

Political thuggery according to Samuel (2013) can be defined as:

Any act of intimidation, violence, hooliganism, brutality or gangsterism, whether leading to death or not, calculated to pose a threat or scale political opponent or perceived political opponents before, during or

after elections and aimed at achieving an undue political result or advantage.

Samuel further explains that political thuggery, especially at elections, may range from such acts as inciting or causing others to act in a disorderly manner, illegal possession of or usage of offensive weapons with the aim to scare or intimidate voters, snatching or destruction of election materials, acts resulting into undue influence as by compelling any person to vote or refrain from voting against his/her will, ballot stuffing etc.

Similarly, Gidigenius Link (2013) observes that Nigerian politics is characterised by violence and since thuggery is defined as act of violence or behaviour by ruffians, it is therefore safe to say that thuggery in Nigerian politics is a means to an end. He also says that there is no limit to the number of thugs that politicians can surround themselves with. The unfortunate thing is that the politicians make use of youths that are supposed to serve as future leaders. These young ones are used for political intimidation, harassment and even assassination of political opponents.

Samuel (2013) observes that in the past service of elections held in 1979, 2003 and 2007, activities of thugs took a centre stage thereby breeding a feeling of resentment among members of the public. These were also witness in 2015 and 2019. The activities of thugs are not noticeable in just one party; all political parties are guilty of this. Thuggery is known and experienced in every part of the country. Activities of political thugs can be seen in assault, assassination, intimidation, harassment, maiming and killing of political opponents. Political thuggery is therefore common place and presently represents a common feature in political elections in the country.

Youth Restiveness

Tenuche (2009) observes that youths in Nigeria are involved and in most cases are in the vanguard of violent conflicts that have occurred in different parts of the country because of restiveness. Similarly, Igbo and Ikpa (2013) observe that restiveness among youths globally and in Nigeria has become a behaviour pattern which has degenerated into topical global issues. They further explain that youth restiveness portrays man's negative side of social development. This negative development has become one of the many security challenges facing man in the contemporary society. In many occasions, lives and properties worth millions of naira have been lost or vandalised and some razed down by restive youths.

Chukwuemeka and Agbara (2010) in Igbo and Ikpa (2013) also observe that human society and, in fact, the entire universe is simply and squarely a complex entity. In view of this, individuals and groups have their complexities, needs aspirations, goals, opinions, views

and values which could be social, economic, religious, psychological or political. Consequently, there is bound to be restiveness among different groups of people especially youths who are at their prime. These youths are filled with energy and when this energy is positively channelled or guarded, they are highly productive and hence they are likely to contribute to the overall development of the society. On the other hand, when the energy is negatively channelled, restiveness and its resultant effects are likely to be felt.

Youth restiveness involves a combination of violent actions, conducts and behaviour which constitute unwholesome socially unacceptable behaviour exhibited by youths in the society. Some causes of youth restiveness among others include marginalization, unemployment, youthful exuberance, poverty, inadequate educational opportunities and resources, lack of basic infrastructure, inadequate communication and information flow, unequal distribution of national resources, poor child upbringing, bad governance, corruption, political instability, drug/alcohol abuse, peer group influence etc.

Cultism and the Nigerian Youth

According to Ajayi, Ekundayo and Olalusi (2010), cultism can be defined as:

A ritual practice by a group of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation formalities as well as their mode of operations are done in secret and kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike.

They further explain that the recent destructive cult activities on campuses are mind boggling, irritating and distasteful as many lives of promising young men and women have been cut short by the bloody hand of murderous gangs on campuses. Similarly, Ogbonnaya (2012) as cited in Apase and Yawe (2019) are of the view that secret cults or societies are those organisations which completely conceal their rules, the names of their members, their signs, passwords from outsiders and the members take oath of secrecy and are often under the threat of severe punishment in the case of its violation.

The activities of cultists are often kept away from the knowledge of others and are also carried out at odd hours of the day. These activities also clash with the accepted norms and values of everyday life. Youths, especially, the new intake in our tertiary institutions are often lured into secret cults as a result of peer influence, fear, indecent morals, supremacy, revenge, parental failure and negligence, show off, lack of self-esteem, societal decadence, erosion of education standard etc. (see Ajayi et al 2013).

Today, cult groups in tertiary institutions are violent, maim, kill and carry many anti-social activities on campuses. It is estimated that there are about forty-five secret cult groups

in Nigerian institutions of learning and they have wrecked great havoc on both members and non-members of the academic community. The existence of these secret cults on campuses has made life unsafe and meaningless to both staff and students, a lot of lives and properties have been destroyed through cult violence. Their violence on campuses sometimes leads to incarceration, rustication or expulsion of both innocent and cult members. Most of them leave school without the degree they went in search. This is very sad.

The Menace of Armed Robbery

The Wikipedia encyclopaedia (2013) describes armed robbery as a crime taking or attempting to take something of value by force or threat of force or by putting the victim in fear. It basically involves the use of force, threat and arms. It is one of the violent crimes committed against humanity. Armed robbers often intimidate their victims with the presence of a weapon during robbery, raises the thought of potential physical harm to the victim making it a violent crime.

Armed robbery is a world phenomenon because according to Ajayi (2013), it is not peculiar to Nigeria. He further explains that armed robbers appear to have surreptitiously moved the nation closer to what could be described as a state where life could be short, nasty and brutish. The armed robbers move in gangs, attack their victims leaving many deaths, rape, sorrow, tears and blood on their trail. Ajayi further states that Nigerian citizens are being held hostage in the nation by a generation of angry frustrated youths who are prepared to take their pound of flesh from the Nigerian society.

Most of the armed robbers on Nigerian high ways and cities are psychotic youths. Ajayi (2013) describes psychotic armed robbers as those robbers who do not care to die. Their doctrine is to kill or be killed since they are desperate to vent their venom on the society. Ajayi further observes that this category of armed robbers engage in mindless killing, raping and elimination of opposition to their nefarious activities. They put their victims in a psychological horror taking away the manliness in their victims.

Sometimes, armed robbers come barefaced while at other times they wear masks. Sometimes, they wear police or military uniforms to achieve their aim. Their period of attack could be anytime of the day but it is predominantly in the hours of darkness. Ajayi adds that day time robbery is also as brutal as night time. It seems everybody in Nigeria appears to be a potential target of armed robbery. It is asd to note that most armed robbers are youths who could have engaged in nation building but use their time for devilish acts.

Kidnapping

The American Law Institute as cited in Opara, Shalmi and Mwanti (2011) submit that kidnapping is when a person, without lawful authority, physically abducts another person without that other person's consent, with the intent to use the abduction in connection with some other nefarious objectives. Kidnapping, therefore means that taking of a person against his or her will (or from the control of a person or guardian) from one place to another under circumstances in which the person so taken does not have freedom of movement, will or decision through violence, force, threat or intimidation. In Nigeria, kidnapping is now a major social problem and a lucrative business to the culprits. In towns, villages and major roads, kidnapers do their wickedness often without being arrested. For most Nigerians the fear of being a kidnap victim is real palpable.

Kidnapping in Nigeria was rare and hardly in the same realm but that changed in the latter part of 2005 and early 2006, when the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) turned to kidnapping of foreign oil workers to draw attention to their political course. That ploy soon enough, lost its political coloration and became a ransom and money making criminal scheme. Whereas kidnapping of foreign workers in Nigeria is escalating, the scourge has also spread hinterland. Some crooks and criminals without cause beyond greed in some parts of the country have followed the pattern of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta and now use kidnappings as fund raising or illegal cash generation tool to buy weapons and attack hopeless citizens. Most kidnapers in Nigeria hold their victims in hostage and demand a ransom of huge sums of money and when the victim's family is not able to pay the money, they kill the victim. Most of the crooks involved in these criminal acts are youths who have caused untold fear into the hearts of innocent citizens.

Kidnapping in Nigeria has become pervasive and is disrupting the peace and social stability of the Nigerian nation. The many incessant cases of kidnap in the country have become a thing of great concern to every good Nigerian citizen.

Sexual Violence

The Ministry of Justice, New Zealand (2013) describes sexual violence as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, sexual harassment, or act directed against a person's sexuality, using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. This includes various forms and contexts of sexual violence such as rape, sexual abuse of mentally or physically disabled people and sexual abuse of children.

Sexual violence therefore occurs when someone forces another to take part in sexual activity when she does not want to. It includes forced sexual intercourse, touching in a sexual

manner against one's will, forcing one to perform sexual acts one considers degrading or painful, forced prostitution, exposure to AIDS or other sexually transmitted infectious diseases etcetera.

Rape as a sexual violence is one of the crimes and social problems prevalent in this generation. It is a global problem. Ringo (2012) reports the case of a recent social upheaval that has shaken India after a 23 year old paramedical student was gang-raped, mauled and left to die naked in the streets of Delhi, the Indian capital. Nigeria as a nation has been facing cases of rape where their victims have suffered from grave physical, mental and emotional consequences. Sometime last year, the media carried a very sympathetic story of how some old women were raped by some notorious youths in a state in the eastern part of Nigeria. This was an act of brutality against women and similar occurrences have happened in other parts of the country.

The consequences of rape on the woman include unwanted pregnancy, exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis and gonorrhoea, damage or disruption of body organs or functions, trauma and paranoia, self-pity or self-blame and of course suicide or death. Similarly, NTA news line (2009) carried pathetic news of an elderly man of about 50 years old who raped a little girl of nine years old in one of the Northern states of Nigeria. Another example of such inhumanity to little girls was a case of a security personnel in Plateau State who raped a five year old girl in B/Ladi LGA area of Plateau State two years ago. Such cases are rampant in the country and need urgent attention.

Terrorism

Bruece (1998) in Opara, Shalmi and Mwanti (2012) sees terrorism as the killing of innocent people by a private group in such a way as to create a media spectacle. It is an act intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants.

Every terrorist end target is political and religion. We cannot talk about terrorism in Nigeria without mentioning the insurgent Boko Haram group which is wreaking havoc in Northern Nigeria. It has done great havoc since its inception. The Boko Haram insurgent groups are fearless, perpetrators of violence, fanatical in behaviour and do not believe in religious tolerance. According to Umar (2009), Boko Haram Alsunah Waljamma translated as western education is forbidden was founded in 2002 in Maiduguri, Borno State. Umar further observes that Boko Haram has branches in almost all the northern states and neighbouring countries of Niger, Chad and northern Cameroun among others. They live and practise violence

The television and non- print media are filled with pictures of violence carried out by ferocious- looking Boko Haram terrorists. It is often hard not to be scared when we see people killed or maimed by terrorists' attacks at restaurants, churches, mosques, in office buildings, on public transport systems, market places or along normal looking streets. Nigeria has been witnessing an upsurge in terror- related attacks. There have been ugly cases of bomb blast and attacks in states like Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Taraba, Gombe, Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Niger, the Federal Territory Abuja, etc. which were the handiwork of Boko Haram. Thousands of Nigerians have been killed and property worth billions of naira destroyed in the bombing onslaughts by Boko Haram sect.

Ekanem (2011) and Onuoha (2012) add that several disturbances of the Maitatseni of the 1980s mentioned earlier and the Boko Haram sectarian violence are all the products of dogmatic adherence to Sharia jurisprudence that inspires Islamic Jihad and obliteration of Western civilisation. This religion dogmatism of Boko Haram has completely brain- washed their adherents and they do not have respect for non- adherents whether Muslims or Christians. Both Christians and Muslims have been attacked and killed though Christians seem to be more at the receiving end of these terrorists. It is very pathetic to mention that Boko Haram has attacked many educational institutions in the North Central, West, and East and many innocent students were kidnapped, massacred and burnt. Security agents have become vulnerable to Boko Haram's attacks. They have become their targets. Of recent, Niger, Kaduna, Kastina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Yobe and Borno states have become the battle field of Boko Haram and the Boko Haram sects are mostly youths.

Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice is any dubious act by students during exams to become successful against exams' rules and regulations. Examination malpractice is gradually eating deep in to Nigerian's educational system. Students at both secondary and tertiary education are often engaged in different forms of malpractices to pass examinations at all cost. The Examination Malpractice Act (1999) explains examination malpractice as any act of omission or commission by a person who in anticipation of, before, during or after any examination fraudulently secure any unfair advantage for himself or any other person in such a manner that contravenes the rules and regulations to the extent of undermining the validity, reliability, authenticity of the examination and ultimately the integrity of the certificates issued. Similarly, according to Asuka (1997) as cited in Okanezi and Eguzozie (2018), examination malpractice is any deviant act that is perpetrated by a student, candidate or person (aiding a candidate) before during and after an examination to be declared

successful. In addition, Asuru (1997) as cited in Okanezi and Eguzozie (2018) postulates that the *mal* in the practice is a Latin word for bad so examination malpractice means a 'bad' practice applied in an examination in order to make the examinee earn an unmerited grade. There are many forms of examination malpractice which abound in schools, colleges and universities. The following are some common forms that students exhibit:

- Bringing in of foreign or unauthorised material into the examination hall
- Irregular activities inside or outside the examination hall.
- Impersonation
- Assault/insult on supervisors or invigilators.
- Falsification of examination result either by examinees or even examiners.
- Storage of questions and answers inside mobile phones.
- Creation of examination centers outside the coverage of internet detections.
- Accessing examination questions before the examination day. That is examinee having foreknowledge of the questions before the actual examination time (leakage).
- Conniving with examination body unfaithful staff to access live questions through the internet.
- Giving or receiving assistance of varied kinds from parents and other allied groups.
- Causing confusion and distraction to enable prepared answers come into the examination hall.
- Teachers or lecturers soliciting and wooing colleagues for the award of unmerited grades to their favourite or students or even parents acting at the same capacity.
- Verbal exchange of ideas and giraffing due to proximity of test-mates and overcrowdedness.
- Bribing invigilators and supervisors so as to turn 'blind eyes' to malpractice or giving examination contractors and impersonators the questions to take away so as to prepare answers outside the examination hall.
- Awarding inflated marks to students by teachers.
- Examinees issuing threat to examiners.
- Swapping of scripts

Functions of Language in the Society

Some functions of language to man are clearly captured by Leech (1974) as cited in Tayyab (2022) which include the following:

The first is the informational function which can be considered as the most important, because it helps people deliver messages, describe things, and give a listener new information. Actually, message is a word that describes this function best. The informational function is also related to such terms as a truth and a value.

The next function of language is the expressive function. This involves the expression of our feelings and attitudes in different ways. This function of language is not used to deliver a message, but to express feelings and impressions regarding events, situations and happenings. Due to the expressive function of language, one can understand the personality of a speaker, and his or her emotions in terms of those events surrounding him. The expressive function of language is often used in poetry.

The third function of language is the directive which is used to induce certain actions or reactions. The example of such a function could be seen in a command and a request. Another feature of this function is that the reaction of a listener is even more important than a thought expressed by a speaker, since this reaction determines whether such a phrase achieved the target or not. Every time we ask someone to bring us something, it is a directional use of language. We motivate somebody and influence his or her behaviour in a certain way.

Another function of language is the aesthetic function. According to Leech (1974) as cited in Tayyab (2022), this function does not have any particular purpose. Here words and sentences are considered as linguistic artifacts. This function serves neither as a request nor as a message. The aesthetic function helps us use words as a tool of a poetic art, and as certain signs. Here, the beauty of chosen words and phrases is more important than usefulness of this information. Aesthetic function depends not only on structure, but on cultural norms as well.

The fifth function of language is the phatic function. The only purpose of such a function is to maintain social relationships. It helps us to interact with people. The real reason for such a talk is not our interest, but simply our desire to talk.

In addition, according to Adeyanju (2008), as cited by Halliday (1970) one function of language is the ideational. This shows that language serves as an instrument for the encoder (speaker, writer) to express and articulate his idea and experience internally. Ideational function refers to the conceptualising process involved in our mental activities. Through language, we are able to understand what happens around us.

Another function, of language that has been described is the interpersonal which is used in establishing and sustaining social relations. Interpersonal function emphasises that

language is mainly a social phenomenon, but apart from enabling communication with other people, it enables to project the speaker in the desired way and to represent the speaker. It is also an instrument of achieving social cohesion. Interpersonally, verbal communication is key to bringing people together and maintaining relationships. Having stated the the general functions of language above, this section will relate the specific ways language can be used to curtail societal vices.

The Role of Language in Curtailing Societal Vices in Nigeria

Language whether written or spoken is a means of communication within a speech community. Crystal (1995) in Mwanti (2011) posits that:

Language is a means of understanding ourselves as well as our society and of resolving some problems and tensions that arise from human interaction. No sector of society is unaffected, and all can benefit from the linguistic factors that constitute a barrier as well as a means of communication.

This clearly shows that language is a means of resolving perpetual vices in the society. The implication is that language can be used to resolved all the aforementioned vices. In order to achieve social cohesion in Nigeria, people of divers ethnic groups and religion especially youths, could be brought together and enlightened on the dangers of such social vices. This can take place at the communities, churches/mosques, schools, markets, hospitals etc. The instrument of communication is language and the language could be either English or indigenous depending on the target group. The informational function of language can be vividly seen here.

Education can impact behaviour and attitudes in youths in diverse ways. Schools and classrooms can provide the space in which people of different origins can be brought together and taught how to live and work together peacefully. Without good education for all and sundry, the nation will produce bad citizens which could lead to social vices in the country. Education is therefore the only instrument that can be used to bring about the moral enhancement of the Nigerian populace that will lead to national cohesion, integration and peace. There can never be education at any level without the use of language because language is the instrument of imparting the skills and values in our learners.

Children first learn ways of coping with the society through socialisation in the family before proceeding to institutions of learning. The implication of this is that if children are not brought up properly at home, it would definitely affect their behaviours in the school environment, this scenario seems to exhibit true situation of most children in various

institutions of higher learning in Nigeria today. Parents use one language or the other to teach their children how to behave well in the society.

Additionally, Wedge (2008), Barakat, Karpinska and Paulson (2008) as cited in Apase and Yawe (2019) mentioned that the content and methods of imparting education have a role in mitigating youth restiveness. This means that peace education can have positive effects on students' attitudes and teachers have the ability to impart cultural values, tolerance of cultural differences and acceptance of diversity as well as fostering critical thinking and interactive skills among learners. The impartation of these values is done through languages.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the place of language in curtailing societal vices in Nigeria. Without language, human endeavours would be impossible as it helps in holding together the fabric of the society especially in the aspect of human interaction and communication, moulding of cultural values in youths, teaching and learning etc. Language is basically a functional phenomenon and its interpersonal, informational and other functions can be used to shape the society that is full of vices.

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