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## **The Impact of Language Development and Global Peace Initiative in the 21st Century: The Linguistic Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

The indisputable nature of language in social contacts cannot be over-emphasized. Language is regarded as key to peoples' hearts because it is used to appeal to their emotions. Language is not only specie-specific but a window to our innermost self. It is an x-ray with which our innermost mind can be inferred. Language can be used to ignite conflict and can also be used to restore peace. Provocative language can be used to cause conflicts and at times even wars, but appropriate use of language can restore peace. Our present world has been bedevilled by conflicts, distrust and even wars. Most often when peace is needed, avenue for dialogue is created and the only instrument used in this dialogue is language. However, it is surprising that in most cases, the issue of language is not considered as a veritable tool for conflict resolution and as such most often, this is not always one of the things that are focused at in global peace initiatives. The study focused on how language and most importantly language development can be used not just to achieve peace but also to inculcate the habit of using appropriate language at all times. In the 21st century where it appears there is a growing trend of violence and eroding of our cultural values and norms, the paper identified language, and more, linguistic politeness strategies as significant means of resolving conflicts and initiating peace. The paper combined insights from the theory of linguistic relativism

by Sapir and Whorf and thus advocated the inculcation of peace and the need to use appropriate language while the children are still acquiring and learning language(s).

**Key words:** language, peace, development, linguistic, conflict and resolution, linguistic relativism

### Introduction

Language is the most important communication tool for human beings. It does not just reflect the reality of the society, but also strengthens and maintains social existence. Language, culture and society interact to give members of different genders, of different levels of power, recognition in society. According to Jimenez in Umera-Okeke (2015, p. 557), “by means of language, we shape our view of society, we organize our knowledge; we learn new things and above all, we assimilate the norms and social patterns of our community”. Right from prehistoric times, even though say, the stone Age, man has demonstrated his need for words, speech, and language. It can be seen that even from biblical times, this tool has played a critical role in the affairs of man. It is far from fortuitous that the story of the Tower of Babel is recorded early in the Bible. This can be interpreted or seen as an unambiguous indication of the awesome power of human language and communication. From that profound story, it is clear that *homo-sapiens* found this tool indispensable to the crucial purpose of communicating to others, ideas, desires, emotions, wants, fears, and accomplishments. The primacy of the oral medium in human history is simply incontestable, while the very power of speech has not diminished even in modern times. The 21st century represents a highly-technologized age, indeed, the fastest in all of man’s scientific race or technological quest. Nor can humans be said to have recorded their best advances—whether medicine, technology, or the Arts—by relegating language and its power to the ground. Indisputably humans’ various achievements have all been made possible by their communication capabilities in general, and the catalyst called language in particular. It should be emphasized, in fact, that a person can hardly do, let alone achieve, anything without his/her powerful tool of language. As social beings, we are in dire need of interaction with others, and language provides us with the most potent weapon in this regard. Thus, language in particular, and communication in general, remain the very essence of human life. But while we may idolize man, or while man may glory in his ability to employ language, and do things with it in a great diversity of contexts, it must be constantly recognized that the entire faculty of speech remains a direct gift from God.

Language as an aspect of people’s culture, incidentally keeps the people’s culture in custody and performs the singular function of propagating and or transmitting the people’s culture from generation to generation. We must acknowledge that a language is essentially a set of items; what Hudson (1996, p. 21) calls “linguistic items”, such entities as sounds, words, grammatical structures, and so on. It is these items, their

status, and their arrangements that language theorists such as Chomsky concern themselves with. On the other hand, social theorists, particularly sociologists, attempt to understand how societies are structured and how people manage to live together. To do so, they use such concepts as 'power', 'class', 'status', "solidarity", 'accommodation', 'face', 'politeness', etc. Language can be used to hire and fire, mend and destroy, and as such the performative role of language is better imagined. Language can also be used as a political tool and can be more deadly in castigating and killing the political career of the opponent more than any other tool. In line with the foregoing, UNESCO (2015, p. 2) captured the role of language thus:

Language allows the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next and is a strong force in disseminating cultures and traditions as well as being key for societal development, and scientific and technological progress. Equally, the role of language has been recognized as a crucial factor in group identity and identified as a key component for the creation of sustainable and inclusive knowledge of societies.

Language is used to form ideas, views and perception. It equally helps to develop character, attitude, as well as helps man to fashion his thoughts. Therefore, it is not out of place to say that language forms a man. Language helps to form relationships, behaviour, actions, reactions and inactions. Oboko (2016, p. 3) citing Birk and Birk captured the situation succinctly in these words; "The kind of language that a man uses, hears or reads shapes to a surprising extent, the world he lives. All the good, the bad and the ugly that stomp human societies are eliciting or practicalising traits and behaviours that language has formed then with". From the foregoing, it shows that language informs man's actions and can influence man's desire to ignite crises and conflicts. On a positive note, too, language can be used to avoid conflict or sue for peace.

Besides, through language the culture of people is transmitted. Wardhaugh (2000, p.10) says there are several possible relationships between language and society. One is that social structure may either influence or determine linguistic structure and/or behaviour. Certain evidence may be deduced to support this view: the age grading phenomenon whereby young children speak differently from older children and, in turn, children speak differently from mature adults; studies which show that the varieties of language that speakers use reflect such matters as their regional, social, or ethnic origin and possibly even their sex or (or gender); and other studies which show that particular ways of speaking, choices of words, and even rules for conversing are in fact highly determined by certain social requirements. Language thus wields enormous power and we hear about language wars or at times language issues alone can bring conflict. Lo Blanco (2016) thus reported that it was a language conflict that sparked Bangladesh independence struggle. Language barrier according to Ter-Minasowa (2008) has been

known since the time of the Tower of Babel when people were punished by the loss of possibilities to communicate. Lo Blanco (2016) stated that Myanmar's many decades of war and open conflict have been linked to demand by what is called 'national races' with the main indigenous/ethnic populations seeking various measures of autonomous governance, with grievances linked to language and culture. UNICEF (2016), stated that though language plays crucial role in conflict, it also plays important role in the resolution of conflict. In conflict resolution and peace building efforts of different organizations and groups that engage in conflict resolutions, language has been the vital instrument that was used.

### **Statement of Problem**

But despite the important role language plays in causing and resolving conflicts, it has not been taken as a crucial factor that should be dealt with. As language has the potential of causing conflicts, it then becomes necessary that the child learns the right way to use language from the cradle. This will ensure that the child internalizes in his/her sub-conscious mind, the need to use the appropriate language which should not be provocative but rather aimed at creating an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. If a child acquires/learns such a language at the beginning, the possibility of using offensive language will be reduced.

Despite the differences in cultural backgrounds, every culture has ways of maintaining peace as peace is the ultimate desire of every man. Regrettably, most of the values which are inherent in our culture have been eroded away. People are no longer taught about the sacredness of life, the need to eschew violence, the need for peaceful co-existence, the need for religious tolerance and the need for harmonious living which has been incessant conflicts, disputes, war, violence and absolute lack of peace.

### **Aim of the Study**

The study thus focused on just accessing the important roles of language and the impact language plays in conflict resolution and global peace but also looks at how the culture of peace and non-use of offensive language can be inculcated in the child right from the early age.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

#### **1. Sapir and Whorf's Linguistic Relativism**

Meaning is an obligatory aspect of any utterance. But most often, pinning down the meaning of meaning and by extension the actual meaning of utterance has always proved to be a difficult task. This is because most often, what is said may be out-rightly different from the intention of the speaker. The theoretical frameworks on which this paper is based are the theory in linguistic relativism and the theory of face and politeness. The theory of linguistic relativism by Sapir and Whorf holds that the

structure of a language affects its speaker's cognition or world view. In other words, the language we speak influences the way we think. For Whorf, linguistic relativism is the programme and guide for an individual's mental activity. Strong linguistic determinism and idea obviously accounts for the difference in thought or linguistic relativity (Wardhough 2000, pp. 216-219).

## 2. Brown and Levinson's Linguistic Politeness and Face Theory

Brown and Levinson's theory of linguistic politeness is sometimes referred to as the *face-saving theory of politeness or face act theory*. The theory is based on the sociological concept of Goffman (1967) who holds that people are motivated by their need to maintain their face, the need to be approved of by others and maintain a sense of self-worth. Looking at the theory of meaning that was put forward by Grice in 1975, while explaining the operationality of Grice's test for implicature, Abonyi (2016), citing Gergely posited that:

Most of the body of Grice 1975 and 1989 consists in an attempt to clarify the initiative difference between what is expressed literally in a sentence and what is merely suggested or hinted at by an utterance of the same string of words. To distinguish the latter from the former, Grice...uses the neologisms *implicate* and *implicature*, while he refers to the linguistically coded part of utterance content as **WHAT IS SAID** (p. 3).

Gergely, according to Abonyi (2016) asserted that the sum of what is said in a sentence and what is implicated in an utterance of the same sentence is called the **TOTAL SIGNIFICANCE OF AN UTTERANCE**. Implicature in this sense is meant to cover a number of ways in which literally unsaid information can be conveyed. Thus, utterances convey many things to the receivers, and these include both the said and unsaid, those imagined and the unimagined. All these are conveyed by the same utterance. Thus, the production of utterances should not only take into account the physical properties of what is said or what the utterance may mean in context but also "the meaning that may be beyond meaning's reach" or even what the speaker and the hearer can imagine. Grice conversational implicature have some maxims which have been hitherto referred to as "The Gricean Maxim of Conversation". These maxims which include; the cooperative principles (a super maxim), quality, quantity, relation and manner are what Chris (2012, p. 1) opined is the backbone of pragmatic theory. The maxims are summarized thus by Chris:

- (i) **The cooperative principle (a super maxim):** Make your contribution as is required, when it is required, by the conversation in which you are engaged.
- (ii) **Quality:** Contribute only what you know to be true. Do not say false things. Do not say things for which you lack evidence.

**(iii) Quantity:** Make contributions as informative as it is required. Do not say more than is required.

**(iv) Relation:** (relevance) make your contributions relevance.

**(v) Manner:** (i) Avoid obscurity (ii) Avoid ambiguity (iii) Be brief (iv) Be orderly.

Though speakers may not satisfy the demands of all the maxims all the time, but being conscious of these maxims is a proper guide to speakers. This theory is significant as peace and peace building cum prevention and restoration of peace in a conflict infested environment require diligence and well thought out plan of action/speech. If one is conscious of these maxims right from the time he acquires and learns his/her language(s), the possibility of making provocative statement will be minimized.

In conflict resolution, when people are told to be conscious of their statements and to flee from making provocative statements, they are technically being told to adhere to Grice Maxim of Conversation. Since conversational implicature demands that one should not be unnecessarily verbose but should be concise and utter only those words that are needed and more importantly to avoid ambiguous statements that may give out unintended meaning.

### **Unrest, Conflict and Global Peace**

In our contemporary world, there is unrest in almost all parts of the globe and these have taken different dimensions in different parts of the globe. Conflicts, unrest, wars have become part of us that it seems that most people prefer listening to news or watching news broadcast that are laden with conflicts around the world. As language teachers in the 21st century, we live in critical times; our world faces serious global issues of terrorism, ethnic conflicts, social inequality, and environmental destruction. "Hardly a day goes by without an announcement of terrorist activities, the newest lake poisoned by acid rain, the latest energy crisis, the suffering of displaced people in refugee camps or the repression through violent means of people seeking their human rights" Kniep (1987, p. 697). Many of these issues are serious, 35,000 people in the world die every day from hunger, 24 every minute, with millions of children dead each year from preventable diseases. Meanwhile, world military spending continues at an astronomical rate despite the World's massive stockpile of nuclear weapons. Human rights are violated round the globe by regimes of all political persuasions. At the same time, the global environment is being damaged by irresponsible politicians, profit-hungry corporations and poverty stricken peasants as well as by "throwaway" lifestyles which consume irreplaceable resources, product mountains of garbage and poison our air and water (Cates 1990, p. 3).

The second point concerns the interdependence of our modern world. Because of the interconnected nature of our global village, it is impossible to ignore the problems that our planet faces. As two British global educators pointed out, we live in a world where

a distant political struggle is a luggage search for plane passengers at Manchester airport, an upheaval in Iran is a lowered thermostat in Buenos Aires, an assassination in India sparks off demonstrations in South London, the uranium requirement of French nuclear power stations is the desecration of aboriginal home lands in Australia (Pike & Selby 1988, p. 6).

The third point concerns the attitudes of apathy, selfishness, and ignorance of many modern young people. Opinion polls taken in various countries, for example, have found that American youths have little knowledge of other cultures and little interest in global issues; that two thirds of British people have stereotyped images, racial prejudices, and limited knowledge about underdeveloped countries, and that 38% of Japanese youth say their life goal as is to get rich while 71% are defeatists who feel there is nothing they can do to change society. While many young people around the globe, of course, do care about the world and its problems, these results for young people surface consistently enough in national surveys to indicate the extent of this problem.

The final rational concerns current education systems. Many concerned educators feel young people in countries around the world are not being adequately prepared to cope with global problems. Too often, schools around the world are locked into traditional education systems that feature rote memorization, passive learning, examination pressures, and the discouragement of critical thinking. This concern has been expressed by international figures such as the late Asian expert and US ambassador to Japan, Edwin Reischauer, who stated:

We need a profound reshaping of education... (Humanity is facing grave difficulties that can only be solved on a global scale). Education is not moving rapidly enough to provide the knowledge about the outside world and the attitudes toward other people that may be essential for human survival (Reischauer 1973, p. 4).

Even the media that ordinarily should handle the issue of agenda settings have been carried away and as such the language of the media is that of wars, conflicts and their likes.

Most conflicts around the world are directly or indirectly caused by issues relating to language. In this respect, Abonyi (2016, p.3) while citing the works of Moshin, Uddin and Alexander (p.3) and Lo Blanco (p.1) asserted:

The government's proclamation of Urdu as the sole national language of Pakistan was the spark for a long bloody war of independence...similarly, the announcement of compulsory Africans in teaching school arithmetic and social studies in South Africa on

June 16, 1976, was the immediate cause of the Soweto uprising...Just as language policy has been the central aim of breaking up the black people into a large number of conflicting and competing among so called ethnic group.

Thus, language and language related issues have caused wars and created hardships that usually go with such awful endeavour. Though people many at times say that the end justifies the means and as such that this language related violence eventually made these countries gain independence; but the fact remains that the other ‘side of language’ which is dialogue and negotiation would have achieved the same result without violence. In the case of Nigeria-Biafra war for example, a diplomatic statement that may not be offensive were coined, “No Victor No Vanquish”. But since this was a mere diplomatic statement and not the use of language as instrument of conflict resolution, no action was attached to see that this statement see the light of the day. Language is a performative act and thus carries an illocutionary force. But the statement was never implemented and the ghost has remained in Nigeria till date. In Arab world, again, Islamic extremist are springing up in places like Syria, Iraq et cetera, and have presently become a threat to world peace. Even in Nigeria, the Boko Haram extremists have dealt a hard blow not only to the people of North East, but Nigeria and the West African countries in general. But, in the middle East, Nigeria and elsewhere, where there are such conflicts, enormous resources have been expended in buying military hard-wares and weaponry aimed at defeating the different terrorist groups. But, whenever the end of these groups seemed to be eminent, they tend to come out stronger. In view of this, the global community has now come up with the fact that the only way to cut their supply routes in terms of human resources is to engage in the process of de-radicalizing the youths. This is because, they believe that the youths have been immersed with negative ideas and have thus been radicalized. The global community has thus come up with the concepts of “de-radicalization” and in their view this is only way the mindset of the youths can be changed and thus stop them from joining the terrorist organization. But then, the question is how were these terrorists radicalized? The truth is that while these terrorists were still young, they were immersed with negative languages. Language of hate, provocative language and language that shape their view to see anyone who do not believe in what they believe as foes/infidels and should be killed. Thus, these youths were radicalized with negative languages right from childhood and it is only through language that they can be de-radicalized. However, different organizations and even international bodies that handle the issue of conflict resolution have not seen language as essential element in bringing global peace. Rather, they would replace it with concepts like diplomacy, de-radicalization and their likes. The paper posited that language and appropriate language development are veritable tools for world peace.



### **The Impact of Language, and Language Development as Instrument of Peace**

Language is central to all communities of human beings...(it) is essential for the regulation of every community: the instruction of its young, the creation of its laws, the development of its culture, the identification of its members (Brown & Miler in Ugoji 2011, p. 91).

This obvious observation is one of the many interesting observations made by linguists, teachers, psychologists, sociologists and many others about the complex social phenomenon called language -the system of sounds used by humans to express their thoughts and feelings. There is no consensus that it affects and structures virtually all versions of human behaviour. Liberman in Eyisi (2007) is therefore, right when he said that it is impossible to think of any aspect of human culture or human behaviour that would not be unchanged in the absence of language. This intricate association that exists between language and all categories of life reflects in no small measure the vital importance of language in the development of civilization. Language enables human being to look back literary to records of events, make projections and look forward into the future or leap forward into space from there still communicate with the world.

Undoubtedly, therefore, language appears to be the single most important endowment of humankind as a means of understanding ourselves and society and resolving some of the problems and tensions that arise from human interaction and national reconstruction. In spite of the fact, that poor conceptualization in the use of language often leads to mistrust, solution to the world problems, no matter how trifle or serious, largely depend on language. Obi Okoye in Ugoji (2011) emphasized this assertion thus:

...peace or war, high or low educational achievement, progressivism or retrogressivism, democracy or military, despotism, oligarchy or diarchy, buoyant or depressed economy, laughing or crying, language is at the centre (p. 91).

The importance of language and in fact all languages of the world cannot be over emphasized. It is based on this that UNESCO (2015) has shown great interest in a multilingual world and stated:

The long-term objective is to contribute to the safeguarding of the World's diverse linguistic and cultural heritage through a global initiative, collaboration and open online platform titled "UNESCO's World Atlas of Languages" for preservation, monitoring promotion, and information and knowledge sharing, as well as learning and teaching languages, with special focus on use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for the creation of truly multilingual societies...

Despite all these benefits that language(s) hold for mankind, UNICEF (2016) reported that language is a factor for conflict in several ways. In view of this, Language Education and Social Cohesion (LESC) initiative carried out a study in some countries this stated aim:

The LESC Initiative examined how language issues have led to and/or contributed to fragility in Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand, and clearly demonstrated that unlike some other sources of tension, especially religious, ethnicity and socio-economic inequality...as language and language related decisions can be used to include and exclude people.

Language related issues are always a delicate issue which must be handled very well as it touches on what humans value very much. This must have prompted Amaechi (2016) while quoting Obafemi Olu to state:

If you imagine today the power of language as a sole vehicle of ethnic identity, in a multilingual country like Nigeria, it will become obvious that language is central to national growth and development. The question continues to linger as to which language to adopt to propel our nationhood and motivate our citizenship towards development (p. 44).

It should therefore be stated here that language is central to human existence and this should be directly recognized for lasting peace to reign in Africa and other part of the globe. In as much as it is not possible to avoid conflicts completely, it is possible to prevent, minimize, keep conflicts within bounds and resolve conflicts using language. If language can be used negatively to incite, oppose ideas, condemn, insult, blackmail, castigate, destroy, abuse, despise and provoke, then it can equally be used to initiate, negotiate and sue for peace. Peace can be achieved through language especially when people avoid inflammatory and inciting language. For instance, the statement recently credited to President Muhammadu Buharu by *The Punch Newspaper* of May 8, 2016 on the issue of Niger Delta, where the president issued a statement that “the military will crush the Niger Delta Avengers” only escalated the crisis instead dousing tension in the region. By implication, if “snail sense” soft words and polite language had been used, a better result would have been achieved.

According to the theory of linguistic relativism, language conditions our minds and world view. To this end, language has the power to condition our minds for peaceful living. As stated above, language can create tension. A situation where a foreigner/decision maker declares that the language of a people is needless in educational system, that alone can cause tension. Such statement is not in line with the Gricean Maxims of Conversational Implicature. The utterance for example “Igbo language is needless in Nigeria education system” can cause tension no matter the

person that says it. This utterance for example violets Grice's (1978) maxims as the contribution is not required (against the cooperative principle), the statement is not true and is not equally informative, and as such fails in the area of quality and quantity. The statement is not only uninformative. This utterance equally has excluded a particular ethnic group in Nigeria and by so doing automatically made the Igbo people inferior to other ethnic groups in Nigeria. From the light of the foregoing, it should be stated herein that language and utterances can cause conflicts if it is not well thought-out. Since language can go to the extent of causing war, it then becomes necessary that non-provocative language must be used. This can be done if what is said is relevant, informative, true and unambiguous. Invariably, what is said should be in conformity to Gricean's Conversational Implicature/Maxims.

There is therefore urgent need to negotiate for the right meaning before anything is said. When one negotiates the meaning and all the possible interpretations of ones' statements/utterances, misinterpretations which can lead to misunderstanding and tension is avoided. Provocative statements are also avoided and on a higher scale, statements that may threaten the national, continental and world peace may be avoided. But negotiating for peace or inculcating the habit of making the right utterance at appropriate places cannot be acquired or learnt in a day. This is because acquisition or learning is a process. The acquisition of what to say which must be relevant and non-provocative should start from the cradle. In that manner, children should be guided not just to learn the right vocabulary, but also guided to use these vocabularies appropriately. Children should be taught to use the right utterance with the peers, older adults, parents and the elderly. Through this process, what is said and how it is said are learnt at the same time. Equally, the process of de-radicalization of adult should start when the child is young. In relation to religion, the Pastors, Imams and other people that take care of the children's religious education should be well trained. A situation where somebody did not receive any formal training on the Bible or Koran but went ahead to teach/instruct the young ones should be discouraged. This is because they do not have adequate knowledge of what they are teaching. These instructors may end up teaching the literal meaning of what is learnt to the children.

Acquiring and learning 'what' to say and how to say it is necessary right from the early age. In language development, however, the subject matter has always been the acquisition of vocabulary at different stages of language acquisition, while in language learning or what is technically referred to as second language acquisition, effort is geared towards learning the second or official language. In this instance, since children are acquiring their native language or the language of the immediate environment have already started learning other languages, the need to inculcate the right attitude and the appropriate use of what is said becomes relevant here. When the child is taught to use the right vocabulary/utterance at the appropriate context, the child may not depart from it when he grows. Children should therefore be made to

appreciate the need to use the right utterance that is not provocative right from childhood. They should be de-radicalized by being taught the right thing and equally made to know the dangers of terrorism. They should also be made to appreciate all languages and see them as equals. In that way, even when they are in position to make language policy in future, they will see all languages as equals. If children are given the chance to learn how to be peaceful, to use non-provocative language, are de-radicalized right from childhood, then the hope of a peaceful world will be in sight.

### Conclusion

Wars have been won and lost through effective use of language, though sometimes referred to as propaganda, which has become instrument of warfare around the globe. Nations of the world have for long engaged in language wars just to attract fame. Language conflict/policies have equally led to wars in different parts of the world. However, whether language or other causes led to war, whenever peace is desired, appropriate language use is always required. These have been referred to as diplomacy, peace meeting and dialogue but in all cases, polished language aimed at calming nerves and ceasing hostilities have always been used.

As different groups advocate for peace education in our schools to persuade the youths to leave violence, others have suggested "de-radicalization". However, to achieve global peace, the use of non-provocative language, appropriate language during peace initiative meetings and bilateral dialogues, is essential. But this peace and the use of non-abusive/non-provocative language and politeness strategies should be acquired and learnt from the cradle. It is only when children are at their formative stage that such positive values can be inculcated in them. Thus, conscious efforts should be made while the child is still acquiring his/her language to ensure that the right language devoid of extremities and radicalism is imparted in the child. If these are done, then the quest for global peace may be attainable in the near future.

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