

Language Usage in Nigerian Political Campaigns and Rallies and Enhancement of Peace, Security and Electoral Process

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Article DOI:

10.48028/iiprds/ijrjssmt.v10.i1.13

Keywords:

Language,
Campaign, Rally,
Electoral process,
Peace and security

A b s t r a c t

Language is one of the greatest media through which human beings globally communicate express and pass thoughts and ideas to fellow human beings. It can be used to glorify and degrade an individual, group of individuals, tribe or tribes, nation and nations etc. thus the importance of language cannot be over-stressed. It is in this perspective that the paper examines the use of language in political rallies and campaigns in Nigeria and shows how the language use in passing the contents to the audience or populace can enhance or destroy peace, security and the electoral process. In achieving this, samples of languages used in campaigns and rallies were gathered and analysed to show how they can enhance or destroy peace, security and electoral process in Nigeria. Some of the issues addressed by the paper include hate speeches, tribal and religious bigotry, regional superiority or aberration and others. At the end suggestions on how to enhance peace, security and perfection of the electoral process through the use of language is proffered.

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Background to the Study

Language generally in any society is very important not because of being the medium of communication but also as a means of expression of thoughts, ideas and other demands. This expression of thoughts and ideas is done through speech or writing. As a speech, it is an event taking place between people, everything we say affects and is affected by everything else that is said, and also by such nonverbal cues as body language (Harris, 1990: 6). This is why it is important for people to reflect on the nature of talk or speech and its reciprocal qualities for it to be reproductive in quality. The words we speak really matters. This is because every word we utter can either be a brick to build or a bulldozer to destroy and as such, language determines the success or any otherwise of any process. It is a man's unique attribute everywhere in the world. 'Particularistic' in the sense that there is an amazing diffusion of tongues, occurring as languages and dialects in varies communities and regions of the world. As such, no meaningful communication is possible without language for its system of universally accepted codes, especially in the written form, gives shape to the pieces of experience of one generation, distills them into specific wisdom, which it also preserves and passes them unto next generation. In this way, the collective lessons on the society in all its fields of endeavor are carried out across geographical, social and time periods, so that the society develops and improves as it grows. But on the other side, when language is used inappropriately, it can lead to misunderstanding, misinterpretations, different expressions and counter-expressions which consequent may precipitate disunity and affect peaceful co-existence in the society. Thus, the African proverb which says: "A tongue has no bones but it is strong enough to break a heart so be careful with your words". This paper covers aspects like nature of language used by different political aspirants and their supporters, analysis of the ability of the expressed language to enhance peace, security and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians or otherwise and some suggestions.

Campaigns and Rallies in Nigeria

The word campaign is seen as planned activities that are made to achieve a particular social, commercial, political aims (Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, 2016: 156) while rally is a large public meeting or gathering to support an idea or political party (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: 963). In Nigeria, whenever the term of office of a serving government is coming to an end, political activities are planned and gradually executed according to the plans. Campaigns and rallies by politicians from all political parties are planned and various strategies and methodologies in order to persuade the populace to vote their party into power concretized. In order to win elections, they prepare time-tables that will guide the movements for their campaigns and rallies. Various dates are fixed for one community to another, local government to another and state to state. They in the process make different speeches, promising heaven and earth to the citizenry. It is during this process that many speeches are made. Consciously or unconsciously, some of these politicians use language in their speeches while campaigning in their rallies that which can tantamount to enhancement of peace, security or otherwise.

Examples of Some Language or Speeches During Election Campaigns and Rallies

Below are extracts from speeches from some Nigerian politicians during campaigns and rallies during electioneering period in Nigeria.

1. In an article titled "Why Obasanjo fought me" the first civilian governor of Bayelsa Diepreye Alaimiyesejha through the use of offensive metaphors asserted that: "Obasanjo told me not to support a bloody civilian like Atiku Abubakar... Today he is talking about Jonathan training snipers and having watch list.... After Obasanjo assumed office in 1999, he was only globe-trotting; it was Atiku Abubakar who was running the country.... That is why I am insisting that Chief Obasanjo is mischievous in his intent of writing the letter to Goodluck Jonathan and leaking it to the press. Chief Obasanjo's character is that if it is not him, it should not be anyone else. He is Mr. know all (Alaimiyesejha, in the Daily Trust, Dec. 24, 2013, 46)
2. Olisa Metuth stated about Lai Muhammad thus: "quarrelsome and misguided person who does not have the basic pre-requisite to hold responsible national office in a democratic government" (Daily Trust, Sunday, Nov. 1, 2015, 5)
3. In response to Meruh's attack, Lai Muhammad stated about Metuth as: with a combustible and out of control spokesperson, like Metuh, there is no way the PDP will survive in opposition. Metuth has shown time and again that he lacks the temperament, presence of mind sobriety, analytical mind, decency in the use of language and pinnacle needed for anyone to be the face of any organization, not to talk of a political party ((Daily Trust, Sunday, Nov. 1, 2015, 14)
4. On the 19th January, 2015 advertisement sponsored by Iyo Dele Fayose of Ekiti State- suggested that the presidential candidate of the All Progressive (APC), candidate, retired General Muhammad Buhari might die in office if elected president (Daily Trust, Monday, January, 26, 2015, 20).
5. In a statement by Femi Fani Kayode, former Minister of Aviation stated that they do not have evidence to link APC Presidential candidate in the 2015 general Elections, General Muhammadu Buhari with insurgency but they have a dossier of his past statements that show that he has sympathy for the Boko Haram sect. He further stated that their intention was to expose General Muhammad Buhari "for what he really is, what he stands for and the great danger his candidacy portends for the unity of the Nigerian state and the peace and well-being of the Nigerian people." (Daily Trust, Thursday, January, 8, 2015, 17)
6. President Jonathan stated in reference to Obasanjo and Buhari thus: "utterances of some elder statesmen cast them out as ordinary motor park touts and politicians and they are not senior citizens (Daily Trust, Thursday, January, 8, 2015, 1)
7. Mukhtar Shagari former deputy governor of Sokoto state called the current serving governor, Right Honorable Aminu Waziri Tambuwal as a cunning and crafty person, who has no personality, honour, integrity and excellence. He made this statement on the 26th May, after the governorship primary which he lost (Online Daily Post, 26th May, 2022).
8. On 2nd February, 2023 during the All-Progressive Congress (APC) Presidential Campaign rally in Edo State, the presidential flag bearer of the Party said: "I am

- going to correct the errors of those who are fighting naked... A custom officer who cannot define the ethics of civil service profession, a car dealer... using Nigerian money to buy cars for their girlfriends- his qualification no fit the president" (TVC News, Nigeria, 5th January, 2023).
9. Again, in a rally at Lagos held on 29th November 2022, the same presidential aspirant stated thus: "We will continue a progressive government where everybody will be included... I know one selfish man, he has been running since 1999, from PDP, ACN... How many times will he run?..."
 10. In Benue state rally held on 26th January 2023, Aswaju Tinibu, said "Today is not the day of protocol no matter how short a man is, he will see the sky... to give you assurance, we, me I no dey old!... we will not bother about the noise makers... if you vote APC, your headache will be gone... they are what I called yesterday's sabotage, they issued to themselves petroleum licenses to their supporters...."
 11. Adams Oshomole in a rally in Edo state asserted that Peter Obi is a joke. Atiku spent 16 million American dollars to fix electricity that was not fixed.
 12. In Kano, Peter Obi stated that: "We are in the business not to waste anybody's time... we will ensure the enemies, the criminals are out of government.... We are going to fight. We want to remove the baboon, let monkey work and chop the money... I was not owing pension, not one piece of land was given to me by the people of Anambra.... Other people give their wives, their children, you voted for broom, they are sweeping you into hunger. APC chairman is 70 years, the other ones we don't know their age at all. Vote for Labour Party (LP)... They steal money, they buy dollar..."
 13. According to Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), It is risky to hand over Nigeria to Tinibu or Obi... (The Will, December, 5 2022) Atiku Abubakar

Analysis of these language Usages and their effects on peace, security and the electoral process

Doofan Uyoo (2010:191), stated thus:

In conflict situation where there is need to decide which political party or who leads a certain government or people, language in its social function has the characteristics of a double-edged sword, in such situations, as mentioned above, language may be used to fan the fire of crisis or it may be used diplomatically to resolve the issues at stake.

What the author is trying to show is that during political competitions, for either to elect leaders for a society or state or country, the political agents do apply certain language characteristics to either polarize or pacify the situation. This statement is validly correct in the Nigerian political context where every action or inaction by government or its agents or any political party or political agent is interpreted by political agents in the prevailing political condition. In this process, the political agents use language that will either fuel the action or inaction of government or its agent. The extracts above illustrate the way which politicians use language as a double edged –sword to causes disaffection or

affection that heat up the polity or dose down the polity.

This section of the paper, tries to provide analyses of the ability of language used in the extracts above to either fan the fire of crisis in Nigeria or curtail the rate of the crisis and hatred among the citizenry. From the extracts 1 to 13 above, it is discernable that the statements can be categorized into different classes namely:

a. Those that are centered on personality or an individual.

In extracts 6, 7, 8 and 11 elements of using language to attack personalities of individuals can be observed. In 6, the statement of former president Goodluck Jonathan that “utterances of some elder statesmen cast them out as ordinary motor park touts and politicians and they are not senior citizens” was made during the 2015 general elections. The statement was to tarnish the image of both Obasanjo who was openly supporting the candidature of General Buhari instead of his. This kind of statement is not supposed to have come from the first citizen. In extract 7, the statement that he was “cunny and crafty person, who has no personality, honour, integrity and excellence “was the personality of the current Sokoto State governor that was sullied. The governor has not responded to the defamation of his character, nor has he taken any action. The expression “I am going to correct the errors of those who are fighting naked... A custom officer who cannot define the ethics of civil service profession, a car dealer... using Nigerian money to buy cars for their girlfriends- his qualification no fit the president” in Extract 8 was addressed to the personality of Atiku Abubakar by Aswaju Ahmad Tinubu. The language used portrayed Atiku as a morally bankrupt and not worthy to hold or aspire for leadership like the presidency. Adams Oshomole attacked the integrity of both Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi in the process of the 2023 election campaigns and rallies when he said “Peter Obi is a joke. Atiku spent 16 million American dollars to fix electricity that was not fixed.” It shows that Obi is joking because to him, he is not qualified to aspire for the post of president of Nigeria while Atiku is corrupt person who collected Nigerians' resource for the improvement electricity but failed to do so. Therefore, both lack the integrity to hold the position of the president of Nigeria.

In all these extracts, personalities of individuals were queried to portray them negatively in the eyes of their supporters and well-wishers. This form of use of language to condemn or portray an influential figure in the society has its consequences. It can precipitate hatred among the supporters of the victims and that of those making the allegations. Sometimes this can result into verbal quarrel or even physical in some cases. Consequently, by extension, it will affect the electoral process.

b. Those that are linked with personality and government

Linked of language usage to attack government and individuals can be found in Extracts 1 and 9 above. In Extract 1, the statement thus: "... Obasanjo told me not to support a bloody civilian like Atiku Abubakar... Jonathan was training snipers and having watch list.... After Obasanjo assumed office in 1999, he was only globe-trotting; it was Atiku Abubakar who was running the country That is why I am insisting that Chief Obasanjo is mischievous in his intent of writing the letter to Goodluck Jonathan and leaking it to the

press. Chief Obasanjo's character is that if it is not him, it should not be anyone else. He is Mr. know all”

The language used here shows that the personality of former president Obasanjo and his government were condemned. Expressions like “Obasanjo told me not to support a bloody civilian like Atiku, globe- trotting and mischievous in intent are loaded with negative connotations aimed at damaging the image and reputation of former president Obasanjo and his government. In Extract 9, Bola Tinubu's statement thus “We will continue a progressive government where everybody will be included... I know one selfish man, he has been running since 1999, from PDP, ACN...How many times will he run?” was being referred to Atiku, the former Vice president. The statement portrayed the government of Atiku as not progressive and that he had vied for the presidency severally moving from political party to another for his political adventurism.

c. Those that are centred on personality, government and political party

From Extracts number 10, 12 and 13, the language used tend to centre on individual personality, government and political party. For instance, the expressions “...if you vote APC, your headache will be gone” and “. they issued to themselves petroleum licenses and their supporters...” in Extract 10 can be seen as canvassing for support for apolitical party, APC on one hand and an attack on the opposition political parties. In Extract 12, the statement that “... refers to the officials of the current government of APC. The statement is trying to portray the present government and its officials are enemies of Nigerians and they are also criminals that must be booted out of government by all means. Thus, the expression “We are going to fight”. From the comment that “We want to remove the baboon, let monkey work and chop the money...” still refers to the officials of the current government who were termed as monkeys and baboons. Coming to the statements that “I was not owing pension, not one piece of land was given to me by the people of Anambra.... Other people give their wives, their children” they are expressions of self-adoration and why he and his party need to be voted into power by Nigerians. “You voted for broom, they are sweeping you into hunger” is an attack on both government and the ruling party, APC whose emblem is the broom while the exclamation that “APC chairman is 70 years, the other ones we don't know their age at all” denotes that the Chairman of the ruling party is old and so also the other top members of the APC presidential team. This is an attack on personalities or individuals of the APC just because of their age. Vote for Labour Party (LP)... “. They steal money, they buy dollar...” Having condemned the ruling party and its officials, he now offered himself and his party to Nigerians who impliedly from his statements will be different from them. On the last segment that they stole money and buy dollar, it is sullyng of the characters of the officials of the APC government.

d. Those that are religiously inclined

In the Extracts above, specifically number 5. Elements of religious bigotry or sentimentalism can be observed. The statement that “they do not have evidence to link APC Presidential candidate in the 2015 general Elections, General Muhammadu Buhari

with insurgency but they have a dossier of his past statements that show that he has sympathy for the Boko Haram sect". This is a hate statement that denigrates a person and his party based on his religious inclination.

Effects of these statements on peace, security and the Electoral process

Undoubtedly, the above statements by elders who held various positions both in Nigeria and outside have direct effects on peace, security and the electoral process. These issues are discussed below:

Attacks on personality and character of people

Personality and character-based campaigns appeal to sentiments instead of the people's sense of rationalization. They rob the people to hold leaders accountable for any campaign promises. Elected public officials who are expected to be able to rein in their base emotions at least in public are often unable to rise superior to its temptation especially in moment of partisan politics.

Hate or provocative speeches

Provocative utterances create enmity among the people who ordinary would have been living together as one group. Sometimes these hate speeches are so distasteful as they are capable of inciting ill-will against the members of the society as they escalate into violence. Most of them utterances end up heating up the polity and causing disaffection among the supporters of the different political parties. In the end there will likely be crisis and counter-crisis which resultantly will set the country ablaze and put the electoral process in jeopardy.

Implications of the Highlighted Issues on the Electoral Process and Democracy

It is very important to give highlights of the above issues on the electoral process and democracy in Nigeria in general. Electoral process, in my view, simply means the processes that are employed to ensure the emergence of a democratically elected government with legal and lawful background while democracy is simply rule of the people by the people for the wellbeing of the people. So the systematic processes that are mapped out to attain a democratic governance are very important if democracy is to be attained and sustained. Some of the electoral processes involve in the journey to attain democracy include registration of voters, registration of political parties, members of political parties, screening of aspirants to elective posts, campaigns, elections, declaration of winners and formation of democratic government. All these processes are imperative for democracy to prevail and be sustained in any country.

From the analyses given above on the use of language by Nigerian politicians during campaigns, it is very clear that if the trends are allowed to persist, the electoral as well as the democratic principles will be adversely affected. Take for instance, religiously centred issues raised above, tension among the various religious groups can not augur well for the country. It is very likely to generate conflicts among the different religious adherents in the country. Tribal or ethnic promotion to the detriment of other tribal groups also will

generate hatred and conflict and counter-conflict in the country. We saw element of this in 1999 during the reign of Olusegun Obasanjo in Lagos, Kano and other places in the country. Presently, we are seeing how ethnic and tribal sentiments are making peaceful co-existence among the various tribes in Nigeria difficult in the South-eastern part of the country for instance, due to the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Similarly, attacks on the personality of political parties are not going to give birth to peace but rather increase the rate of conflicts among the members of the different political parties. We observed for instance, in the just concluded general elections clashes between the members of the various political parties. Specifically, between the members of the Labour Party (LP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) in Lagos, members of the APC and People Democratic Party (PDP) in Adamawa, Kebbi, Sokoto, etc., APC members and that of New Nigerian People's Party (NNPP) in Kano etc. these inter-party clashes contribute in the disruption of peace, a very important ingredient of enhancement of any electoral process and democratic governance.

In brief therefore, the implications of the issues raised above are many and one of which is the eroding of the whole electoral as well as the democratic processes. Elections and process of democracy can only thrive in a peaceful environment. When peace is disrupted, definitely, democracy and its processes will be halt.

Conclusion

From the discussion above it is discernable that politicians are more vulnerable to provocative speeches in all its ramifications. Most politicians are fond of attacking one another by way of using sentimental utterances or offending discourse in trying to pull-down their opponents. To enhance peace, security, law and order in the electoral processes in Nigeria, politicians should try to refrain themselves from inciting utterances so as to safe guard the national peace and unity of the country. They also try to learn to forget about their differences and work in harmony for the progress of Nigeria and not to create uneasy situations for the citizens who are presently in an uneasy situation as a result of insecurity, hunger and lack of money.

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