



PROVERBS IN THE BATTLE AGAINST COVID 19 AND INSECURITY IN THE NIGER DELTA

Eluke Daniel Henacho and Isaac Eyi Ngulube

English Department, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

Cite this article:

Henacho E.D., Ngulube I.E. (2022), Proverbs in the Battle Against Covid 19 and Insecurity in the Niger Delta. African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research 5(1), 80-98. DOI: 10.52589/AJSSHR-M1KOJIT9.

Manuscript History

Received: 10 Jan 2022

Accepted: 31 Jan 2022

Published: 17 March 2022

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits anyone to share, use, reproduce and redistribute in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

ABSTRACT: *It is difficult to see any correlation between proverbs, songs, chants and COVID 19. It will take only an avid researcher to observe the surreptitious and subtle correlation observed here. The world of science has produced various vaccines to tackle the menace that is COVID 19 and governments the world over are doggedly fighting insecurity. No sooner have we found a vaccine than mutation and difficult strands of the COVID are springing up here and there, telling us that the battle is only half won. From the medical point of view the solution remains in distancing, washing of hands, wearing masks and observing COVID 19 protocols. Another area that is most effective in curbing this dreaded disease is in creating sufficient awareness. The people that are enlightened will not fall prey to the dreaded monster. This is where proverbs, songs, chants, myths, folklore, folktales, legends, traditional stories, and received wisdom become very powerful tools for checking this global pandemic. In the first instance, there is no nation in Africa without this troika (proverbs, songs and folktales). All we need to do is deploy them in creating sufficient awareness in handling loved ones affected by this death. The western world is depending on the television, radio, newspaper, magazine, social media outlets and other means of mass communication to disseminate information on how to deal and relate with this hydra headed monster. But these are luxuries that we in the developing world cannot afford, and even the few that can afford them, there is no constant light to power the instruments and enable us to get the message. Illiteracy is another big hindrance, a lot of us cannot use English effectively, and a lot more cannot understand messages spread via the medium of English. The most reliable means of communication with the people remains their mother tongue. Therefore, this paper argues that governments and agencies of government must embark on translating their messages into songs, chants and proverbs. These will resonate with the rural populace more easily than radio or TV adverts. The data collected and analysed in this paper prove the claim that language is a powerful tool in tackling insecurity and generating sufficient awareness for COVID 19.*

KEYWORDS: Proverbs, Battle, Covid 19, Insecurity, Niger Delta



INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to see any correlation between proverbs, songs, chants and COVID 19. It will take only an avid researcher to observe the surreptitious and subtle correlation observed here. The world of science has produced various vaccines to tackle the menace that is COVID 19 and governments the world over are doggedly fighting insecurity. No sooner have we found a vaccine than mutation and difficult strands of the COVID are springing up here and there, telling us that the battle is only half won. From the medical point of view the solution remains in distancing, washing of hands, wearing masks and observing COVID 19 protocols.

Another area that is most effective in curbing this dreaded disease is in creating sufficient awareness. The people that are enlightened will not fall prey to the dreaded monster. This is where proverbs, songs, chants, myths, folklore, folktales, legends, traditional stories, and received wisdom become very powerful tools for checking this global pandemic.

In the first instance, there is no nation in Africa without this troika (proverbs, songs and folktales). All we need to do is deploy them in creating sufficient awareness in handling loved ones affected by this death. The western world is depending on the television, radio, newspaper, magazine, social media outlets and other means of mass communication to disseminate information on how to deal and relate with this hydra headed monster. But these are luxuries that we in the developing world cannot afford, and even the few that can afford them, there is no constant light to power the instruments and enable us to get the message. Illiteracy is another big hindrance, a lot of us cannot use English effectively, a lot more cannot understand messages spread via the medium of English. The most reliable means of communication with the people remains their mother tongue.

Therefore, this paper argues that governments and agencies of government must embark on translating their messages into songs, chants and proverbs. These will resonate with the rural populace more easily than radio or TV adverts.

In Nigerian culture, everybody is his brother's keeper. Indigenous languages are, therefore, not only used for communication but also for intimate interaction (Machonu 207). The current wave of hegemony of the English language results in the internalization and engagement of foreign culture in our psyche. It signals the death of the culture of honesty, respect for human life, brotherhood, industry and hard work, self-worth, hospitality, camaraderie among others. When Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* was killed during the week of peace, he was banished from his clan for seven years. When he killed the Whiteman, his people deserted him. Such reactions were based on the people's culture of tolerance, self-control and ancestral opposition to senseless killings and disobedience to law and order.

No Nigerian culture encourages stealing by tricks expressed in modern parlance as '419', nor does it subscribe to stealing under any guise. None of the cultures tolerate killing whether through provocation or political motivation as prevalent these days. None of our cultures authorises child trafficking which is modern day slave trade after it was successfully abolished by white men who motivated it, in the first place. None of our cultures encourage leadership by exclusion whereby a clique of privileged few gangs up to oppress the underprivileged majority by virtue of birth, position and geographical region. None of our cultures fan the embers of enthronement of might and subjugation of the weak. How then did these ways of life come to us?



Let us not hastily push the blame on globalisation and modernization. We should accept that with the English Language came a presumed modern way of doing things subsequently overblown by globalisation. Ekah (4) points out that globalisation is breaking down barriers of ignorance in different parts of the world, orchestrating handwork, research inquisitiveness and industry and providing easy access to global information.

English has exerted tremendous influence on the cultural life of Nigeria. Through globalisation, we can make references to responsible leadership in the United States, Britain and other parts of Europe. Culture of discipline, good government, transparency, accountability, honesty, dedication to service and industry are prevalent in western societies where English predominates. In addition, law and order are not compromised while the drive for excellence is astute (Essien 23). There are also positive values Nigeria as a nation can gain from globalisation and the twin sister, the English language.

In Europe and Asia, language and culture are the bedrock of development. In Africa, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Arabic, are erroneously considered the proud symbols of development. Some parents want to acquire the colonial language of their environment and insist the children should acquire the same (Ajuwon 20). Preference for mother tongue is for domestic use and beyond this is disgust. The disgust is so grave that students who are offered admission into the department of Nigerian Languages against their choice struggle to change it. If they cannot, they forfeit such admissions.

English has successfully violated the balance and harmony in our society so much that the people no longer see themselves in their native language and culture. Instead, the foreign tongue is the mirror through which we look at ourselves. The Nigerian race is exposed to mortal danger because we spite indigenous languages. What the English language does is to change the mentality of the speakers. It changes the cultural values to the level of subservience and blind loyalty to a language and culture that enslaved us. The Nigerian Constitution has not help matters:

The Nigerian constitution stipulates that the English language, a second language in Nigeria, is the official language. Paragraphs 51 and 91 of the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria further confirm the status of English as follows: 'the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in the English language and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made.' The business of the State Houses of Assembly shall be conducted in English but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages spoken in the State. (*CFRN* 1979)

The State House of Assembly at Awka, Anambra State stipulates that Wednesdays are set apart for the use of Igbo language in their deliberations in the House (145). The surprising thing is that the members would dress properly in native attires on Wednesdays but the language used is more of English than Igbo. They code switch from Igbo to the English language.

Omachoun (124) cites Herbert Prochous as saying that there is a time when we must firmly choose the course we will follow, or drift of events will make the decision. Ekah opines that because there is Ajax Amsterdam in Holland, then it must be Ajax Cape Town in South Africa (12). Because it is the Premier League in England, it must be the Premier League in Nigeria,



as if, it would not be as strong and as versatile if it goes by the name Super League. Because there is a European Union, then it must be the African Union. Because it is Bush House in London, then it must be Bush House in Nigeria. Because it is a Prime Time Jamz in London, it has to be a Prime Time Jamz in Nigeria. Since there is a London Times, there must be a Daily Times. Even in local football matches, the names of big football teams in Europe are adopted and used in local competition.

One begins to wonder what “AC Milan, Manchester United, Chelsea, Barcelona, Real Madrid”, and Arsenal are doing in local football competitions. The mentality behind the blind imitation is that such names portend success, strength and resoluteness and adopting such names in village competitions, in their belief, gives character and strength to the players and the team. This shows that the African world view is built on the English language and its expression. Success is tailored towards the European approach. We no longer think independently.

Language: An Instrument

Language is used for communication. It is used as a medium of instruction and an aspect of cultural identity of a people; it remains a veritable tool for national development and socio-economic well-being of every nation. The moment a nation can feed its citizenry and provide job securities, there will be relative peace in that nation. Language can also be a vehicle for driving national development and ensuring peaceful co-existence. The data collected and analysed in this paper shall validly prove the claim that language is a powerful tool in tackling insecurity and generating sufficient awareness for COVID 19.

In the 6th Century, a Chinese philosopher and religious teacher, Confucius was asked what his first policy would be if he became the President of China? Confucius replied:

It is to correct language.

If language is not correct,

What is said is not what is meant;

What ought to be done remains undone

And the people will stand in confusion (1)

Today, it is no longer fiction that China and other Asian tigers which prioritised their use and development of indigenous languages are at the driving seat of the global economy, science and technology including ICT. Every developed nation in the world prioritises the use and development of its indigenous languages. Evidence abound that has proven this claim to be genuinely true. The Chinese, Japanese and Indians made laws that strengthened the use and development of their indigenous languages. And what is the end product today? Your guess is as good as ours! These nations have become economic world powers competing favourably with the West and Americans. Mandarin is spoken in China; it is also the official or national language of China. Hindi is also an indigenous language that is used as an official or national language in India. However, indigenous languages are usually empowered when they are legally-backed up to be used as languages of education. In this respect, they become both means of teaching and subjects to be studied. The Nigerian Constitution and its Policy on Education



would give backings or powers to this effect. If this works for other nations, why would it not work for Nigeria? On this note, Ofoegbu has this to say:

The success of India in this connection is indeed very instructive because it has a similar colonial history to Nigeria. India has more than 1,600 languages and a population of over 1.3 billion people. India adopted Hindi as her official language alongside English. She planned and successfully reduced the function of the English Language in India. The constitution recognises 13 languages for regional administrative and educational purposes... (64).

India remains the medical tourist destination of the world today. The Indians would not have achieved this feat if they had failed to develop their indigenous languages through education. Again, on the burning issues of science and technology, Ofoegbu harangues:

...unless there is a technological culture in a language, the seed of transferred technology will fall on barren ground and fail to germinate. One very good way of developing such a culture is to introduce science and mathematics in the child's own language at its earliest stages of education (65).

Ayodele Olaoye argues that local languages play vital functions in national development thus:

Indigenous languages are indispensable cultural legacies with which all forms of human interactions can be carried out. National development is the development of individuals in a nation. Individuals can develop educationally, socially, politically, economically and culturally through interaction with government agencies that disseminate policies through various indigenous languages. Development indices such as internal cohesion, integration, unity, economic well-being and citizen's participation in governance are promoted through indigenous languages (29).

This paper is wholly in tune with the position of this scholar. As a people, Nigerians failed to tap from the peaceful dispositions which are inherent in their indigenous languages. If they imbibe the peaceful thoughts and sermons inherent in their mother tongues, the acts of terror and terrorism which have torn them apart would have become a thing of the past. If the over 450 languages spoken and used in Nigeria are adequately empowered through the medium of education, there will be more jobs, literacy level will rise and the risk of insecurity will be minimised. The culture of peace is embedded in the proverbs which their indigenous languages are richly endowed with.

Going forward this paper examines the theoretical framework; data collection; the religious practices; Nigerian education; Nigerian politics; and the fight against terrorism. This paper holds the view that illiteracy, religious extremism, bitter politics birthed terrorism and destructive ethnic jingoism, which have threatened the peaceful coexistence of Nigerians over the years. The misunderstanding, misinterpretation and misapplication of the Holy Books of Islam and Christianity could be fingered as the cause of the rise of extremist tendencies which engineered or engendered terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. The zone is the hotbed of Boko Haram and ISWAP.



Our proposition is that if indigenous languages are used in teaching and learning in the school systems; teaching and preaching of the sermons in Islam and Christianity, and used as the language of politics, there will be a drastic reduction in the acts of terror and terrorism. The culture of peace inherent in the indigenous languages would perform the magic. The use of indigenous languages will forestall the misinterpretation and misapplication which is rife in the English and Arabic languages. Concepts or ideas are better understood and assimilated in the indigenous languages more than any other language. This monster of insecurity has grown so powerful and eating off the fabrics that held the people together as a nation.

The English language which is used today as our language of education, politics, religion, etc. is a carrier of the British cultures and/or American ways of life. Terrorism is alien to this nation. It is here because the imposed languages (English and Arabic) promote it. Until Nigerians begin to speak their indigenous languages which will entrench their cultures of peace, harmony, unity and oneness, security will continue to elude them. This assertion is verified by the Eleme and Ikwerre proverbs analysed in this paper. In all, to be able to solve COVID 19 pandemic and the security challenges as a people, Nigerians must rise to the occasion and begin to develop their indigenous languages, which will guarantee her national development, peace, security and integration.

The Framework

The theoretical framework which shall form the fulcrum of this paper is the CHAT. This is an acronym for the:

Cultural Historical Activity Theory helps people to understand and analyse the relationship between the human minds (what people think and feel) and activity (what people do). The root of this theory is traceable to a school of Russian psychology known as the cultural historical school which was founded by L. S. Vygotsky and Aleskei N. Leotiv. Vygotsky's insight into the dynamics of consciousness was that it is essentially subjective and shaped by the history of each individual's social and cultural experience. Since the 1990s, CHAT has attracted a growing interest among academics worldwide. Elsewhere, CHAT has been defined as a cross disciplinary framework for studying how humans purposefully transform natural and social reality including themselves, as an on-going culturally and historically situated, materially and socially mediated process. The core tenets of CHAT include that: Humans make, employ, and adopt tools of all kinds to learn and communicate. Humans act collectively, learn by doing and communicate in and via their actions. Community is central to the process of making and interpreting meaning – and thus to all forms of learning, communicating and acting. (Wikipedia)

CHAT was originally invented by Michael Cole and popularised by Yrjo Engestrom, to stimulate unity among adherents. Through the 90s the theory picked up a diversity of ideas connected to Vygotsky's work (Wikipedia). We now turn to analysis of data.



Data Collection

The Eleme proverbs were elicited from Chief Dada Nwolu-Obele, a native of Alesa. Each of the proverbs is followed by a brief indication as to its meaning and a note on its practical application in real life situations. Each is first presented with a close interlinear translation and then a free translation. These proverbs are attributed to animals, insects, reptiles, fishes and plants. They are structured in a way that reflects the Eleme man's understanding of the intricate and delicate balance in nature. Gunner (1) sums up the functions of proverbs in West Africa thus:

“Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten,” and Igbo proverb says the art of conversation and argument depends, in fact, on their use. By them the speaker shows his learning. Use of proverbs also enables the speaker to attack an opponent obliquely, without mentioning his name or the subject of the dispute. Proverbs express not only a people's inherited wisdom and code of behaviour (“If a child washes his hands, he will eat with kings”)[Igbo] but also imagination and sense of humour “If the earthworm does not dance in front of the cock, he will still be eaten, but at least the cock cannot say he was provoked”) [Yoruba]. (Cited in Ngulube 283)

Eleme proverbs

1. abura kɔɔ ajiye o'u jiiye ɔgbã mɛ epipɛɛɛ ɛbãrã eyaa ɔbɔ

Lizard say: PAST climb cotton-tree iroko tree CONN shallow pit AGR-NEG hand

The lizard said, although I have climbed the cotton and iroko trees, I am unable to come out of a shallow pit.

Application: No matter one's ability to solve great and difficult problems, there may be an instance where he may not be able to solve a seemingly simple problem.

Context: When a problem arises.

2. ajija kɔɔ ɛka'ue ekpikpii ɔkɔ dɔɛ nou

fox say: PRE MOD he: die bone fowl LOC mouth

The fox says that even though it is dying yet it still has the bone of a fowl in its mouth.

Application: No matter what adverse or difficult situation in which some people find themselves, they never let go of their 'bad' habits. For instance, some people are hell bent on maintaining the status quo at great expense.

Context: When a habitual drunk is ill from drinking yet still demands for drinks.



3. ajo kɔɔ okukula ɔɔ bee ɔ'aa nnɔɔ

oil palm fruit say: PRE together: AT hand plenty oil

The palm oil fruit says that they produce more palm oil when there are several of them.

Application: A united people will achieve more.

Context: A situation that demands collective effort.

4. akpɛ kɔɔ mpɪi mpɪi bɛɛ ochen

snail say: PRE slow slow FOC walk

The snail says slow and steady wins the race.

Application: We fail to attain our goals because we are often in hast. When we are hasty we are not able to foresee obstacles on our path but with planning and patience, a slow and steady approach, we will accomplish our desires.

Context: When hurrying is not required.

5. akpɛ kɔɔ onu dɔru ete

snail say: PRE mouth cling: PAST ART: tree

The snail says that its mouth is glued to the tree

Application: My mouth is busy; I am eating, no time for talking.

Context: When eating

6. akpɛ kɔɔ ɛgboogboo onuri bɛɛ rɛɛ ajimaaa ogigaɛɛri

snail say: PRE soft mouth CONN FOC climb thorning tree

The snail says it uses its soft mouth in climbing the thorning tree.

Application: We can use a soft and/ or soothing approach to overcome difficult people.

Context: When faced with very difficult opposition.

7. ebulu kɔɔ o'o kɛ ajɛ rɛɛ ɛgwaa

ram say: PRE LOC: FACT him CONN AGR NEG hair MOD: FUT place

The ram says that its neck hair will reach places where it is unable to reach.



Application: It is the tradition in Eleme for young wrestlers to tie hairy skins from rams on their waists as part of the wrestling costume, as wrestling matches rotate from one village to another, so the wrestlers move about with the ram's hairy neck costume.

8. egwii afii koo me reesie owo ogbere mi nto ree aje etiee ebo ogbere pu nje

rat (type of) say: PRE CONN AGR-NEG-go clear road AGR-NEG-time FOC him pass LOC road pass AGR-NEG

The rat says that it cannot participate in communal road clearing because it does not use the road.

Application: People who have no personal interest and need for a particular activity which demands general participation by members of the community or group use this proverb.

Context: Group work or activity.

9. ekikorebete koo ade ke akanje ki'ue katue okwaa weeje oso agwa ade ke aka'u me enu gorieru onu

peck hole iron wood LOC reach day CONN mother: die CONN boil mouth

The woodpecker says that on the day its mother will die, it will make her coffin with the iron-wood through pecking it and making a hollow space in it, but on the day its mother died, it had a very painful boil on its mouth.

Application: People who brag and boast of the great things they will accomplish in the future, very often meet with disappointment or disaster when the appointed time comes. The boil on the Woodpecker's mouth could not allow it fulfil its inordinate ambition.

Context: Warning against overconfidence.

10. bowa koo ekaraa wiaa me ree ebabaa ake

toad say: PRE TEMP-LOC stoop: PROG CONN FOC challenge wrestling bout

The toad says that it is just stooping for pleasure and not inviting an opponent for a wrestling bout.

Application: It is the custom in Eleme that in inter and intra-town wrestling festivals, the wrestlers from each town stoop in groups while the spectators stand to watch those wrestling. So, anybody seen stooping in the arena is regarded as a wrestler who is challenging an opponent. This proverb is usually said by anybody who wants to let those around him know that he has no intention of challenging his superiors in a fight or argument.

Context: When seen as an opponent or a rival in cause of an argument.



Ikwerre Proverbs

The Ikwerre proverbs were randomly collected from respondents in Omagwa, Omegle [Elele], Omerelu and Omuanwa. These are agrarian communities of Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State.

1. Kama aluji chi, akpeji chi

Translation: Instead of us to fight till nightfall, let us arbitrate till nightfall.

Application: It is better to arbitrate till dawn than to fight till dawn.

Context: When there is a family crisis or feud.

2. Qgwu ka nma, qwu bu oma.

Translation: To be enemies is better than to be desolate.

Application: It is better we remain as enemies and stay alive than to kill ourselves and become desolate.

Context: When there is violence or war.

3. Ba ano nu esii nyeowa, no otu aka nu esii nye ikne.

Translation: They stay at the homestead of a weakling to point at the homestead of a warrior.

Application: It is the weakling who lives to point at the desolate homestead where a warrior or a brave man once lived.

Context: Counselling when there is violence or war and emphasising the need to avert it.

4. A wuru nudo ya kanma

Translation: Better to live in peace

Application: Suing for peace every time is the best antidote to violence.

Context: In the event of holding a meeting to consider options of war and peace, the speaker emphasises the need to sue for peace all the time.



5. Ye ikpo ba ye'owa

Translation: A complainant is not a weakling.

Application: Insisting on a peaceful resolution does not mean or translate to weakness.

Context: The person who goes to complain about another should not necessarily be misconstrued as a weakling. He boldly wants peace to reign.

6. Ndu ye ikeh di ye owa na aka

Translation: The life of a warrior is in the hands of a weakling.

Application: The life of a strong man is always in the hands of a weaker person.

Context: This applies when the speaker advises on the need to maintain equality of life and existence. Everyone is important and plays his / her roles.

7. Okpe udo n'ahu udo

Translation: An advocate of peace will forever be visited by peace.

Application: Any person who talks about peace or advocates peace will always have peace knocking at his / her door.

Context: The speaker encourages his audience to always stand for peace as peace is priceless and violence is senseless.

8. Ezhi nu oro wee udo n'ahu oğbaghara

Translation: A household without peace will have crises.

Application: A household which does not preach peace will have untold crises ahead.

Context: In a family or community meeting, the speaker stresses the need for peaceful co-existence, harmony and unity for everyone. This will guarantee progress and avert violence or crises.

9. Oğū shie nri oma

Translation: War does not prepare a good dish / delicacy.

Application: No war is a good chef.

Context: When advising the younger generation to always sue for peace as violence, violent crimes or terrorism would never make them better.



10. Nye ikpo bu nye owa, ma n'ohu nye ike.

Translation: A complainant is a weakling but always a winner.

Application: A complainant is a weaker man yet a conqueror.

Context: When adjudicating on a case, the speaker will always advise parties to explore all available conflict resolution mechanisms before resorting to self-help which may be disastrous.

Analysis of the proverbs

The lizard said, although I have climbed the cotton and iroko trees, I am unable to come out of a shallow pit.

This proverb speaks succinctly to the insecurity problem in Nigeria today. The predicament of the Lizard is also the predicament of the Nigerian nation. The people are unable to deal with COVID 19 and the insecurity that is plaguing them. The good thing about the lizard is that it realises the magnitude of its predicament. The situation with Nigeria is that the nation lives in denial.

The fox says that even though it is dying yet it still has the bone of a fowl in its mouth.

The situation with the fox is pathetic, and the Nigerian situation is equally pathetic. Corruption is ravaging and destroying the economy yet the political elite are hell bent on looting and staking away the wealth of the nation into foreign banks. The people themselves look helplessly on, some even cheering the looters, hoping for crumbs. This is the root of the insecurity, the have nots are more in number, begrudging the looters and taking to arms.

The palm oil fruit says that they produce more oil when there are several of them.

The wisdom of the oil palm is what Nigeria needs to combat COVID 19 and insecurity. If every person contributes through spreading the awareness of how to deal with COVID 19, corruption, and insecurity; the battle is already half won. The English saying 'when we all play: we all win.' supports this claim for unity and oneness of purpose.

The snail says slow and steady wins the race.

Nigeria is not methodical or systematic in dealing with its national problems. The fire brigade approach landed us in the civil war. Nigeria has still not learnt its lessons. Nigeria fails to attain her goals because of failure to foresee obstacles, no planning and patience. The wisdom of the snail is imperative here; slow and steady approach, we will accomplish the nation's desires.

The snail says it uses its soft mouth in climbing the thorning tree.

The origin of our problems is comments from careless people in leadership. These careless utterances are provocative which leads to insecurity. We need the wisdom of the snail; use a soft and/ or soothing approach to overcome difficult people.



The rat says that it cannot participate in communal road clearing because it does not use the road.

The fact that Boko Haram is in the northeast should be a concern for all Nigerians, let us not behave like the rat who opines that because it does not use the road, it will not participate in road clearing. COVID 19 is a scotch that spreads rapidly, so also is insecurity. It will sooner or later reach all nukes cranes of Nigeria, if not checked in the bud.

The toad says that it is just stooping for pleasure and not inviting an opponent for a wrestling bout.

Nigeria lost well over 3 million people (mostly women and children) during the civil war; we are surprised that some elements in Nigeria are clamouring for war again. Let the wisdom in the above proverb guide us. Let us not invite disaster upon ourselves.

Instead of us fighting till nightfall, let us arbitrate till nightfall.

This Ikwerre proverb argues for peace and peaceful coexistence. In other words, it is 'better to live in peace' because there is no room for people with violent dispositions. The wisdom here is superlative, 'let us arbitrate till nightfall'. The next proverb 'to be enemies is better than to be desolate' further intensifies the first; peace at all cost. The Ikwerre peoples' proverbs: 'they stay at the homestead of a coward/weakling to point at the destroyed homestead of a warrior' and/or 'the life of a warrior is in the hands of a weakling'; also supports the argument for 'a peaceful disposition'. One wonders why we don't listen to the wisdom of our forebears as elucidated in these proverbs.

The analyses of proverbs above buttress the point that indigenous languages promote peaceful co-existence, mutual respect, peace, unity and harmony as against war, terrorism, crimes, criminality, senseless killing, terror and violence which have continuously threatened our national security. From the above Eleme and Ikwerre proverbs, it is clear that the culture of the Eleme and Ikwerre people was encapsulated in its indigenous language via proverbs, songs, myths, legends, etc. Our indigenous languages are not the mediums of violence which other languages and cultures promote. Of all the twenty proverbs outlined above, they share one recurring decimal which is promoting peace against the cultures of violence and war. Every true religion teaches and preaches peace and this is inherent in the wisdom of our fathers as enunciated in the proverbs. The culture of violence is alien here but has reared its ugly heads today because of foreign influences on our people.

Nigerian Language Education

Every education institution in Nigeria uses the English language for instruction. This is because the nation's constitution recognises and empowers it as an instrument for teaching all subjects and also a subject to be studied. This position is an anathema to our national development and peaceful coexistence. To worsen matters, the policy thrust of the government on language education proposes a number of ways to develop indigenous languages in the country.

Over the years, linguists and educators have identified well over 450 indigenous languages that are used and spoken in Nigeria. However, the policy thrust on language education acknowledges its overriding importance, thus:



(a) Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. (b) For smooth interaction with our neighbours. It is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French (10).

The NPE streamlines the role of language “in early child education” as follows:

(c) Ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will: (i) Develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages and (ii) Produce textbooks in Nigerian languages (12).

Although the government has these beautiful provisions on paper as policy documents, not much has been done to enforce or implement them to the letter. These relevant sections of the instrument outline good intentions of the leadership in developing mother tongues in Nigeria but the same government has failed to enforce its own laws made to advance indigenous language education in Nigeria. As noted earlier, the NPE exacerbates the whole situation. The NPE recognises the English language as a metalanguage, teaching language and language for specialisation at all tiers of education in Nigeria. In pursuance of the goal (of Primary education), the NPE provides that:

(e) The medium of instruction in the Primary School shall be the language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject. (f) From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and language of immediate environment (16).

In a related development, Olaoye reiterates the relevance of multilingual education as one which “is capable of eradicating illiteracy. It provides political awareness and socio-political stability”. (30) The illiteracy level in Nigeria which is on the rise per minute basis, makes our younger generation vulnerable and willing tools in the hands of those who conscript them into terror and terrorism. The illiteracy level is coterminous with the gullibility and vulnerability of the younger generation who easily fall prey to the whims and caprices of terrorists and violent merchants.

Here, it is evident that the English language has been over-empowered to dominate our linguistic space as a colossus. This is, however, an assault to the vitality and potency of Nigeria’s indigenous languages in teaching and learning. This situation brings to the fore the Six-Year Yoruba Primary Project (SYYP) (championed by Babs Fafunwa) where students who were prepared in indigenous languages scored more than those who were taught the same subject in an L₂ (English). In this regard, Omachonu has this to say:

Science and technology education, as it has been argued earlier, is more result oriented and thrives better in its indigenous environment, ... hence the need to retrace our steps as we move



towards the adoption of indigenous languages as mediums of instruction (57).

Furthermore, since every effort made in the past to give Nigeria an official or national language other than the English language, has failed, the nation seems to be enmeshed in a linguistic quagmire. The options explored or experimented in the past included the Esperanto or Wazobia option, Guosa option, Swahili option, Naija pidgin option (Ofoegbu, 50-57) have failed woefully, it is the thinking of this paper that Nigerians re-try the development of indigenous languages as this will enable her to surmount other national thorny issues such as insecurity. Boko Haram is a by-product of low-quality education or illiteracy. If we get education right through indigenous languages, we would have made some youths invulnerable to be recruited into such criminal gangs as Boko Haram, IPOB, MEND, ESN, Cultism, and other monsters ravaging our security outfits today.

The Religious Practises

This paper is of the firm view that religious extremism and fanaticism is one of the remotest causes of the high level of insecurity in Nigeria. The religions (Islam and Christianity) are dominantly practised in Northern and Southern Nigeria respectively; have birthed crises that metamorphosed into full scale terrorism. However, we must not forget that these religions use Arabic and English in propagating their faiths. Islam uses Arabic while Christianity uses Latin, Greek, Hebrew and lately English. These religions imposed western ideas and ideologies on the people of Nigeria thereby emasculating the people of their age-long African traditionalism. It is because we, today, practise a faith that is alien to our people through a medium which is not native, that we are entangled with western crimes and criminality such as militancy, cultism, terrorism and other corrupt practices. It is only when we fall back to our original root of African traditionalism and use indigenous languages adequately that most of the threats posed by these religions and cultures would be curtailed or curbed to the lowest minimum.

In *Isiburu*, a play written by Elechi Amadi and which dramatises or re-enacts the “egelege” (wrestling) festivity of the Iwhuruohna (Ikwerre) nation; Nyema, the dibia (native doctor) or traditional practitioner delivers a long speech (traditional sermon). He begins: *Isiburu pours out some akaneme into a cup and gives it to Nyema. Nyema rises, and offers libations throwing away bits of kola.*

NYEMA: Gods of the earth, eat this;
 Gods of the night, eat this;
 Ojukwu Diobu the fair, eat this
 Amadioha, king of the skies, this is yours,
 And you ancestors, small and great,
 Guardians of this place, eat this
 We go by orho and ogwu;
 The bird that would perch alone
 Should suffer a broken wing;
 He who says our yams will not mature;



His will not sprout
 He who slays for nothing,
 May his hands never leave his sides;
 Who pursues an innocent chicken will stumble;
 Our hands are empty and clean;
 We carry nothing,
 So if we fall we spill nothing;
 The frog leaps to safety while the flame
[He picks up the cup of akaneme and spills it drop by drop on the ground]
 Ogbunabali, drink this;
 Mini Wekwu, drink this;
 Ojukwu Diobu, drink this;
 Ali Ikwerre, drink this; (Act 1, 8)

The diction of Nyema, the native doctor, during the rituals of presenting kola nuts to the gods and libations go a long way to depict the wisdom, aspiration and desire of the Iwhuruohna people. They are agrarian in nature and believe so much in the natural laws and principles of peace and justice as symbolised by “owho and ogwu”. The use of language in this scene buttresses the communal existence of the people and their aversion to greed and weakness. The innocence which characterises their existence reinforces the peaceful dispositions inherent in the ten Ikwerre proverbs examined much earlier in this paper.

In Nigeria, Islamic extremism birthed Boko Haram, ISWAP, killer herdsmen and bandits and all these monsters have turned North East, North West and North Central zones into theatres of war. In the South, the dominant Christian population regrouped into OPC, IPOB, ESN and other militant groups to defend themselves. We believe that all these crimes were birthed as a result of religious extremism and fanaticism fanned by the use of languages such as Arabic, Latin, Greek and the English language. We challenge the adherents of these religions to push for the translations of their Holy Books (Quran and the Bible) into as many indigenous languages as possible. If this is done, the people will be at home with the true teachings of these religions. So many Islamic clerics and church clergy misinterpret their Books mainly because of the languages such books were written in. This misinterpretation is the bedrock of false religious practices and belief system that have engendered violence and terrorism as religious cultures practised in Nigeria. Those (mainly Arabians and Westerners) who introduced Africans to these religions do not exhibit the level of madness that goes on here all in the name of religion. In fact, Nigeria can be said to be the Religious Headquarters of the world; a praying nation. Of the truth, no single prayer is being answered because we move from one bad situation to another worse situation on a daily basis. Except corruption which is the fastest-growing industry in Nigeria, the next to that is religion. The wealthiest pastors are mainly from Nigeria. Prosperity has taken over salvation. The misinterpretation and misapplication of their religious tenets is a form of madness unto itself. If we begin to use our indigenous languages which



promote peace and unity, then, we would have got it right and submerge the spirit of violence and culture of terrorism. We must get back to the roots to get things right!

Nigerian Politics

Democracy, which is a major form of governance practised in different nations of the world, has found its way to Nigeria. The nation returned to democratic governance in 1999 till date. Since then, politicians and other institutions of the State have made use of the English language during campaigns and other forms of political discourse. The political parties use the English language in drafting their Constitutions and Manifestoes. Also, campaign songs and party slogans are all captured in the English Language. No wonder, there is usually a disconnection between the government and the governed in Nigeria. As a nation of over 200 million people, where the majority of the population are illiterate, the government imposes the English Language on the governed. This breeds a form of bad blood between the people and the government. The people are not well enlightened on the policies and programmes of the government because of the medium of expression. However, the acrimonious nature of politics played here remains a major security threat. If we stop the use of a foreign language which has caused them more harm and loss of identity, lack of trust and unity, then, we would have solved half of our security problems. The poor, illiterate masses do not see themselves as participants in government and politics. Until Nigerians learn to use indigenous languages in politics and politicking, bickering and hatred would not depart from us. The animosity in politics breeds violence and violent-crimes associated with politics, ballot paper snatching and political assassinations are all forms of insecurity bedevilling Nigeria. It is disheartening to note that the main political parties in the country: APC and PDP do not have any of their party documents translated into any Nigerian language. This neglect or exclusion of our indigenous language component to the workings of political parties is an aberration and one of the reasons why we have not got it right as a people.

The Fight against Terrorism

The failure of leadership, poor education, acrimonious politicking, religious extremism and ethnic jingoism are the chief factors which have worsened our security situation in Nigeria. The major terrorist groups in this country include Boko Haram, ISWAP, IPOB, ESN and UGM. They are all by-products of poor education and religious extremism, and ethnic jingoism as against national patriotism.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram has killed, maimed and dismembered more than an estimate of 200,000 residents in the North East, North West and North Central. At a time, they conquered some places and hoisted their flags. While this ravaged unabated, the South East region of Nigeria is being conquered by another terror group – IPOB and ESN (Eastern Security Network). They have maimed and destroyed the peace of this country.

The import of this paper is that the government should empower and enforce policies that concern the development of native languages and make them language of education, languages for implantation of science and technology, religion, and politics. If this is achieved, we would have solved our national security problems half-way through; local policing and the use of indigenous languages in intelligence gathering is the magic wand. The English language could still be relevant in this case as an ancillary language.



On a last note, this paper aligns itself with the thoughts of Okoh on the possible ways of solving our national challenges (mainly insecurity) through the use of indigenous languages. Okoh suggests:

...that Nigeria's problems are not necessarily insurmountable, if we do the right things, for the right reasons. For this reason, we emphasise that a major solution lies in the government's ability to properly educate the different language blocs of the country, to enable them to understand, even appreciate one another. Indeed, we ... argue that if every ethnic group in Nigeria appreciated the other for the right reasons, the spectre of distrust, which has recently caused much acrimony and violence, will be quite laid to rest...(290 – 91).

CONCLUSION

Developed Nations of the world such as Britain, United States, France, China, Japan, etc all empowered and used their indigenous languages. There are security challenges all over the world but developed nations tackle theirs squarely because they have developed sufficient intelligence gathering and gadgets through their languages. Security is more of intelligence gathering and being more proactive in approach. When people are empowered adequately, they get gainful employment and fend for themselves. When a mind is preoccupied positively, it thinks less of crimes and criminality. Quality education through indigenous languages would make our youths invulnerable to crimes and criminality. When one is well educated, one becomes less gullible to religious propaganda and political gimmicks that could trigger off violence or terrorism as orchestrated by religious extremism and intolerance.

The multilingual nature of Nigeria should be seen as a blessing and not a curse. If nations such as China, Japan, Malaysia, etc could harness their multilingual and multicultural diversity to their advantage, why not Nigeria? The more developed nations tackle their security challenges head-on. And since language is the driver of our peaceful co-existence, Nigeria has a point of duty to join another league of nations as the Asian tigers, to develop her own indigenous language as this could guarantee seventy percent solution to our security problems. Okon Essien caps it all when he said:

A country as large in physical size, geographically disparate, historically documented differently, depending on nationalities, linguistically and culturally diverse and complex, and woven into one geopolitical boundary as a nation-state by accident of history as Nigeria, needs reforms from time to time. Older nations like Britain, France, and the United State etc, are where they are today because they underwent necessary reforms. (1)

In all, the time to engage in the linguistic reformation of Nigeria is now when our indigenous languages could be enthroned into the linguistic crown of both official and national languages and has the English language play ancillary roles. However, the development of indigenous languages in Nigeria has its attendant problems which range from dearth of knowledge in the actual number of local languages in the country, poor investigation mechanisms, pitiable



funding of research institutes, insufficient amenities and lack of ideologies on the controversial nature of local languages in Nigeria. In spite of these limitations, indigenous languages have shown or demonstrated the capacities to be of immense assistance in tackling the insecurity problems bedevilling the country. They can promote peace, unity, peaceful co-existence and foster religious tolerance.

REFERENCES

- Amadi, Elechi. *Isiburu*. Ibadan; Heinemann, 2003
- Emenanjo, Nolue. "Functional Illiteracy: The Bane of National Development." *English Studies and National Development in Nigeria*. Ed. O.M. Ndimele. Port Harcourt: ELTAN & M & J Grand Orbit, 2010.
- Emenanjo, Nolue Ed. *Endangered Languages in Nigeria*. Port Harcourt: M & J Orbit, 2010.
- Emenanjo, Nolue Ed. *Empowering Smaller Nigerian Languages*. Port Harcourt: M & J Orbit, 2010.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NTRDC, 2004.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. (2010 as Amended)
- Ndimele, Ozo-Mekuri Ed. *English Studies and National Development in Nigeria*. Port Harcourt: M & J Grand Orbit, 2010.
- Ofoegbu, Cyril Okechukwu. *Issues in Languages and National Development in Nigeria* Onitsha: Mustard Printing, 2017
- Okoh, Nkem. *The Challenge of Englishes in Nigeria*. Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers, 2006.
- Okon, Essien. "Language and the Nigerian Reforms Agenda ". *Language and Economic Reforms in Nigeria* Eds. O.M. Ndimele, C.I. Ikekeonwu and B.M. Mbah. Port Harcourt: M & J Grand Orbit, 2006
- Olaoye, Anthony Ayodele. "The Role of Indigenous Language in National Development: A Case Study of Nigerian Linguistic Situation". *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 2013
- Omachonu, Gideon S. "The Challenges of Using English for Science and Technology Education in Nigeria". *English Studies and National Development in Nigeria*. Ed. O.M. Ndimele. Port Harcourt. M & J Grand Orbit, 2010