

# VERBAL HYGIENE AND ETHNIC POLITICS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF SELECTED NEWSPAPER PRINT AND ONLINE PUBLICATIONS

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## Abstract

The work investigates verbal hygiene as fundamental towards achieving unity, conflict resolution and sustainable development in a linguistically, ethnically, culturally and politically diversified Nigerian society. It tries to establish a connection between verbal hygiene and persistent implosion of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria and the debilitating consequences of such on virtually all strata of national development. Data were collected using purposive sampling technique from select Nigerian newspapers and other textual sources like television and social media broadcast that showcase the speeches of opinion leaders from different ethnic groups in Nigeria. The collected data were textually analyzed through the lens of Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson. It was found that a strong relationship exists between poor verbal hygiene, hate speech, electoral violence and ethnicity in Nigeria. This work also found out that the speeches of most opinion leaders analysed in this work are impolite and verbally unhygienic and as such impede the positive face of people from opposing ethnic groups, this constitutes serious threat to inter-ethnic relation and cohesion. The researchers recommend that every user of the English language in Nigeria must strive to use language consciously to achieve mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence.

## Introduction

The two words, “verbal” and “hygiene” may seem incompatible at first glance, judging from the fact that whereas the former comes from the language discipline, the latter may be located in the domain of sanitation and environmental cleanliness. However, the two have become a significant collocation in discourses relating to social interaction in both textual representations and face-to-face encounters.

The concept “verbal hygiene” seems to draw attention to some unwritten rules and norms of social interaction that appear to purport that utterances could be “dirty” and “unhygienic”, and so demand some kind of laundry and sanitizing before they are produced and transmitted to the addressee. Verbal hygiene is a relatively new concept in interactional sociolinguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis that seeks to emphasize the use of appropriate, polite and unbiased words to express our opinions, thoughts and intentions in every given situation. It is a term coined by a British linguist, Deborah Cameron to create awareness on the use of language which is culturally, socially and linguistically correct (6).

Language use has become a subject of serious enquiry among scholars and researchers over the years because of its functional dynamics, as a pivot around which all human activities are based. How language is used and abused in interpersonal relations point to the fact that despite the tremendous advances that have been made in the quest of making human relations more harmonious and hitch-free, humanity is still enmeshed in the whirlpool of rancour, conflict, fear and mutual suspicion. Crises, altercations, insecurity and wars have become more frequent and prevalent in the contemporary world more than any period in modern history.

Nigerian media have recorded numerous cases of verbally unhygienic expressions that tend to mirror the depth of ethnic rivalry and mutual suspicion as this work has established. The persistent cases of insurgencies in the Niger Delta, Boko Haram terrorism, herdsmen invasions, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) agitations, Oodua Republic, Arewa Consultative Forum, Middle Beltans group and numerous others, are dissident groups that emanate from the more recognized ethnic polarizations of Arewa, Odua, Ohaneze, Middle Belt Group and Niger Delta Development Commission that have consistently fanned ethnic rancour in Nigeria. People thus seem to unconsciously think, act and verbalize in line with these ethnic affiliations. Thus, it is against the background of the persistent implosion of conflicts in Nigeria and the debilitating consequences of such on virtually all strata of national development that this paper seeks to examine the concept of verbal hygiene and ethnicity in Nigeria.

In every human society, language involves producing and sending information which is often decoded by an individual through the medium of social context. Verbal hygiene does not mean that speakers should be economical with the truth but it does emphasize that speakers can express their opinions respectfully and politely without causing unnecessary frictions while engaging in a communicative process in the society. Cameron argues that language use is paradigmatically a social and public act, therefore, talking; writing and signing – must be carried on with reference to norms which may themselves become the subject of overt comment and debate (6).

Basically, every speaker who wishes to express opinions must strive conscientiously to understand the thought pattern or the social context of the group of people he or she wishes to communicate with. Social context as a political, psychological, religious, cultural, and educational background of an individual shapes and defines how people react to a given piece of information. These social variables constitute fundamental influences which affect our perception of the world around us. Other such social variables also include gender, race, ethnicity, educational status, sexuality, and so on. These factors shape the way a person reacts to issues and discourse linguistically. Due to individual differences, no two people can react and interpret information in the same way except when they share the same opinions, sentiments, beliefs and worldviews.

Therefore, it means that to live in peace and harmony, speakers and users of language must be mindful of their use of language, especially as it concerns resolving our deep rooted mutual suspicion and conflicts in the different and highly diversified social contexts of interaction. Maggio posits that biased language can powerfully harm people as amply demonstrated by bigots' and tyrants' deliberate attempts to linguistically dehumanize and demean groups they intend to exploit, oppress or exterminate (37). Adedimeji postulates that mere words can make and prevent wars, create understanding or inflame prejudice, form constitutions or destroy them, sell shoddy or superior ideas, justify humanity's worst actions or express their highest ideals (18).

It is based on the foregoing that this work seeks analyse selected media textual data to discover the extent to which verbal hygiene obtains in one of the most volatile social variables of

interaction in Nigeria: ethnicity, whether opinion leaders especially the politicians are verbally hygienic in their use of words especially while addressing issues affecting people from other ethnic groups, as well as how ethnic cohesion or differences are enacted by the selected newspaper speeches, reports and articles in Nigeria. It is assumed that utterances emanating from the high echelon of public office should be geared towards mutual trust and respect for sensibilities of the masses in order to avert crisis, conflict, mutual suspicion and ethnic tension in Nigeria, but from the data available to us, the reverse is the case. The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What lexical and grammatical features encode these ethnic related verbally unhygienic sentiments in the selected text?
- 2) What politeness strategies and face needs do these expressions enact in inter- ethnic relations?
- 3) How have these affected inter-ethnic cohesion in Nigeria?

### **Concept of Verbal Hygiene**

Verbal hygiene is a concept that denotes the use of politically, socially, religiously, linguistically friendly and polite words to express our opinions, ideas and views in a given situation. The issue of verbal hygiene is borne out of the need to use language more efficiently in the process of communication. According to Cameron, making assertion on language is an integral part of using it; and people's folk beliefs about various language and kinds of correctness are "a measure of their commitment to a discourse of value: a discourse with a moral dimension that goes far beyond its overt subject to touch on deep desires and fears" (13). From the above assumption, the idea of verbal hygiene can be examined during and after every communication process.

Another central idea to verbal hygiene is the notion of politeness. Lakoff sees politeness as a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interactions and transactions (34). Central to the explication of politeness is the concept of "face"; the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact". In other

words, face is “the emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize” (Yule 130). This explains the fact that everybody has face wants – defined as the expectations a person has that his public self-image will be respected (134). In this regard, politeness principle has a dual goal: acting efficiently together with other people and creating and maintaining social relationships. Furthermore, the concept of “political correctness” is another issue related to verbal hygiene. This involves choosing language which the user believes shows empathy with people of different ethnic groups, races, genders, physical abilities, sexual orientation, religious belief, and ideological positions among other things.

### **Ethnicity**

Ethnicity as a concept is an immensely complex phenomenon that portrays different perceptions. Osaghae sees it as a social formation resting upon culturally specific practices and a unique set of symbols and cosmology (23). Fawole and Bello adds that it is a belief in common organs and a broadly agreed common history that provide an inheritance of symbols, heroes, values and hierarchies, and conform to social identities of both insiders and outsiders (212). Ethnic culture is one of the important ways people conceive of themselves as bonded in culture and identity in closely intertwined relationships. As a social construct, Osaghae observes that ethnicity can be regarded as the employment of ethnic identity and differences to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict and cooperation (26).

Osai argues that as a social phenomenon, ethnicity has attracted enormous attention in social and political relations in Nigeria with special reference to relationships amongst the numerous disparate ethnic groups that form the agglomeration called Nigeria (43). It has been pointed out that practically every major national issue in Nigeria is cast in the mold of ethnicity, and this leads to contagious ethnocentric condemnation being a common feature in every national discourse. The reality of ethnicity in Nigeria is such that most Nigerians consider themselves firstly, as members of a particular ethnic group and secondly, as indigenes of a local government or state, and thirdly, as Nigerians, in that descending order of allegiance and loyalty.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored on Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson. As mentioned earlier in the conceptual review, Brown and Levinson postulate that politeness is a form of behaviour that establish comity; that is, the ability of participants in a social interaction to engage in discourse in an atmosphere of relative harmony (133). They went further to assert that politeness refers to redressive actions taken to counter-balance the disruptive effects of face threatening acts. In their theoretical position, the scholars attempt to give “a description of the principles that lie behind the construction of social behaviour”. They opined that “language use is part of the very stuff that social relationships are made of; as such, discovering the principles of language usage may be coincident with discovering the principles out of which social relationships, in their interactional aspects are construed. These include principles of agreement, modesty, tact, sympathy, generosity and approbation”(55).

In an elaboration of these principles of language usage, Brown and Levinson further identified the concept of ‘face’ as a requisite quality in all social relationships (84). The concept of face is originally conceived by Goffman as a speaker’s sense of linguistic and social identity (32). In a further elaboration of the concept of ‘face’, Brown and Levinson distinguished between an individual’s ‘negative’ or ‘positive’ face (84). A person’s negative face is the individual’s need to be independent, his/her basic claim to territories and his/her freedom from imposition. A person’s positive face however, is his/her need to be accepted and liked by others and the need to be treated as a member of the same group. An individual’s face wants may be threatened through acts such as orders, threats, warnings, requests, advice, suggestions, offers, promises, compliments and expressions of strong emotion, envy, admiration and all forms of utterances in which one feels “put down” in some way. In such instances, the speaker infringes on the addressees’ personal preserves and independence. Acts that threaten positive face wants include expressions of disapproval, criticism, contempt, ridicule, complaints, accusations, insults, challenges, reprimands, disagreement, mention of taboo topics, a blatant non-cooperation and the use of address/familiar terms in initial encounter, all of which infringe on the hearer’s need to be accepted, liked or to be connected.

Since politeness is a pragmatic phenomenon, it is influenced by contextual and situational factors, some of which are the social distance between the speaker and hearer(s), the relative power or control that speaker has over hearer, that is, the social dimensions of hierarchy and the ranking or size of imposition involved in doing the FTA in a particular culture and situation. The situational context therefore determines that “the greater the imposition, the more indirect the language is.” Moreover, as speaker’s power (physical, material or metaphysical) increases, the weightiness of the FTA diminishes. These classifications and descriptions are crucial to this study because they provide a framework for examining the social relations among ethnic group in Nigeria. They give insights into the relevance of politeness and verbal hygiene as powerful interactional strategies in maintaining sustainable inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria

### **Empirical studies**

Nzekwu and Nnuta discovered in their recent research on verbal hygiene in the use of the English language: a tool for unity, conflict resolution and sustainable development in Nigeria that the major cause of poor verbal hygiene in Nigeria is the heterogeneous nature of Nigerian society (74). They conclude in their studies that Nigerians tend to be divided among ethnic, political, religious, social and even economic lines. This influences their use of language positively or negatively as the case may be, just to protect the interest of the group one belongs to. They affirm in their study that lack of respect for people’s way of life and their belief system is always at the centre of verbal war, which if not curbed on time can exacerbate serious crisis in Nigeria.

Adibe in his study on ethnicity, hate speech and nation building discovered lack of verbal hygiene results to hate speech which employs discriminatory epithets to insult and stigmatize others on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or other forms of group membership(6). He concludes that hate speech is any gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. He stressed that the effect of hate speech is often the gateway to discrimination, harassment and violence as well as a precursor to serious harmful criminal acts. It is doubtful if there will be hate-

motivated violent attacks on any group without hate speech and the hatred it purveys.

Eghosa, Osaghae and Suberu discovered in their research that Nigeria is usually characterised as a deeply divided state in which major political issues are vigorously – some would say violently – contested along the lines of the complex ethnic, religious, and regional divisions in the country (28). The issues that generate the fiercest contestation include those that are considered fundamental to the existence and legitimacy of the state, over which competing groups tend to adopt exclusionary, winner-take-all strategies. These include the control of state power, resource allocation, and citizenship. As a consequence, deeply divided states tend to be fragile and unstable because almost by definition, there are fewer points of convergence and consensus among the constituent groups than are required to effectively mitigate or contain the centrifugal forces that tear the society apart.

In addition, Lewis and Bratton in their survey found that almost one-half (48.2%) of Nigerians chose to label themselves with an ethnic (including linguistic and local-regional) identity, compared to almost one-third (28.4%) who opted for class identities, and 21.0 percent who chose a religious identity (25)

## **Methodology**

Sample texts from newspaper reports and online news were selected for the study. The selected texts are credited to some opinion leaders from different ethnic groups in Nigeria. In this research, the word “opinion leader” has to do with influential personalities whose opinions are always relied upon by their followers mostly from their ethnic groups or their social class. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in the selection of sample texts. This is because only the texts that contain the targeted linguistic items: verbally unhygienic words and expressions are selected. The data were sampled from different online and print newspapers in Nigeria. The names of the newspapers which cut across broadcast, online and print media include: *Daily Star* newspaper, *Vanguard* newspaper, *Punch* newspaper, *News 24*, *Premium Times* newspaper, *This day* newspaper, *Sun* newspaper, *Nation* newspaper, *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper, *Naij.com* news, *Naija pundit* news and *The Seattle Times* online newspaper. Tape recordings of electronic news broadcasts were also used to augment the print data.



The reason for this option of sampling technique is borne out of the need to ensure that the target population is reached and covered because major political, religious, ethnic and social groups often express their views through a particular print or online medium that align with their philosophies or views. Secondly this technique was chosen to have fair share of data from different sources so as to make reliable generalization at the end of the research.

Analysis follows the tri-dimensional framework of discourse analysis suggested by Fairclough (1995) which include the levels of description of the formal properties of text, followed by the semantic interpretation and the meaning potentials of such textual items and finally pragmatic explanation of the sociocultural implications of such linguistic choices.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

The following texts for data analysis were drawn from both online and print newspapers in Nigeria. The names of personalities associated with the utterances, the newspaper and date of publication are indicated alongside the textual data. The sample texts are presented in accordance with the stated research questions.

**Text 1:** 2015: Dokubo vows to fight opposition, bullet for bulleton *Vanguard* News May 22, 2013

- (1) “We have to demand for what belongs to us. 2015 is not about Jonathan, but about our destiny. If you allow them, they will crush us when they come. I am ready for them, bullet for bullet.”
- (2) “The battle line is drawn, if our representatives in Abuja are trading off our destinies, we will not accept it. The enemies are at the doorstep waiting to pounce. Having Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC, ministerial and ambassadorial positions are not enough, we want to control our resources”
- (3) “When the enemies come with their gun to shoot us down, I will also hold a gun to fight back. The day will come, they will come for us, and there is no sitting on the fence. When they

- come, they won't differentiate between Urhobo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Isoko, Anioma, Edo, and other ethnic nations.”
- (4) The day will come, they will come for us, there is no sitting on the fence.
  - (5) “For every Goliath, God created a David. For every Pharaoh, there is a Moses. “We are going to war. Everyone of you should go and fortify yourself.”
  - (6) “Keep grudges and sentiments apart. We are ready to match them bumper to bumper,”

From the analysis of data in Text 1, Asari Dokubo uses the rhetoric of “us” and “them” to bring together members of his ethnic groups in solidarity as exclusion strategy against “others” from other ethnic groups. These others are described as “enemies”, who have “come with their guns to shoot us down”, who are ready to “pounce” on “our destinies” and “our resources”. He thereafter draws “a battle line” between the ingroup and outgroup along ethnic lines. At the mention of the word “battle”, what comes to mind is blood, destruction and death. The implication of this kind of statement is fear, intimidation and harassment in the minds of the people. Thirdly, the use of unguided and impolite words was again seen in the statements in data 17, “when the enemies come with their gun to shoot us down, I will also hold a gun to fight back”. These are symbolically loaded hate speech with different layers of meaning.

**Text 2:** Amaechi will be treated like a traitor –Dokubo-Asari *Punch* newspaper: May 6, 2013

- (7) “If Amaechi has singled himself out as a traitor, he will be treated as a traitor; there is nothing anybody can do about it. Now that we have come out of slavery, nobody can take us back into slavery, it is not possible...”
- (8) “I want to say that there will be no peace, not only in the Niger Delta, but everywhere, if Goodluck Jonathan is not the president by 2015, except God takes his life, which we do not pray for.
- (9) “Jonathan has uninterrupted eight years of two terms to be president, according to the Nigeria constitution. We must have

our uninterrupted eight years of two tenures. I am not in support of any amendment to the constitution that will reduce the eight years of two tenures that Jonathan is expected to be president of Nigeria.”

This text may be said to be a continuation of Text 1, a counter statement to the advocacy of a Northern president in Text 3. In this text, Asari Dokubo called Amaechi, the former Governor of Rivers State, who is supposed to be in the same ethnic “ingroup” solidarity with President Jonathan, a traitor. Amaechi’s political problems with President Jonathan and his support for Buhari has ignited the wrath of his own people against him because he has betrayed his people and transferred his loyalty to someone else from another ethnic group. This is a typical example of a statement that can be described as verbally unhygienic because calling someone who has not been proven by a court of competent jurisdiction a traitor is a verbal insult and defamation of character.

**Text 3:** 2015: North will confront Jonathan – Lawal Kaita – [www.naijapundit.com/news](http://www.naijapundit.com/news)

- (10) We hear rumours all over that Jonathan is planning to contest in 2015. Well, the North is going to be prepared if the country remains one. That is, if the country remains one, we are going to fight for it. If not, everybody can go his way,”

The data in Text 3 which is a statement made by Lawal Kaita, a Northern Nigeria elite is verbally unhygienic because of the explicit use of impolite expressions. The *us/them* rhetoric is also evident here in the politics of canvassing for the presidency. Knowing the politics that surround leadership succession in Nigeria which in most cases are skewed along ethnic lines, and knowing that the two personalities involved in this utterance do not share ethnic affinity, this explicit threat that “the North will fight for it” (ie, the Northerner becoming the next president) implicates that if Jonathan, a Southerner contests and wins election in 2015, there will be rancor of such magnitude as threatening the very existence and unity of the country. What this means is that it is only when a Northerner is at the apex of leadership in Nigeria that the country will remain one, otherwise “everybody can go his way”.

**Text 4:** Fayose's death advert on Buhari- *Punch* newspaper

- (11) Nigerians be warned! Nigeria I have set before thee life and death, therefore, choose life that both thee and thy seed may live Deut 30 vs 19.

The recent advert by Ayo Fayose, the controversial governor of Ekiti state, in which he presented photographs of some former rulers of the country from the North who died in office and then used innuendo to ask if retired General Muhammadu Buhari would suffer the same fate, has caused deserved outrage from the general public. This statement can therefore be described as a typical example of verbally unhygienic expressions.

**Text 5:** Muhammadu Buhari is "Brain-Dead." - Patience Jonathan. *Premium Times*, Thursday, October 8, 2015

- (12) "Muhammadu Buhari is Brain-Dead."  
(13) "Buhari is a car with a damaged engine but being packaged by Tinubu and his cabal whose only interest is the wealth of Nigeria".  
(14) Mr. Buhari is a "septuagenarian with fossilised ideas of how to run a government and social engineering."  
(15) Buhari is "an old plane that has been parked for long".  
(16) "You are 'a liar, manipulator, two-face hypocrite. You have egoistic craving for power and live a life only men of low self-esteem and intellect thrive."

In this text, Patience Jonathan used the most verbally unhygienic and face threatening words rendered in copious metaphors that make the expressions more emotive and persuasive. These verbalizations credited to the erstwhile first lady of Nigeria could be damaging to the individual referred to as well as lead to altercations more so when the participants are from different ethnic groups.

**Text 6:** “Buhari is truly brain dead, Fani-Kayode insists”. *Vanguard*, March 6, 2015

- (17) “To say that General Buhari is “brain dead” is an understatement and to suggest that he is suffering from dementia is nothing new.
- (18) “The First Lady has spoken in a courageous and forthright manner and, most important of all, she has spoken the bitter truth.
- (19) “Instead of crying like spoilt little brats and complaining, the APC and the Buhari Campaign Organisation should live with that bitter truth and leave her alone.
- (20) “She has every right to express herself in any way that she deems fit and she is entitled to her opinion. This is especially so given the fact that her husband, President Goodluck Jonathan, is in the Presidential race.
- (21) “Buhari’s general disdain for women and their opinion is well known. This is a man that said that he would scrap the office of the First Lady if he is elected President.
- (22) “If he is not ready to face public scrutiny and criticism for his often irresponsible, retrogressive, nonsensical and asinine views, he should quit the Presidential race and consider retiring from politics.
- (23) “Our counsel to the APC is as follows: leave the First Lady alone or prepare yourselves for a relentless verbal blitzkrieg, the likes of which you have never seen before.”

Another prominent political figure and a civil rights activist, Femi Fani-Kayode, takes up Patience Jonathan’s speech and infuses it with more caustic remarks against Buhari and APC, using such words and phrases as “dementia”, “often irresponsible, retrogressive, nonsensical and asinine views” and “spoilt little brats”. No matter how the speakers justify these epithets used to describe fellow humans, they are still not verbally hygienic and such users of language should seek for more accommodating words and phrases.

**Text 7:** “Go and die” Governor Adams Oshiomole tells a crying widow. *Daily Star* Newspaper November 28, 2013

(24) 'You are a widow! GO and DIE!'

The above statement credited to Adams Oshiomole, the Governor of Edo State is a declarative statement that generated a lot of controversy, heated argument and accusation from different human rights and women organizations in Nigeria due to the unguarded use of words by the Governor. This can be described as face threatening, verbally unhygienic and hate speech because the speaker did not consider the face, situation and most importantly the fact that the addressee belongs to the less privileged who needs the sympathy of the governor. Although the ethnic affiliation of the widow is undisclosed, this utterance is inhuman and uncalled for, whatever the context.

**Text 8:** "From Goodluck to Badluck: Ejike Mbaka". *Thisday* newspaper January 3, 2015

(25) The Goodluck met Yar'Adua and Yar'Adua died. Before you know it, the Goodluck met our oil and the oil had a bad luck and poured away, before we knew it, the Goodluck met our naira, our naira had a bad luck. Where are we going? What is the fate of this country? Shall we continue like this, we need change (shout of change from the congregation).

(26) The destiny of Nigeria is greater than Goodluck Jonathan. The Goodluck in Jonathan has become a bad luck to Nigerians. Whatever brought him in should send him back and let Nigeria be.

Some analysts have pointed out that since the above expression was made by a man of God that it should not be criticized. In the real sense of it, the statements contained in the texts are not polite. First of all, the popular Revered Father said that: Goodluck met Yar'Adua and Yar'Adua died...." This is a very strong and critical statement that suggests that Goodluck Jonathan actually killed late President Yar'Adua. All the statements contained in this text are spoken in bad taste and since it bothers on unproven religious and political sentiments, it should therefore be regarded as verbally unhygienic, capable of fueling inter and intra-ethnic tension.

**Text 9: PMB: 97% Constituencies Cannot Be Treated On Some Issues With 5% Constituencies.**

"I hold here a copy of the election results. Naturally constituencies for example that gave me 97% CANNOT IN ALL HONESTY be treated, on SOME ISSUES with constituencies that gave me 5%. I think these are political realities. While certainly there will be justice for everybody, everybody will get his constitutional right, but where the party and constituencies by their sheer hard work made sure they got their people to vote and to ensure their votes count, they must feel that the government has appreciated the effort they put in putting the government in place. I THINK THIS IS REALLY FAIR.

By the constitution, no state can be excluded from government so THERE IS NO WAY even if I want to show gratitude to those constituencies that heavily voted for me against those that didn't even vote for me. THEY HAVE THE PROTECTION OF THE GOVERNMENT. And I've made an undertaking that I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody. If I come CLEARLY and marginalize a certain group because they did not vote for me, then I have already contradicted myself and I'm sure people will be too quick to pick that against me." Sources: Vanguard Newspaper July 23, 2015

**Pres. Buhari says he won't treat people who didn't vote for him equally ...**

This statement, coming from the helmsman and the first citizen of the country, caused a lot of ripples in the media and the general public who see it as an obvious manifestation of sectional politics skewed in favour of particular ethnic groups against others. Such unguarded utterances are verbally unhygienic as it could stir up ethnic sentiments capable of destabilizing the country. One sees the obvious contradiction between, on the one hand, treating those who voted for him better than those who didn't, and on the other, "I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody"

**Discussion of Findings**

The two research questions posed in this work have been adequately addressed even in the data presentation in the last section. The first question seeks to discover the lexical and grammatical features used in

the textual data to encode ethnic-related verbally unhygienic sentiments, while the second is concerned with the politeness strategies and face needs that have been enacted among the participants in the use of the identified expressions. These two questions relate to each other in the sense that when an expression is verbally unhygienic, it is equally face-threatening to the addressee.

One of the remarkable grammatical features that encode these verbally unhygienic expressions along ethnic divides is the use of personal pronouns *I/we/us*, versus *you/them/they*. These personal pronouns are markers of grammatical cohesion referred to by Halliday and Hasan (4) as the cohesive device of reference. However, these innocuous reference items can serve very powerful rhetoric in the construction of ingroup and outgroup identities, with the ingroup represented by *we/us*, while the outgroup is the *you/they/them*. “*Us*” is usually represented positively while “*they*” is usually cast in negative mould in what van Dijk would call “positive-self and negative-other presentation”, where “our good is emphasized and our bad de-emphasised, and where their good is de-emphasised and their bad emphasized” (van Dijk, 2005: 102).

This rhetoric of “us” and “them” is replete in the textual data selected for this study. In Text 1, the *Vanguard* newspaper on May 22, 2013 reported the utterances of Asari Dokubo, a civil rights activist from the Niger Delta using this rhetoric of exclusion to dissuade the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta from voting for Buhari from the North. He tagged the North, “they” and the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta – Urhobo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Isoko, Anioma, Edo, and other ethnic nations in the Niger Delta as “us”. Here, “they” are the “enemies”, the ones “waiting at the doorstep ready to pounce” on “us” ... our destinies” and “our resources. He vowed to fight these enemies “bullet for bullet”, “bumper to bumper” because he claimed that they “have come with a gun to shoot us down and I (Asari Dokubo) will also hold a gun to fight back”. Secondly, the registers used in the expanded text where this extract was culled from are words associated with war. They include: death, battle line, crush, destruction, bombs, bullets, die, intimidation, gun boat, arson, devastation, ruin, enemies and others. All these words are lexical and grammatical items that portray the deep rooted animosity



and mutual suspicion existing among the ethnic groups in Nigeria and answer our Research Question 1.

In Text 2, this *us/them* rhetoric is carried a notch further by the speaker in Text 1 who pronounces a kind of estrangement on anyone from “our” ethnic group who dared to support an opponent from another ethnic group. Such a person loses group immunity and is branded a traitor as is the case with Amaechi whose support for Buhari and APC and not for Jonathan, his kinsman, earned him that name. “Peace will take a flight in Rivers State if Governor Rotimi Amaechi continues his romance with the Northern leaders who are plotting against the President...” It presupposes that one is expected to show solidarity only to a political candidate of one’s ethnic group; otherwise the verbal snipe will descend on the person. There is no gainsaying the fact that this type of scenario is counterproductive to sustainable peace and social cohesion.

This claim is buttressed in Text 3, where a political actor from the North, Lawan Kaita, responded in what seemed like a counter-attack and a verbal duel. His response to the “bullet for bullet” threat is that “the North will confront Jonathan... We hear rumours all over that Jonathan is planning to contest in 2015. Well, the North is going to be prepared if the country remains one. That is, if the country remains one, we are going to fight for it. If not, everybody can go his way”.

It is seen from the above verbal duel how the exchange of verbally unhygienic expressions can foster social disharmony, mutual hate and intolerance. Leadership positions call for judicious use of words, the likes of which is usually witnessed in developed countries like America where such expressions show political immaturity. For instance, in all the caustic remarks made against President Obama and his family in the social media during his tenure as American president, there was never any impolite retort from the president or members of the family. The two texts above (Texts 1 and 2) also show that ethnic prejudice is at the crux of Nigerian politics and is the determinant of who gets the support to be elected. Every ethnic group strives to project their members in political positions especially the highest position of presidency. It is at the root of the various campaigns such as rotational presidency, restructuring and confederation so that the powers of the president will be reduced and the various ethnic groups get a fair share of the country’s resources.

Text 4 exemplifies an extreme case of verbally unhygienic expressions directed at the present head of state. By forecasting someone's death in office in reference to his inability to rule the country because of his age should have alternative ways of expression. By referring to other Northern leaders who have died in office is to imbue the death advert with an ethnic prejudice. This self/other representation may also be ethnically motivated since the speaker hails from another ethnic group as the addressee.

Further to the answers to our research questions on the lexical and grammatical encodings of verbal hygiene in the selected texts, the use of semantically loaded metaphors were used in Text 5 and 6, credited to the erstwhile first lady, Patience Jonathan and Femi Fani-Kayode respectively to record a barrage of verbally unhygienic expressions directed at Buhari's candidacy as president of Nigeria. Such metaphors as "brain-dead", "a car with damaged engine", "a septuagenarian with fossilized ideas", "an old plane that has been packed for long" portend non-functionality and non-performance and could be described as caustic aimed at dissuading the electorate from voting for the candidate. Also such epithets as "dementia", "crying little brats" and others, no matter how justifiable in describing the participants so intended, do not give the speakers good credentials in the area of politeness.

Political actors in Nigeria tend to use their highly elevated positions and political immunity to hurt the sensibilities of their subjects. This assertion seems more apt in Text 7, reported in the *Daily Star* newspaper, Nov 28, 2013 and credited to the Governor of Edo State, Adams Oshiomole. For that statement to come from a leader shows inconsideration to the plight of the less privileged by our political elite. The statement goes against the grain of verbal hygiene and there is need for more explanation of the contexts of this utterance, more so at a widow who deserves empathy rather than castigation.

The statement credited to the famous catholic cleric-turned spiritualist, Father Ejike Mbaka in Text 8 has also been viewed through the lens of verbal hygiene in his statements against the former head of state, Goodluck Jonathan. The utterances are as impolite as they are face-threatening to the addressee. As a spiritual model to millions of

Catholics and non-Catholics alike, the questions are; what would a cleric, who is expected to be non-partisan, benefit from such provocative political statements when his role should be neutral and palliative? How can he direct his adherents to be courteous and respectful to their fellow humans when he himself is not living out these virtues by his examples? Is he expecting that by aligning with Buhari from the supposed “major” ethnic group to castigate the latter’s political opponent, he may gain political favours when he eventually ascends the presidential seat as it eventually turned out?

From the data in Text 9, it is obvious that the highest political office in the country, that of the presidency, is not immune to ethnic prejudice. It is believed that “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks”, for this statement to have emanated from the mind of the president about the ratio of allocation of resources: 97% as against 5%, for the constituencies that voted for him and those that didn’t respectively, is the climax of ethnic sectionalism in high places. It is verbally unhygienic and face threatening to the ethnic groups that have been so marked out for marginalization and can lead to political insecurity and rancour.

From the survey of textual analysis in this work, it has been categorically affirmed that there is a strong relationship between poor verbal hygiene and crisis, mutual suspicion and disharmony in interethnic relations in Nigeria. This study has discovered that people who usually complain of being insulted by other ethnic groups often use even more hateful words in describing the groups they feel have insulted them. The outcome of this exercise is that at the end of the day, there exist the widening of the social distance among the different ethnicities that make up the country and an exacerbation of the crisis in the country’s nation-building. This finding is in line with the postulations of Adibe (6) who described verbally hygienic words or expressions as speech that employs discriminatory epithets to insult and stigmatize others on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or other forms of group membership. It is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action.

## **Conclusion**

The role of academic research especially one located in political discourse analysis is that of a moderator, a referee and a mentor. In these roles, s/he acts as the conscience of the society, championing courses of social justice and equity with the aim of correcting social vices or creating awareness for their existence as cogs in the wheel of social harmony. Though such an endeavour may be viewed by the participants so spotlighted as demeaning to their ego, allowing them to go unmentioned will be tantamount to sitting on the fence and allow injustice to fester in the country.

The importance of using respectful, unbiased and effective language is fundamental towards achieving long lasting peace, unity, conflict resolution and sustainable development. This research has been able to prove that verbal hygiene is an important decisive factor and the instrument of achieving unity, peace and conflict resolution which has not been utilized efficiently in Nigeria. However, these researchers are not saying that commentators and opinion leaders should not point out the numerous ills pervading and drowning the country, perpetrated by political and social actors who make life unbearable for the citizenry, the way out should not be to compound the situation by using words and expressions that propagate hatred suspicion distrust and exclusion. What we are suggesting is that the criticisms should be constructive, verbally hygienic and polite without degenerating into *ad hominem* stance. The textual data in this study go to show a few out of the numerous unguarded expressions that are credited to our political and religious leaders which rather than achieve any positive dividend, may lead to chaos and overheating of the polity.

It is an unwritten fact that deep into the subconscious of most Nigerians is their strong attachment to ethnic affiliations. The politics of Nigeria has for long been played along ethnic lines and the way out seems illusory. Therefore, rather than fan the embers of ethnic divisions through their unguarded utterances, efforts should be made by our political leaders who want Nigeria to remain as one entity, to eschew ethnic favouritism, by treating every citizen as indigenes of one country, Nigeria; by allocating recourses and positions based on merit and capability to perform, and not on the basis of where one comes from,

what tribe one hails from, what party one voted for and other such divisive considerations.

This research work affirmed that the major cause of poor verbal hygiene in Nigeria is ethnic politics especially during the time of election. To this end, our leaders and indeed every Nigerian must show more love, respect and politeness in their utterances. When this is done, ethno-linguistic crises will be averted and socio-political apathy will be a thing of the past and Nigeria will begin to witness sustained unity, peace, all-round development and transformation.

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