

Using Language and Literature for National Cohesion



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Abstract

Aim: The quest for national cohesion is very important for any nation. This paper focuses on the way national cohesion could be achieved through the use of language and literature in Nigeria. Language is the means of communication, which also defines one's culture. Consequently, literature mirrors the society, using language as its tool.

Methods: The library materials which include text books and journals were used. Also, interviews were also done on students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Results: English is the language that binds Nigerians since it is a multilingual nation, but other languages could be learnt by individuals for national cohesion, which resultant effect is unity. Furthermore, English and literature could be used in the integration of national cohesion and the use of language and literature should be interpreted so that a large percentage of the populace in the nation would understand it.

Conclusion: Teachers, scholars, researchers, and stakeholders should contribute immensely in the interpretation of language and literature for national cohesion.

Recommendation: The study recommends that in order to provide national cohesion, people should not only concentrate on their culture alone, but embrace acculturation.

Keywords: *Language, literature; cohesion, importance of language and literature.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses language and literature as a panacea for national cohesion. Language connects people to each other in social relationship and allow them to participate variety of activities in various demands of social life, which include; identity, gender, class, kinship, difference, status, hierarchy, and politics. Literature represents language in action, being written form with utterance, select body of imaginative writings that could stand up to reason (Amen V. Uhunmwangho 14). This paper examines language, literature, the language of literature, cohesion, national cohesion and the importance of language and literature for national cohesion.

1.1 Language

Language was born in the counting days of mankind. This means that language began since man started living (Oghiator, 2005) Obodeh, 2018). To support the foregoing assertion, Genesis (10:5) in the Bible, posits that after the flood, the descendants of Noah spread out over the earth, that everyone after their tongue, after their families, in their nations. The Bible could be seen as the actual direct source of the conception of the nation as a people linked by birth and language. The Biblical cum modern conception of nation and language remain powerful despites having been weakened by various attempts to overthrow it (Uhunmwangho, 2000).

Bollinger (1968), Oghiator (2005), Oghiator and Ohen (2023), define language as a system of vocal-auditory communication, using conventional signs, composed of arbitrarily patterned sound units and assembled according to set when interacting with the experience of it users. To Sapir (1921), language is a purely human non instinctive method of communicating ideas, nation and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols.

Bloch and Trager (2017) in Oghiator et al. (2023) stipulate that language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means which a social group co-operates. Hall (1966) in his view states that language is the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral- auditory arbitrary symbols. Hall (1966) and Sapir (1921) have a similar view about language as purely human institution used by a particular society's culture. Robbins posits that language is a symbol system...that wholly based on pure arbitrary convention. To John Lyons, language is stimulus free. Another striking definition of language by Chomsky, (2007) is that language is a set (finite or infinite) of sentences each of a finite set of elements.

Also, Uhunmwangho (2016) in Oghiator et al. (2023) state that language in all intends and purpose, is a means of communication between a speaker (writer) and a listener (reader). It enhances social mobility and defines our humanness. He further states that language connects people to each other in social relationship and allows them to participate in a variety of activities in everyday life, it is a veritable aspect of communication which defines and marks its proficient trajectory (3). This means that language is not simply a tool of social conduct but the effective means by which human beings formulate models of conduct. Therefore, one could submit that language is the repository of culture and humanity's primary means of communication. The last stipulation is important in the functions of language.

1.2 Literature

Literature is a linguistic practice, culturally valued and aesthetically prestigious (Adagbonyin, 2017). It is a production of a profound imagination and linguistic freedom. It has a vast canvass

and a variegated collocation geography. As a work of art, its uniqueness lies in its creativity. Whether oral or written, whether in the form of prose, poetry or drama, literature is often seen as lacking rigidity in the structure, even as its mode of execution is language. Its deep connection with life may be viewed not only in terms of its content, but in terms of its characteristics language. That linguists pay close attention to the language of literature is because of the fascination this language holds for them. It serves as some form of run in towards the communicative core.

Literature is the art that uses language in its concrete form, beyond the pedestal (Oghiator, 2007). It is not what is written what has been captured in point. To appreciate a work of literature, it is necessary to know what the linguistic codes connote especially in their context of use, because the words are symbol of something from which meaning construes. It is the notion that Chapman in Kassim-Oghiator (2007) argues that meaning cannot be confined but they can be investigated through language codes arrive at styles used by individual writers to get at meaning objectively.

The literary artist may use indirect form of expressions to express their ideas. The artist may hide information under a symbol, a metaphor, or a simile. Figurative expressions in works of literature come from unconscious mind of the artist. And sometimes, the artist works with inspiration. Literature stands out among other writing because the choice of literacy artist and the overall language employed in a literary text is different from what may be called the ‘everyday’ conversational language of a speech community.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The library is the primary source of this research, as text books, and journals are got from there for the writing of this paper. Consequently, the authors utilized their experiences in use of language and literature in approaching students from different culture and ethnic backgrounds. Different research methods are used for this study. Apart from sources of information from the library, interview was also carried out with students from different ethnic backgrounds.

2.1 The Language of Literature

Language is the material of literature as stone or bronze is of sculpture. But unlike stone that has no life, language is a creation of man and is thus charged with the heritage of linguistic group (Oghiator 2007). She further stated that in literary language, the resources of language, are exploited much deliberately and systematically, for instance paradox, which forms the contextual change of meaning. Literary language also portrays irrational association of grammatical categories, such as gender and tenses, which are employed quite deliberately. This deliberate use of language can be employed to enhance national cohesion.

Language and literature are simply a tool of social conduct but the effective means by which human being formulate models of conduct and social involvement (Uhunmwangho, 2000). Language and literature are a veritable aspect of communication which define and mark their various needs that provide us with specific or diverse information. For instance, the literary artist communicates with language to portray his/her feelings and thought in the society, either in the form of prose writing, poetry, music and drama. All these are done for informative and communicative purposes. Language and literature are of common ancestry because as a vital distinct ingredient, language is to literature as oxygen is to air, perception of the realities of literature is shaped by the structure and emotional power of language. There is no use of

language that is not open to literature. But literature contains a higher incidence of special linguistic features than other uses of language. To Chapman (Oghiator, 2007), literature shows far more diversity of individual usage of deviant features to special effect than other uses of language or styles do in the exploration of meaning conveyed by language. Since language is from society, the writer of literatures uses language in the manner that is creative.

Some scholars believe that literature should be studied without the application of the scientific and descriptive methods of language and that literature could only be approached with all the literary devices for analysis. Yet the literary artist and linguist know that literature cannot be studied in isolation without recourse to language/linguistic. This is because the context of literature which is drawn from the society of the artist depends on language for its realization (Oghiator, 2007).

There are several instances when the beauty of word usage in literature contributes to the joy of communication..., it leads to the appreciation of language in literature not only language in its glottal use, the various linguistic stages by which the creative writer enhances his communication Nwogo in Yankson (1987); Oghiator (2007). Infact, there is no other way one can fully understand work of art except through an understanding of literary language, which the creative artist patterns language at different levels in order to create unique vision of life.

Since literature is an art from whose stuff is language, then it follows that one can employ different levels of language (linguistic methods) in the examination of literature (Oghiator, 2007). This could be illustrated with the famous Chomsky's nonsense sentence, 'colourless green ideas sleep furiously, which sounds semantically nonsensical at the surface level. But when put into verse by Bassnett-Mac Guire, becomes meaningful (Akwanya 1998). Thus;

Colourless
Green ideas
Sleep
Furiously

In this form, it is a text and no longer a nonsense sentence. As a text, could be given a full stylistics linguistics analysis, which involves language and literature. Therefore, literature should be seen as language use. For example, in the following text by William Wordsworth "Tintern Abbey", Language is employed in the expression of though in the text.

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with elevated thoughts
A sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused
Whose dwelling is in the light of the setting suns

And in the round ocean
And in the blue sky

And in the mind of man
A motion and a spirit that impets all things

All objects of all thinking things
And rolls thought all things
All objects of thinking things
And rolls though all things.

In the foregoing text, the poet uses language to express the presence of supernatural in nature and the controlling force of nature. The foregoing poem (text) could be critically analyzed and applied to the different levels of language, which is purely a linguistic analysis different from literary analysis or appreciation. The use of language in this form could be employed to enhance national cohesion in Nigeria.

2.2 Cohesion

The ties and connections which exist within a text are known as cohesion. Faurclough (1992) states that cohesion (cohesiveness) refers to how clauses are linked together into sentences and how sentences are in turn linked together to form larger units in texts. Oghiator (2010) states that cohesion is a factor that distinguishes text from random collection of sentences. This assertion could be adopted in the language of literature to proffer national cohesion in Nigeria.

Cohesion is the linguistic means by which a text functions as a single unit (Osisanwo, 2003). There are many cohesive relations that are used in any discourse. They include: anaphoric cata anaphoric relations, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, highlighting and exemplification. All these cohesive relations, (ties) are used in language and literature which also foster national cohesion.

3.0 THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

The use of language and literature could go a long way for national cohesion in Nigeria. Nigeria is a nation that is multi-lingual in nature, therefore the English language would not be possibly be used at the level of the grassroot, this means that the indigenous language and literature (most importantly in the oral form should be used in the villages where there are angry youths to cob major issues, such as; riots, rapes, killings, gansternism and other forms of social vices and conflicts.

A language enjoys public recognition when it is possible to assess public services and/or conduct business in that language (Uhunmwagho, 2000). Also, human beings speak because of a fortuitous charge profoundly modified by the social organization of their ancestors. In order to service and procreate, they found themselves needing to form cohabitation of a considerable size, language and literature then appear as a means for individuals to display their value as members of coalitions (Uhumwangho, 2000).

Language is a means of communication. It is a semiotic system (a system of signs). Since literature is the representation of language in either written or oral form, the use of language as a means of communication and as a sematic system will contribute immensely to the growth of

national cohesion in Nigeria. The importance of language has made Oghiator (2005) to say that ‘language is the sun, which is the centre of the universe. It is the tool of tools, where all learning takes place.

As a record of human experience, literature proffers in verse or prose that artfully wears together knowledge of the past with a heightened awareness of the present in ever new verbal configurations (Uhunmwangho, 2016). Moreover, literature is necessary for reasons, its ability to provide pleasure to readers, to help build experience, to reduce stress to help readers have empathy for others and to have sense of reasoning. For instance, Chomsky’s nonsense sentence colourless green ideas sleep furiously” became sense when put in a verse, which is the use of the genre of literature, using the levels of language for the analysis.

In summary, the use of language and literature would contribute greatly to national cohesion in the following ways.

- a. Education: Language and literature promote healthy competition among youths, encourage greater fairness and perception among individuals. Furthermore, national cohesion and integration could be enhanced through government schools, with students being admitted from every state and linguistic environment. It is expected that as students with others from different parts of the country, they will learn, appreciate and understand each other culture.
- b. Health care: This is done by educating individuals, communities, states and the nation, the importance of health and healthy living through seminar, symposium, drama, poetry and health talk and medical collaboration and teamwork across the states.
- c. Security: National cohesion and integration could be activated through acting of drama, seminar and workshop, for herds men/farmers clashes, militancy and other forms of insecurity that may manifest as cultism kidnapping, and other anti-social behaviours.

Consequently, Krystal (2017) posits that literature allows a person to step back in time and learn about life on earth from the ones who walked before us. He further states that with literature “we can gather a better understanding of culture and have a greater appreciation of them.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Language and literature will contribute to national cohesion which will reduce the occurrences of corruption and insecurity, thus promote unity, cooperation and oneness in the country. Unity is a resultant effect of cohesion, for without cohesion unity will not abound. Unity is the state of being in full agreement or a condition of harmony and accord. It is simply put as the sense of working together for the common goal of all. All these manifest with the use of language and literature.

There is a common language that enables people of different culture to communicate and interact, that is the English language. There is also need to find more common ground by using indigenous language for cultural symbols and practice of the people as regards to festivals, food, way of dressing, dance, greetings and many others, using the language and literature of the

people to promote national cohesion. Acculturation could also enhance national cohesion. With the good use of language and literature, national cohesion could be achieved in our society.

Language and literature are connected to every endeavor in human life. As such, this study highlighted the areas that could break down the religious conflict in Nigeria. These are: the use of semiotic language discourse; language of advertisement; the language of poetry and music; and the language of drama. The aforementioned therefore, ameliorate the integration of national cohesion in Nigeria, since they are part of language and literature.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The use of language and literature should be interpreted such that a large percentage of the populace in the nation would understand it. The language and literary scholars, researchers and teachers should be able to proffer the interpretations to foster national cohesion.
2. The study recommends that in order to promote national cohesion, people should not only concentrate on their culture alone. There should be diversification of cultures, which include dressing, food, language, inter-marriages, greetings, and dance.
3. This research also recommends that Nigerian citizens should shun all forms of ethnic discriminations. Different ethnic groups should see themselves as one Nigeria, and embrace unity in the school, workplace, religious places, markets, and farms. Citizens should endeavor to learn other languages other than theirs.

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