

Emerging Roles of Sociology of Language and Culture as Panacea to Incessant Conflict in Zamfara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The situation of crises in Zamfara state, North-west Nigeria has recently reached quite unprecedented heights so much so that hardly a day passes without horrible pictures and heartbroken details of excessive destruction and senseless killings on the television screen, radio broadcasting, newspapers, and magazine. Security in Zamfara state has become a major problem in recent times. Cases of abduction, kidnapping, terrorism, senseless killings, maiming, nihilism, burgeoning restlessness, banditry, and other others, have been undoubtedly rampant. Therefore, Zamfara citizens, despite the state apparatus to ensure the safety and protection of lives and property, are incessantly living in perpetual fear and worry. It is against this backdrop that the study tends to proffer other means of trying to resolve the scenario of crises and banditry through the sociology of language and culture as a panacea to incessant crises and banditry in Zamfara state, Nigeria. The objective of the study is, among other things, reasonably available data to identify how language and culture would lead to the achievement of peacebuilding across the state. The researcher employed the use of questionnaires, oral interviews, and formal interactions to elicit information from the inhabitants of the study areas where there are records of banditry and conflicts activities are extensive. The work employed the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which holds that our thoughts are shaped by our native language and that speakers of different languages, therefore, think differently as its theoretical Framework. The study discovered among other things that the application of language and culture are stronger weapons than the arms and ammunition which are being employed by the federal government of Nigeria in attempting to resolve many crises in Zamfara state.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Language and Culture, Conflicts, Role of Language.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The situation of crises in Nigeria has recently reached quite unprecedented heights so much so that hardly a day passes without horrible pictures and heartbroken details of excessive destruction and senseless killings on the television screen, radio broadcasting, newspapers, and magazine. Nigeria is a country that is characterized by a diversity of norms, values, and beliefs, and destructive multiculturalism that makes it vulnerable to a variety of crises/conflicts. This view is typically true of a multicultural society; each of the diverse groups making up the country has a value and interest which sometimes conflict with those of others. Language as a concept is subjected to different definitions depending on the understanding and the concern of the scholar. For example, a psychologist may see it as an instrument of thought or representation of behavior or performance; an educationist may see it as a medium of instruction or

subject to be learned; a philosopher may see it as the vehicle of reason or experience; and a sociologist may see it as a means of communication in society. Therefore, as a working definition in the proposed research work, it would suffice to describe language as a means of social communication used to explicate and differentiate different ethnic groups and cultures among people of the world. Through language, people build, understand, and express their emotions, intentions, and values to confirm social relations. Language is an intrinsic part of the culture and its potential can be tapped and maximized to establish peace through adequate and proper language use.

Culture is said to be the sum total of ways of life of a group of people, the ways of life are given expression in language. Indeed, while the level of development prevalent in a society depends upon the cultural values of the people, these values are

communicated, first of all through the medium of language. Therefore, language and culture are interrelated as they work together and influence each other positively towards functional peace and stability of a society. Culture is a complex and total configuration of institutions and modes of life embracing the knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, capabilities, habits, and expectations commonly prevalent in society and shared by the members thereof (Iwe, 1979). In brief, culture can also be defined as an aggregate and complex concept and ways of life of a people. It is a major way in which people adapt to their environment and it plays a vital role in the renewal of society. Therefore, the survival of morality in any society depends to a large extent on the revival of the positive aspects of its culture.

Crises and banditry whenever it occurs anywhere in the world are widely perceived as destructive. The destruction of these two damaging acts is inimical to the peace and development of society. In other words, the destructive nature of every act of conflict and banditry makes it a vice that should be avoided. In this case, it has become a permanent life threat and in most cases has retard development in Nigeria, especially in the entire parts of Northern Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this research work tends to look at the sociology of language and culture as a panacea to incessant crises and banditry in Nigeria, with a focus on the state of Zamfara, the North-west state of Nigeria.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Security challenges and incessant crises in Nigeria are so alarming so much so that every citizen is subjected to the threat of one form of crisis or the other, ranging from cases of abduction, kidnapping, killings, nihilism, and banditry, to mention but a few. These moral crises are on the increase. The recent and emerging banditry, which is faced with cattle rustling, stalling, and killing of innocent farmers in the Northern part of Nigeria, is clamoring for a solution. Therefore, this research work investigates the application of the sociology of language and culture as an alternative means to bring about a permanent solution to the crises and banditry with a focus on selected LGAs in Zamfara state. This is against the backdrop that the use of force by the government to bring about peace or an end to the problem is not giving us desired result of putting an end to this pandemic.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. Investigate the role of language as a panacea to incessant crises and banditry in contemporary Northern Nigerian societies.
- ii. Examine the effects of culture in resolving the incessant crises and banditry across the North-west part of Nigeria.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. What are the specific roles of language as a panacea to incessant crises and banditry in the contemporary Zamfara state?
- ii. What are the effects of culture in resolving the incessant crises and banditry across the state of Zamfara?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

1.4.1 Sociology of Language

The sociology of language is one of the several approaches to the study of the patterned co-variation of language and society. It is a term that views society as being broader than language, and therefore, as providing the context in which all language behavior must ultimately be viewed. It embraces such features as the ethnography of communication, linguistic etiquette, etc. Sociolinguistics is defined as the relationship which exists between languages and the culture and tradition as well as the politics of a particular community, (Akindele & Adegbite, (3). It is a discipline that assigns functions to various languages which exist in a community, and such functions may suggest that a language be used as a mother tongue, another as a second language, or mother tongue, and yet another as a foreign language. Sociolinguistics, in addition, examines the interaction between the use of language and social organizational behavior. In other words, it focuses upon the entire gamut of topics related to the social organization of language behavior, including not only language use per se but also language attitudes and other behavior toward language users. For example, every society has its attitude to dialects and other forms of language being used (Fishman (68), Bell (76), Trudgill (71).

Sociolinguistics is also a discipline that provides answers to such questions as who speaks what language to whom and when and to what end. In addition, it seeks to provide an answer to the question of what accounts for differential changes in the social organization of language use and behavior toward language. It also tries to explain why and how this organization and behavior have become selectively different in the same social networks of communities on two different occasions. For instance, it explains why one particularly addresses a semi-literate audience in pidgin and another audience, an elite one, in impeccable English.

Above all, sociolinguistics describes the general patterns of language use within a monolingual or multilingual speech community so as to show the systematic nature of the alternations between one variety and another among individuals who share a repertoire of varieties. In monolingual speech communities, the linguistic repertoire of particular social groups may consist of sexual social class varieties, other social classes, e.g. occupational and

educational varieties, and regional varieties of the same language. It should also be noted that there is an overlap in the preoccupations of the sociology of language and sociolinguistics in such a way that the two concepts are used interchangeably to describe the relationship between language and society, (Dell Hyme, (19), Hertzler (196). The basic notion underlying sociolinguistics is quite simple: language use in interactions. The notion is simple, but the ways in which language reflects behavior can often be complex and subtle. Furthermore, the relationship between language and society affects a wide range of encounters from broadly based international relations to narrowly defined interpersonal relationships.

In another development, two trends have characterized the development of sociolinguistics over the past several decades. First, the rise of particular specializations within this field has coincided with the emergence of more broadly based social and political issues. Thus, they focus on the subject matters such as language and nationalism, language and ethnicity, and language and gender have corresponded with the rise of related issues in society at large. Second, specialists who examine the role of language and society have become more and more interested in applying the results of their studies to the broadly based social, educational, and political problems that probably gave rise to their emergence as sociolinguistics themes to begin with. Sociolinguistics thus, offers a unique opportunity to bring together theory, description, and application in the study of language.

1.4.2 The Concept of Culture

Culture is the sum total of the way of life of a group of people, the way of life is given expression in language. Indeed, while the level of development prevalent in a society depends upon the cultural values of the people, these values are communicated, first of all through the medium of language. Therefore, language and culture are interrelated modes as they work together and influence each other positively towards functional peace and stability of a society. Culture is a complex and total configuration of institutions and mode of life embracing the knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, capabilities, habits, and expectations commonly prevalent in society and shared by the members thereof (Iwe, 1979). In brief, culture can also be defined as an aggregate and complex concept and ways of life of a people. It is a major way in which people adapt to their environment and it plays a vital role in the renewal of society. Therefore, the survival of morality in any society depends to a large extent on the revival of the positive aspects of its culture.

Culture is inextricable from conflict, though it does not cause it. When differences surface in families, organizations, or communities, culture is always present, shaping perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, and

outcomes. When the cultural groups we belong to are a large majority in our community or nation, we are less likely to be aware of the content of the messages they send us. Cultures shared by dominant groups often seem to be "natural," "normal" -- "the way things are done." We only notice the effect of cultures that are different from our own, attending to behaviors that we label exotic or strange. Though culture is intertwined with conflict, some approaches to conflict resolution minimize cultural issues and influences. Since culture is like an iceberg -- largely submerged -- it is important to include it in our analyses and interventions. Icebergs unacknowledged can be dangerous, and it is impossible to make choices about them if we don't know their size or place. Acknowledging culture and bringing cultural fluency to conflicts can help all kinds of people make more intentional, adaptive choices.

1.4.3 Conflict

Conflict is mostly conceived as the absence of peace and the breakdown of order. However, scholars of social conflict have made several attempts to dissect the concept, especially in the analysis of what constitutes a violent conflict and how it is inimical to peace. Indeed, conflict is actual or perceived opposition to needs, values and interests. It is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence, by this; conflict appears to be perverse in human society. What this means is that conflict generally arises as a result of the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups or individuals. Hobbes argued in *Leviathan* that: "When two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies and ... endeavor to destroy or subdue one another" (Hobbes 1991), (Oloredo and Oloredo 2015 (Francis 2006).

To this end, it is the inability of parties to enjoy values accrued to scarce commodities that invariably convey them to conflict. To Butler, 2009, conflict arises from mutual recognition of competing or incompatible material, interests, and social basic values. However, most conflicts in the social realm are dynamic rather than static in nature and evolve in accordance with interaction between and among the aggrieved parties. This shows that the absence of communication or interactions among people provides a conflict environment, a situation where the aggrieved parties are ready to go to war with one another. It can be viewed from both political and social perspectives. From the social perspective, it is an expressed agitation between parties with conflicting interests; and from the political point of view, conflict among parties who struggle for power and resources. The parties in conflict may be individuals, groups, or countries.

There are a number of theories that explain the causes of conflict; and these include the Human Need Theory, Relational Theory, Political Theory, and Transformative Theory. The Human Needs Theory

expresses the view that without certain basic needs, human beings cannot survive. The relational Theory posits that conflict is the product of social interactions that operate among people from different sociocultural backgrounds. Political Theory views the state as the platform where people or groups with conflicting interests clash over certain benefits. Thus, a weak state informed by poor leadership breeds conflict among the group therein. The Transformative Theory opines that conflict is generated by perceived inequality and injustices driven by socio-cultural, religious, political, and economic forces within a state. In a rapidly changing world, approaches to the settlement of conflict are also changing.

1.5 The Relationship between Culture and Conflict

Culture is an essential part of conflict and conflict resolution. Cultures are like underground rivers that run through our lives and relationships, giving us messages that shape our perceptions, attributions, judgments, and ideas of self and others attempting. Though cultures are powerful, they are often unconscious, influencing conflict and attempts to resolve conflict in imperceptible ways.

Cultures are more than language, dress, and food customs. Cultural groups may share race, ethnicity, or nationality, but they also arise from cleavages of generation, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, ability and disability, political and religious affiliation, language, and gender -- to name only a few.

Two things are essential to remember about cultures: they are always changing, and they relate to the symbolic dimension of life. The symbolic dimension is the place where we are constantly making meaning and enacting our identities. Cultural messages from the groups we belong to give us information about what is meaningful or important, and who we are in the world and in relation to others -- our identities.

Cultural messages, simply, are what everyone in a group knows that outsiders do not know. They are the water fish swim in, unaware of its effect on their vision. They are a series of lenses that shape what we see and don't see, how we perceive and interpret, and where we draw boundaries. In shaping our values, cultures contain starting points and currencies [1]. Starting points are those places it is natural to begin, whether with individual or group concerns, with the big picture or particularities. Currencies are those things we care about that influence and shape our interactions with others. Culture is always a factor in conflict, whether it plays a central role or influences it subtly and gently. For any conflict that touches us where it matters, where we make meaning and hold our identities, there is always a cultural component. Intractable conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir are not just about territorial, boundary, and sovereignty issues -- they are also about

acknowledgement, representation, and legitimization of different identities and ways of living, being, and making meaning.

Conflicts between teenagers and parents are shaped by generational culture, and conflicts between spouses or partners are influenced by gender culture. In organizations, conflicts arising from different disciplinary cultures escalate tensions between co-workers, creating strained or inaccurate communication and stressed relationships. Culture permeates conflict no matter what -- sometimes pushing forth with intensity, other times quietly snaking along, hardly announcing its presence until surprised people nearly stumble on it.

1.6 Theoretical Framework: Sapir Whorfian Hypothesis and Social Contract Theory

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis holds that our thoughts are shaped by our native language and that speakers of different languages, therefore, think differently. This hypothesis is controversial in part because it appears to deny the possibility of a universal groundwork for human cognition, and in part, because some findings taken to support it have not been reliably replicated. We argue that considering this hypothesis through the lens of probabilistic inference has the potential to resolve both issues, at least with respect to certain prominent findings in the domain of comprehension of concepts and ideas. Thus, the researcher employed the principle of linguistic relativity. This formulation implicitly acknowledges that Sapir and Whorf were not the first or only scholars to have theorized about relations between language and thought and that other strands of thinking about the issue also exist. The main point of debate in the discussion of linguistic relativity is the correlation between language and thought. The strongest form of correlation is linguistic determinism, which would hold that language entirely determines the range of possible cognitive processes of an individual. This view has sometimes been attributed to Benjamin Lee Whorf, and to Ludwig Wittgenstein, but it is not currently the consensus that either of these thinkers actually espoused determinist views of the relation between language and thought.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

1.7.1 Brief Historical Survey of the Study Area

The kingdom of Zamfara is as old as some of the other Hausa city-state such as Zazzau, Gobir, Kano, and Katsina. Zamfara kingdom covers a vast landscape that extends up to the River Rima to the northwest and River Kaduna to the southwest. The kingdom was believed to have flourished from the 11th century up to the 16th century as a city-state with the capital of the kingdom being subjected to intermittent movement and changes depending on the functions of the kingdom from time to time and from place to place, such as Dutsi as well as Birnin Zamfara, and then Anka in the half of

the 19th century when Birnin Zamfara was overrun and destroyed by the Gobir forces (Chafe, 2016).

By the 19th century British colonialism emerged in the town of Gusau which became an important commercial and administrative center with roads and railway networks. However, after Nigeria's independence and with the creation of states during the Gowon regime, the Zamfara Kingdom became part of the North-western state and later Sokoto state. Agricultural Production has been the backbone of the economy of the state. This can be observed to be the mainstay and occupation of the people of the area. Moreover, this is coupled with the type of land found in Zamfara State to be savannah, consequently, the whole of the area is suitable for the cultivation of varieties of crops.

The modern Zamfara State is currently populated with the Hausa and Fulani communities. The dominant ethnic groups are the Zamfarawa who are mainly found in Anka, Gummi, Bukkuyum, and Talata Mafara local government areas (Mohammed, 2019). By the 2006 census figures, the state's population was given at Three Million, two hundred and seventy-eight thousand, eight hundred and seventy-three and (3,278,373). But, by 2016 the population has been estimated at Four million, five hundred and fifteen thousand, four hundred (4,515,400). Zamfara State covers an area of 38,418 square kilometers that was bordered in the north by the Niger Republic, to the south by Kaduna State. In the east, it is bordered by Katsina and to the west by Sokoto and Kebbi states. The State currently has fourteen (14) local government areas. These local government areas are Anka, Bukkuyum, Bakura, Bungudu, Birnin-Magaji, Gummi, Gusau, Kaura Namoda, Maru, Maradun, Shinkafi, Tsafe, Talata Mafara, Zurmi.

1.7.2 Method of Data Collections

Participants for the study were selected from across all the local governments within Zamfara state, but with emphasis on the areas from where there are records of conflicts and banditry. Participants are randomly selected from the areas selected through a stratified random sampling technique. Each area is stratified along component LGAs. Therefore, this study mainly covered seven (7) LGAs which are prone to the activities of banditry. They are Anka, Bukkuyum, Bngudu, Brinin-Magaji, Gummi, Shinkafi and Zurmi. The researcher employed the use of questionnaires, oral interviews, and replicated and formal interactions to elicit information from the inhabitants of the study areas where there are records of banditry and conflict-used activities. Key Person Interview (KPI) is also used to verify the information obtained from the oral and informal interactions. These same methods were replicated throughout the seven (7) LGAs of the state (Zamfara).

1.8 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the data collected through the various means for this study points to the fact that resolving conflicts in Nigeria through the mode of language and culture presupposes understanding and articulating the pragmatics of multiculturalism. This is because conflict resolution is a basic activity articulated and conducted in forms that significantly vary across cultures and people. This is against the backdrop of the fact that culture varies with people. In other words, differences in approach rest on a contrasting understanding of the nature of conflict and society. The result of this study aligned with the thought and understanding that in conflict resolution, language is a stronger weapon than the arms and ammunition which the current governments of Nigeria use in attempting to resolve many conflicts in the country.

On the question of the effects of culture in resolving the incessant crises and banditry across the state of Zamfara; it was discovered that cultural influences and identities become important depending on the context. When an aspect of cultural identity is threatened or misunderstood it may become relatively more important than other cultural identities and this fixed narrow identity may become the focus of negative projection and crises set in. Therefore, there is a need for mutual respect for the cultural practices of every community of people.

1.9 CONCLUSION

Language as a phenomenon is the pivot on which all human activities, ranging from the most prosaic to the most profound revolve. It provides the unique medium through which the belief system, worldview, moral values, and virtually all the fundamental components of any given society are passed on from generation to generation. Language, as a natural ability, is common to every normal human being. It has also been established that conflict incompatibility arises from mutual recognition of competing or incompatible material, interests, and social basic values. However, most conflicts in the social realm are dynamic rather than static in nature and evolve in accordance with the interaction between and among the aggrieved parties. Thus, it is possible for a state not to have an established church. But the state cannot help but give at least partial establishment to a culture when it decides which language to be used in running its affairs.

Culture is a complex and total configuration of institutions and modes of life embracing the knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, capabilities, habits, and expectations commonly prevalent in society and shared by the members there of Cultural messages from the groups we belong to give us information about what is meaningful or important, who we are in the world, and in relation to others' identities. Therefore, cultural

messages shape our understanding of relationships, and of how to deal with the crises and harmony that are always present whenever two or more people come together. The ideological nature of language and culture is always compounded and complemented by the fact that arguments for culture are usually embedded in a host of assumptions. These include assumptions about the ways in which language preserves and transmit culture. This is the fact that speakers belonging to particular communities might be expected to have various languages and about how the notion of equality of treatment (both within a group and beyond the group) itself might be interpreted. The work concludes among other things that the application of the sociology of language and culture are stronger weapon than the arms and ammunition which are being employed by the federal government of Nigeria in attempting to resolve many crises in Nigeria.

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