

# Language, Communication and Literary Studies for Peace, Security and Development in Nigeria

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## Introduction

Nigeria is one of the biggest nations in West Africa. It has a startling diversity and is multilingual in nature. The country is endowed with abundant natural resources that could elevate it to the status of a developed state; but instead, the opposite is the case because it is constantly challenged by social, political, economic, religious, and security issues that endanger the unity and peaceful coexistence of the country's diverse population (Adebisi, 2007). 'Peace' and 'security' are basic necessities of human beings everywhere. Peace is a state of harmony characterised by the lack of violence, conflict behaviours and the freedom from fear of violence. Security, on the other hand, is the protection of a person, building, organisation or country against threats such as crimes or attacks by local or foreign countries.

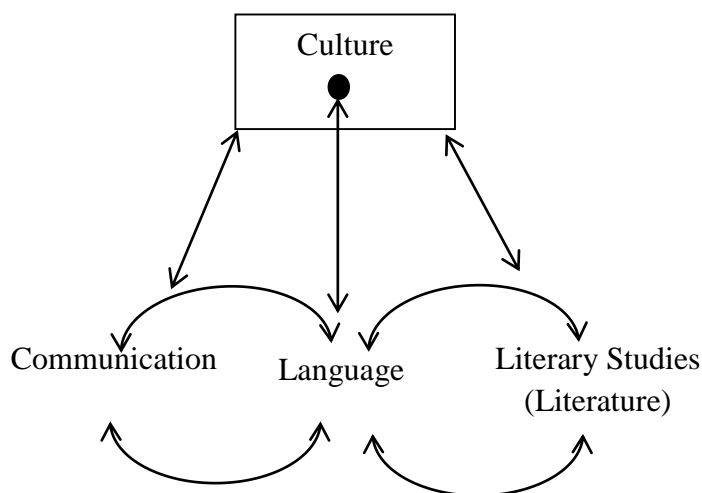
For decades now, there have been numerous threats to the unity and peaceful coexistence of the diverse people residing across the different states in Nigeria. The threats to peace and security in Nigeria have been occasioned by factors ranging from organised crimes, unequal distribution of national resources, bad governance, tribalism, favouritism, ransom kidnappings, farmer/headers clashes, banditry, armed robbery, among others. Due to this situation, innocent lives and properties have been wasted thereby creating negative effects on our nation in the form of poverty, disease, disillusionment, underdevelopment and internal displacement of individuals (Ali, 2013). The depth to which security challenges have driven Nigeria as a country is incalculable. The nation's pathetic security situation is a great source of worry since it keeps getting worse every day. Definitely, the deployment of force alone cannot solve the problems, we must look elsewhere. One promising alternative is to harness the resources of religious/civic education, history, language, communication and literary studies among others. This incontrovertibly makes the broad theme of this 38<sup>th</sup> annual English Scholars' Association of Nigeria (ESAN) conference very opposite and germane.

All the three major religions in Nigeria: Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion preach peace. The **Holy Bible** in Hebrews 12:14 admonishes us to follow peace with all men, for without peace and holiness no man shall see the Lord. Also, Romans 12:18 encourages us to try our best to seek peace and that we can seek peace by controlling *our words, our actions and our conduct* (emphasis mine). Also, the Quran in chapters 4:14, 6:108, 49:9-10, among others, emphasise the importance of peace. Interestingly, the central message in *Òbàràdòfún* 121 in Ifá divination is peace. In *Òbàrà òfún* 121, four characters: Eégún (Masquerade), Òrìsà (Deity), Èsù Òdàrà and Òrúnmìlà were close friends whose relationship became sour. They consulted their diviners (Babalawo) individually who then told them that what went wrong was that peace was lost among them. They were told to make sacrifices to bring back peace, with

Eégún told to hold the home front; Ọ̀rìsà to hold the outside/public space; Èsù Ọ̀dàrà to take charge of Oríta (the junction) and Ọ̀rúnmìlà becoming Alájere idẹ (custodian of wisdom). With this, peace came back and things started going on well with them (source: Babaawo Awósanmí Àbe, aged 51). Without peace and security in all their ramifications there can be no meaningful development anywhere.

### **Language, Communication and Literary Studies: The Nexus**

Language, literary studies (literature) and communication are interdependent. Literary studies cannot exist without language; communication and language are also inseparable because language is a major means of human communication; and the three are closely entwined (Olaoye, 2013). Language is a system of communication that transmits information through verbal or nonverbal signs (Okesipe and Okolo, 2013). The field of literary studies focuses on the interrogation of imaginative writings including poetry, drama, and prose fiction (Push and Johnson, 2014). Communication is a mechanism for two or more people to exchange information while they concentrate on the message being exchanged (Oyewo, 2004). Whereas language is thought of as a means of communicating, communication, on the other hand, is the process of employing language as a tool to inform and educate the people; and literature is the information or message plus the art behind it, that is communicated via language. What we have stated above outlines the link among the trio in a tripartite structure, a combination that is crucial to Nigeria’s quest for peace, security and development. The close interrelationship among language, communication and literary studies in relation to culture, defined by Tylor cited by Tschum (1978:236) as “...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and all other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” can be roughly illustrated as follows:



### **Language for Peace, Security and Development**

Language is a universal tool that serves as the cornerstone of every community on earth. The term has been defined by numerous scholars. For instance, Ogunsiji (2013:23) cites the delineation of language by Sapir (1963) as “a wholly human and non-instinctive manner of

transmitting ideas, feelings, and wants by means of consciously manufactured symbols". In Murthy (2007), language is described as a means of communication that allows people to share their feelings, ideas, and thoughts with others. According to Okesipe and Okolo (2013; 30), language is a method of communication for a speech community. The characteristics of language include the fact that it is arbitrary, productive, creative/dynamic, systematic/orderly, non-instinctive and conventional. The foregoing discourse underscores language as a means of communication and of social control and a marker of identity. It is a trait that all people share; a key difference between humans and other animals, and the driving force underlying human interactions (Ogunsiji, 2013).

Human language is the most useful tool of communication to mankind. Every member of a linguistic community uses language meaningfully to express thoughts, ideas, beliefs, needs etc, which ultimately contribute to the smooth running of that society (Atolagbe, 2004). Language plays a myriad of crucial roles in every linguistic community. Speaking on the roles of language in the search for peace and security, Barber (1999) observes that it facilitates cooperation among citizens in a nation. Adeyanju (2004) supports this view by asserting that cooperation among citizens is essential to the flourishing of the society because it assists members in achieving their goals. He says further that the cooperation that engenders peaceful co-existence among members in society cannot be achieved without language.

Language is not admittedly the only means of human communication. For example, in the Yoruba traditional society, one could communicate with another person by sending symbolic objects, that is, through what is known as *àrokò*. For instance, if *ódán'* leaves are sent to somebody, it is a way of cautioning the person to reduce his/her arrogance. And if the shell of a snail is sent to somebody, the sender wants unity and cooperation. Remember the Yoruba saying: *Bí ìgbín bá fà, ìkarahan rẹ á tẹ lée.* (If the snail moves, its shell shall follow it) (Ọpádòtun, 1986). But of all the means of human communication, language is the most famous, developed, elaborate and complex.

To promote peace and security in Nigeria, all citizens must use language (whether indigenous or non-indigenous) in an appropriate manner. The reason for this is that the appropriate use of language can foster peace and unity among citizens while its misapplication can incite conflict. The Yoruba say soft words bring out kolanut from the pocket, while harsh words draw out sword from the shield. A number of conflicts, for instance, have occurred in Nigeria as a result of the inappropriate use of language. The recent horrific killing of Deborah Samuel, a female student at the Shehu Shagari College of Education, for allegedly making a derogatory comment about Prophet Muhammad, serves as a potent example of this misapplication of language. It is obvious that language misuse causes conflicts, which could culminate in the destruction of lives and property whereas its proper use engenders cohesion and togetherness. It is this cohesion that fosters the growth and development of any nation, which in turn supports and upholds peace and security.

Peace and security can be promoted and maintained through language education. Language education entails the planning, developing and implementation of the language arts curriculum in such a way that members are trained to acquire language skills that will facilitate the ability to cope with other life skills (Amadi, 2014). Commenting on the significance of language education in the search for peace and security, Okafor, Nwogu and Osuagwu (2018)

state that language education helps to eradicate language barriers or the inadequate understanding of a language which can no doubt delay the progress of peace movement initiated towards conflict resolution. They proceed further to note that language and peace are inextricably linked and that the attainment of peace in a country like Nigeria which is multilingual will require peaceful or cordial relationships among its citizens which cannot be realised without the appropriate use of language. They observe further that the inadequate knowledge of a language could lead to the misuse of such a language which can generate misunderstanding and conflict whereas the use of a common language or the knowledge of a language as well as its proper application inspires oneness and unity (Okafor, Nwogu and Osuagwu, 2018). From the foregoing, it is axiomatic that language is essential because it enables language learners to become skilled and critical communicators, and this will make them to become useful members of their society.

The foregoing submission on the import of language education underscores the need for government and policy makers to encourage language education since language plays vital roles in ensuring peace and maintaining security in any society. Apart from the three major languages (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) which have been adopted as Nigeria's national languages, government and policy makers in Nigeria should, as a matter of urgency, accord prominence to the so-called minority languages used by the various 'minority' tribes in Nigeria. This is necessary because language is the central part of culture and it is also an important medium for the expression of culture. Meaningful measures for local peace and security are better handled in the indigenous language. Moreover, the gap between policies and their implementation should be bridged.

Language is very powerful and this confirms the submission of Olerede & Oloredo (2015) that misuse of language can lead to ethnic colouration, religious segregation and political crisis. Samson and Dauda (2013) aver that language is a double-edged sword that can aggravate or prevent insecurity in the society, depending on how it is used. The way a leader uses language in the society can bring about peace or chaos or a turbulent situation in a country. There will be peace security and development in a society devoid of hate speech foul language, negative stereotyping and name calling. Language must be consciously used to achieve peace because human perception and conception are conveyed through language in form of messages and, messages are transformed into meanings (Olerede & Oloredo, 2015). Furthermore, it must be pointed out that a language is a tool that can be used to maintain and sustain mutual understanding among members of a society because it is the key to the heart of the people. The Yoruba language for example stands out as one of the Nigerian languages that have cultural and traditional values that could be used to communicate messages of peace and security among people. Some Yoruba proverbs and expressions for instance prove how language can be used as a potent tool to achieve peace, unity, togetherness, cooperation, security and progress in society. Some of these proverbs and expressions are mentioned below:

1. *Òrò pèlẹ ní yọ obì lápò*  
(interpretation/explanation: soothing words bring out kolanut from the pocket)
2. *Ká fì òtún wẹ òsì, ká fì òsì wẹ òtún ni ọwó fí mọ*

(Interpretation/explanation: Hands can only be properly cleaned if both right and left hands are used to clean each other).

3. *Sùrrù baba iwà*  
(Interpretation/explanation: Patience is a virtue)
4. *A ò gbọdò finá s'órí òrùlé sùn*  
(Interpretation/explanation: we must not sleep under a burning roof)
5. *Ojú l'alákàn fì ń sọrí*  
(Interpretation/explanation: Crabs use their eyes to protect their heads)
6. *Bí a bá ro dídùn ifòn, a ó h'ọra dénú egungun*  
(Interpretation/explanation: if we think too much about a painful experience, we will overthink)
7. *Bí ikú ilé ò bá p'ani, t'òde ò lè p'ani*  
(Interpretation/explanation: if the enemy within does not kill a person, the enemy without cannot)
8. *Ogun kò rí bí iyán, ogun kò rí bí èkọ*  
(Interpretation/explanation: War is neither like pounded yam nor like a pap)
9. *Bí abá ní kí á dá iná ejò bí óse gùn tó, a ó d'aná sun ilé*  
(Interpretation/explanation: If we prepare the fire that is meant to roast a snake according to the length of the snake, we may end up burning down the whole building)
10. *Ọmọ ẹni kò se ágbáfò, ò ń k'ásọ wálé, ẹ r'ọju olè ni ẹ ò mu*  
(Interpretation/explanation: Your child is not into a laundry business and he is bringing different kinds of clothes home; you already know a thief but fail to apprehend him.
11. *Bí a ò bá gbàgbé òrò ànà, a ò le rí ẹnikan bá seré*  
(Interpretation/explanation: If we do not forget the discord of yesterday, we will not have people to play with).
12. *Ìbèrè ogun ní àá mọ, a kìí mọ òpin rẹ*  
(interpretation/explanation: we can only know the beginning of a war; we cannot know how it will end).
13. *Ogun ní si ní mú; èpè kíl si ní jà*

(interpretation/explanation: one can accidentally be a war victim, but not that of a curse).

14. *Bí òdèdè ò dùn, bí ìgbè ni ìlú rí*

(interpretation/explanation; if there is no peace at home, the town looks like a jungle)

15. *Bí a bá ò jà bí ká kú kò*

(interpretation/explanation: Even if we quarrel, we should not be killing one another)

16. *Ọwó tí ò bá dilẹ̀ ni Èsù ò bè nísé*

(interpretation/explanation: An idle hand is a devil's workshop).

17. *Sùúrù leè se òkúta jinná*

(interpretation/explanation: with patience, a stone can boil).

18. *Bí ojú bá balẹ̀ áá rí' mú*

(interpretation/explanation: if the eye looks down patiently, it will see the nose)

The expressions above are some Yoruba sayings that explain the need to maintain peace and security and avoid wars in our immediate environment. Expressions like these also abound in other indigenous Nigerian languages. The expressions do not only preach peace and security, but they also point out the relevance of morality, tolerance and the value system of our society. Language is an important part of society; and if well utilised, its properties and constructs can be used as an effective tool for ensuring peace security and development in the society.

### **Communication for Peace, Security and Development**

Effective communication is another important tool that can be used to achieve peace and security in Nigeria. Communication is at least dyadic in nature and there are different forms of communication, all of which can be effective in maintaining peace and security to yield meaningful development. Interpersonal communication, group communication, organisational communication, inter-cultural/trans-cultural communication and mass communication are some of the communication forms that could be used in achieving peace and security in society. Bau (2016), while exploring how communication could be used in peace building notes that communication is beyond mere persuasion and behaviour change, but involves deeper mechanisms such as building trust, exchanging knowledge and stories, identifying problems and defining solutions. One aspect of communication that is important in peace and security is **dialogue**.

Dialogue is a process, a deliberate planned and sustained conflict intervention effort where people commit to listen, reflect and question with a curious mindset to seek a shared understanding in situations that touch on peace and security. Dialogue ensures understanding and it helps conflicting parties to agree. Without dialogue, peace and security cannot be achieved because dialogue helps in unearthing the grievances of warring parties as well as the proactive and reactive strategies that are needed for a nation's security.

**Dialogue** has the purpose of resolving conflicts and achieving peace through shared meanings, mutual agreement, mutual understanding and consensus. In addition, **problem-solving dialogue** is a dialogue style that is relevant in the discourse of peace and security. This dialogue approach ensures a long-lasting peace because it allows warring parties to communicate and iron out their differences in a manner that brings total peace. Ropers (2004) submits that the most ambitious approach is the problem-solving dialogue, in which the disputants organise their communication in such a way that they can systematically work through the substance of their differences. It is important to reiterate that the role of dialogue cannot be underestimated because of the way it uses communication and interaction to establish and maintain mutual understanding between conflicting parties. Since communication in all its forms can be used to create and exchange meanings, it can be used to achieve peace through peace talks and negotiations. Peace and security can only be realised through communication-oriented processes and approaches such as arbitration, mediation, negotiations, reconciliation, conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction, monitoring and advocacy. A lot of labour-related problems can be solved through purposeful dialogues between employers and employees without protests, industrial strikes, etc.

In order to maximise the benefits of communication, the style of communication is very important. Without bothering you with the theoretical postulations on style, let us take it as the deployment of the aggregate of the linguistic possibilities available to a language user at a particular time. We stand to gain a lot in this direction from the knowledge of stylistics in all its branches especially linguistic, pragmatic and pedagogical stylistics. It is not uncommon to hear people say: I didn't even mind what he said, but *the way* he said it! Definitely, a bad style can mar a piece of communication. To achieve success in communication, all barriers to effective communication: Linguistic, psychological, physical and so on should be removed or significantly reduced. Many homes have been broken because of the use of inappropriate style in spousal communication. Let us remember what the Yoruba say:

***“Aifèlẹ̀ ké ibòòsí ni àìjọ”***

(Interpretation/explanation: If *ibòòsí* (danger alarm) is pleasantly raised, it is danceable).

They also say that *“pẹ̀lẹ̀ lakọ́ ó labo”* (interpretation/explanation: *pẹ̀lẹ̀* (a ‘sorry’ word) can be said to scorn or appease somebody).

Certainly, we go into communication with the concept of ‘face’, that is, some social image and the desire to be approved of. A person confronted with a lot of face threatening acts will become uncomfortable. In the event of loss of face, therefore, restorative and mitigating strategies should be put in place as repair mechanisms. Paraphrasing the parlance of Dell Hymes’ *Ethnography of Communication*, we must know what to say, to whom to say it, how to say it, and when and where to say it.

### **Literary Studies for Peace, Security and Development**

Literary studies refers to the study of written or oral texts created imaginatively to reflect or ‘refract’ the society. It is a creative expression that entertains, convinces, enlightens, admonishes, and warns (Push and Johnson, 2014). Literature highlights the positive, the

negative, and the ugly aspects of society and frequently offers solutions implicitly. One of the essential features of the literature of any country, such as Nigerian literature, is the language employed for its expression. The language employed gives enough indication of the community or country where it originates (Teilanyo, 2004). In the traditional Yoruba society, oral literature was a potent medium of activating moral rebirth among the citizens (Ogunsiji, 2020). Literary writers use literature as a very effective and impactful instrument to convey ideas, thoughts, and feelings concerning social problems (Diyanni, 1997). Some literary writings in Yorùbá such as Kọlá Akínlàdé's **Owó Èjẹ, Taló Pa Ọmọ Ọba**; Ládẹjọ Okédìjì's **Àjà Ló Lẹrù, Àgbàlagbà Akàn**, have many useful lessons to teach us about crimes and crime-related activities in our society.

A very good 'classical' example of a literary work that is used as moral antennae is William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* first published in 1954 and which is probably the most important novel published in England in the 1950s. The novel narrates the story of a group of British boys shot down during some kind of atomic war and are marooned on an uninhabited island in the Pacific. Very soon, the boys begin to quarrel and their efforts to build an orderly society collapse. The story demonstrates how intelligence (symbolised by Piggy) and common sense (symbolised by Ralph) will always be overthrown in society by sadism (Roger) and the lure of totalitarianism (Jack). Also, the growth of savagery in the boys demonstrates the power of original sin. Simon, the Christ figure, who discovers the real 'Lord of the Flies' to be the head of a pig puts up on a stick to appease an illusory beast is killed in a terrifying tribal dance. The breaking of the conch, the symbolic object which the boys use as a means of communication and an instrument of maintaining order symbolises the fact that injustice, disorder and anarchy result whenever communication breaks down.

In a near total disaster that overtakes the Edenic island, Ralph is being chased to be killed and it is the arrival of a naval officer that saves the day. The story of the Golding's boys shows the inevitable overthrow of all attempts to impose an enduring civilisation on the instinct of man. The sadistic chase to kill Ralph is revealed to be the work of only a group of little boys and the irony is also directed at the naval officer on a rescue mission; for, his uniform, his submachine gun, his revolver, etc are only more sophisticated substitutes for the boys' war paint and sticks, because he is also chasing men in order to kill! So, when in the end Ralph weeps, he indeed weeps for humanity.

In the Nigerian context, recent literatures such as those produced by Ahmed Yerima interrogate the issues of peace and (in)security, among others. Yerima's *Pari* (2016) captures the Chibok experience. As a literary piece, it functions as a micro illustration of the North-East insecurity situation characterised by the Boko Haram insurgency. Through the language of the text, the problem of **governance** is brought to the fore as the despicable quest for national booty by the political class is underlined. **Governance** is prioritised as an endemic problem looming in the Nigerian nation. In the text, we find the interplay between **conspiracy and governance**, as Nigerian biggest insecurity challenge in the North and its devastating effects on the citizens, as well as what seems to be a possible solution to the menace, not just in the north but in the entire nation. Yerima's three plays **Hardground**, **Little Drops**, and **Ipomu** convey different phases of generic unrest in the Niger Delta as well as the reactions of the people of the region towards the unrest. While **Hard Ground**, replicates a sad narration of the Niger Delta region



traceable to skewed or lopsided policies of the government in its discriminatory processes of resource allocation, *Little Drops* conveys a gradation of the crisis as it moves from a lighter level to a torrent that engulfs both women and children and turning the dreamland into a monument of debris. The unbearable situation leads to a contradiction that is anchored on self-realisation by women who seem to be the brunt bearers of the crisis in the region, pushing to an end the unrest through a collective determination. And in *Ipomu*, following the government amnesty intervention, one sees a new and retreating Niger Delta that is revamped as against what the region was known for (see Edem 2021). This signifies that ‘*good governance*’ can trigger a rebirth of not just a new Niger delta region but a new Nigeria that we all crave.

## **Conclusion**

Peace and security are essential ingredients of development and in our search for peace and security in the country, it is time we looked more seriously in the direction of religious/civic education, language, communication and literary studies. In the light of the efficacy of language, communication and literary studies in fostering and upholding peace and security in Nigeria, proper attention must be paid to them by government, policy planners/makers, teachers, curriculum developers and so on. Language must be seen as not only a means of communication but also an important aspect of culture that must be well mastered and appropriately used. Nigeria is a land of diversity in many ramifications, including language. In our own context, multilingualism, as I submit elsewhere, should be seen as an asset and not a liability (Ogunsiji, 2007). Also, there must be effective communication devoid of prejudice, hatred and incitement that could lead to animosity between parties or groups of individuals from different tribal/religious or political affiliations. Our indigenous languages should be accorded due recognition, for much of our valuable indigenous knowledge is encapsulated in these languages. And through literary studies, students can broaden their worldviews as well as acquire the knowledge, skills and strategies of problem-solving, conflict resolution peace-making and job creation. All the students at the Secondary School level should be given the opportunity to experience literature.

The inclusion of peace and security education in literature and in our educational system will go a long way to enable the learners to have a sense of value re-orientation. But we must make sure that we expose the learners to the right type of literary materials. As a matter of necessity, the negative effects of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) on our culture(s) and processes of communication as well as the standard of our education should be curtailed. The social media should not be allowed to erode our cultural values and practices. For example, announcing the transition of a foremost Yoruba traditional ruler first on the social media is an aberration, to say the least. Also, the language and style of the social media should not be allowed to impact negatively on the language of education. Above all, we must educate the youth to shun evils and all crime-related activities and tendencies for peace, security and development to abide in our country.

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