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The Language of Politics in Nigeria: Conflicts and Resolution

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Abstract

Being the most distinctive attribute of man, language has often exerted a lot of influence on the whole gamut of human affairs: political, educational, socio-economic, cultural, etc. Language mainly serves to form (or deform), inform, reform and transform man and his society (Adedimeji, 2005a), all of which are harmonious with the goal of politics, making the two concepts symbiotic (Adedimeji, 2006). This paper undertakes a descriptive appraisal of the language of politics in Nigeria and finds that it is marked by such features as rhetoric, bombasts, exaggeration, illiteracy, meaninglessness, lies, verbal violence, etc. all of which justify the Orwellian thesis that political language is designed to make lies sound truthful, murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind (Orwell, 1946). The conflict engendered by the linguistic behaviour of the Nigerian political class is analyzed as the paper recommends sincerity, politeness and seeking the necessary trouble of communicative competence to the politicians in particular and all language users in general.

1.0 Introduction

*All issues are political issues, and
politics itself is a mass of lies,
evasions, folly, hatred and*

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schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer.

George Orwell (1946).

One thing that has often astounded and confounded thinkers and scholars is language, the human-specific system of communication through conventional signs and representations. Though often taken for granted, a short reflection on language reveals the pervasive influence it exerts on every stratum of life and society. Language is man's all-in-all as a genetic inheritance, a mathematical system, a social fact, the expression of individual identity, the expression of cultural identity, the outcome of dialogic interaction, a social semiotic, the intuitions of native speakers, the sum of attested data, a collection of memorized chunks, a rule-governed discrete combinatory system of electrical activation in a distributed network (Cook and Seidlhofer, 1995:4). In our world of words and the concomitant information explosion, there is no keeping out language as all issues are language issues, to paraphrase George Orwell.

Language is enigmatic and mysterious because despite its being man's primordial and most often used possession [Man inhales 438 cubit feet of air, *speaks at least 48,000 words*, breathes 23,000 times, discharges two pints of perspiration and loses 7.8 pounds of waste in 24 hours (Read, 1999:4)]. Attempts at tracing the origin of language have yielded fanciful theories like the Scriptural Theory (language is God-given), the Bow-Wow Theory (primitive language was an imitation of natural sounds), the Pooh-Pooh Theory (language arose from the instinctive emotional cries of joy and pain), the Ding-Dong Theory (man has a peculiar faculty by which external impression can be given verbal expression), the Yo-he-ho Theory (language emanated from the noises of

a group of people engaged in a joint labour or effort), the Gesture Theory (language is preceded by gesture) etc (Tinuoje, 2003:11). We are persuaded to accept the Scriptural Theory as the most valid.

As language manifests certain peculiarities based on regional/geographical, social, educational and functional differences, language varieties are distinguishable in various contexts. As Halliday (1978:31) observes, types of linguistic situation differ from one another in three major respects: what is actually taking place; what part the language is playing and who is taking part. He goes further to say that these three variables taken together determine register, the range within which meanings are selected and the forms of which are used for their expression. The language of politics manifests this linguistic situation and it is marked by certain features that make it distinctive. This paper attempts a broad appraisal of the register of politics in Nigeria through a critical examination of some of the linguistic idiosyncrasies and semantic eccentricities of Nigerian politicians since the dawn of independence, especially between the second republic and now.

2.0 The Characteristics and Varieties of Language

There is a close affinity between man and language in the sense that language resembles man in many ramifications. Languages for instance, are born, they grow and develop, they change and shift, and they have families and 'social relations' (Adedimeji, 2005a; Lawal 2004). This intimate relationship and Siamese twinship inform Adedimeji's (2005a:194) contention that "man is language and language is man" as he goes further to coin "manguage" as the ultimate solution to all conflicts. By this, he means that all (social) problems are created by man and they can only be solved by effective communication and efficient messages.

According to Dinnee (1967:6-10), characteristics of language include its being *sound*. This means that sounds of language take precedence over their representation in writing and that all human beings produce speech sounds with the same equipment. Language is also *linear* in the sense that the successive movements of the speech organs manifest a fundamental linearity. This succession of sounds can be adequately represented by using separate signs for each sound and arranging the signs in the linear order of their production. Language is *systematic* as it is describable in terms of units that can combine in a finite number of ways (e.g. morphemes make words, words make phrases, phrases make clauses, clauses make sentences, etc). And language is also a *system of systems* based on the inter-dependence of its systems or levels. Like an onion bulb, each layer of language is covered by another layer and the totality of these layers makes a language complete. Thus, phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic systems of language are crucial layers and levels of describing and accounting for language.

Other characteristics of language are that it is *meaningful* (interest is only in language because each of its sound is linked to every fact of human life and communication is possible through it); it is *arbitrary* (there is not always a direct connection between the nature of the things or ideas language deals with and the linguistic units that are used to express them: "a rose by another name would smell as sweet" and onomatopoeic words are a rarity in languages); it is *conventional* (people use language according to fixed analogical rules and the same expressions are used to express same things and situations. It is this conventionality of language that does not allow communication to 'break down' in speech communities); and it is a *system of contrasts* (communication is possible because of the observed

differences in the sounds produced; if vocal symbols do not have contrasting features, human language would not be more than bleating, barking, crowing, mooing, etc. all which are peculiar to, and consistent with, the animals that produce them).

Besides, language is *creative* for it provides the analogical basis for man's ability to generate new sentences and understand utterances heard for the first time. The imaginative manipulation of the interlocking linguistic systems allows orators, poets and writers to explore human emotions and experiences. Languages are also *unique* in their own networks of sounds and signs and they are deservedly distinguishable. And at the same time, languages are *similar* and it is this similarity that makes new languages learnable. Language is also *symbolic*, complex and subject to change (Tinuyo, 2003: 7 - 9).

Varieties, on the other hand, are sets of linguistic items with similar social distribution (Hudson, 1996:22). According to Crystal, cited in Lamidi (2000:111), variety is any form of language which can be found in a speech community. Different types of varieties exist. Regional varieties are brought about by geographical locations (e.g. British English, American English, Nigerian English), Educational varieties are occasioned by levels of education attained (non-standard English, illiterate English, basic English and standard/educated English), Stylistic/Functional Varieties are borne out of appropriate choices for appropriate occasions (Frozen, Formal, Informal, Casual and Intimate Varieties of language), Social varieties derive from social classes that language speakers belong to (e.g. Pidgin, Educated and Middle class varieties of English are possible). Situational varieties arise based on the context of discourse by which language users select appropriately from the total linguistic repertoire available in language. Situational varieties are otherwise known as registers and they are

marked by their distinctive phonological, syntactic, lexical and semantic features (Alabi, 1994:235).

Register is a variety of language distinguished according to use; it is the situational variety of language. Registers are characterised along three dimensions: what is the language activity presented? How is language activity presented? What is the relation between the persons involved in the language activity? (Bamgbose, 1970:81). These three dimensions are described by Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964:90) as 'field of discourse', 'mode of discourse' and 'style of discourse' respectively. The type of language used in an area of study differs significantly from that adopted in another. Thus, we may talk of the language of engineering, language of medicine, language of law, language of sports, language of politics, etc. These 'languages' are still constrained by the geographical location, to some extent, of where they are used. Hence, the language of politics in Nigeria may further have peculiar features within the general register of politics.

3.0 The Language of Politics in Nigeria

In his essay that has become a classic (and which motivated the present study), "Politics and the English Language", first published in 1946, George Orwell discusses extensively the deterioration that politicians have brought upon English language. He laments that Modern English is "full of bad habits which spread by imitation" and that political writing is not just bad writing but political language (its speech and writing) is largely a defence of the indefensible. Thus, political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness (cited in Kennedy, et al, 1997:535). He starts the essay by hypothesizing that English language is in trouble and embarks on a rescue mission by launching attacks on his identified features of

political language: dying metaphors, operators or verbal false limbs, pretentious diction and meaningless words. At the end of the essay, he recommends the following rules for politicians and users of language as a panacea to the "slovenliness of our language" that "makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts" (p. 527):

- (i) Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- (ii) Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- (iii) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- (iv) Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- (v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- (vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous (p. 538).

Some fifty years since the first publication of the essay, English has suffered more deterioration in Nigeria among the politicians that George Orwell would cringe in utter disappointment if he were to know *the nonsense* that most Nigerian politicians have made of his "linguistic reform". While the general features of political language identified by him are upheld and/or foregrounded, the language of politics in Nigeria is discovered to be especially characterized by rhetoric, bombasts, linguistic exuberance, illiteracy, innuendo, exaggeration, lies, scathing remarks, verbal violence, and meaninglessness, among others.

It is significant to point out that language and politics meet at the threshold of power (Adedimeji, 2006:

251). Language is a powerful weapon and politics is itself concerned with the use of power (Bolinger, 1980; Fairclough, 1989). Indeed, men are engaged in *politics* as they try to *define* their positions in society, as they *struggle* for scarce resources, and as they try to *convince* others to accept their points of view (Anifowose, 1999:1, Adedimeji, 2006:251). The language of politics largely oscillates between deception and persuasion (rhetoric) (Jones and Wareing, 1999). In other words, the goal of political language is either to deceive or persuade in any given context.

Within the Nigerian context, as noted by Abati (2001:43), there is a "gradual movement from the sublime to the ridiculous in the use of English language in Nigerian politics". These sublime and ridiculous usages that feature in the politicians' use of English are those identified which are discussed/illustrated as follows:

3.1 Rhetoric

The Aristotelian definition of rhetoric is that it is "the faculty of discovering all the available means of persuasion" (cited in Ajadi, 1997:206) while George Campbell explains the concept in this light: "All the ends of speaking are reducible to four: every speech is intended to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passion or to influence the will". As earlier mentioned, the language of politics is essentially to persuade and deceive. It is to this domain of persuasion/rhetoric that the frontline Nigerian politicians belong. The language here is impressive and effective on the basis of remarkable linguistic competence. People like Tafawa Balewa, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, S.L.A Akintola on the one hand, and the likes of Bola Ige, Maitama Sule, Aminu Kano, Jerry Gana, Chuba Okadigbo on the other, belong here. Samples are thus:

The yearning for independence is a natural instinct embedded in the breast of man by nature. Had it been natural for man to live in slavery or under domination of others with perfect contentment, the human race would have long ago been exterminated.

Obafemi Awolowo

Down with man's inhumanity to man;
Forward with the people to a new dawn; We
stand for economic regeneration and political
re-surgimentation.

Nnamdi Azikiwe.

Indeed, examples in this category are
inexhaustible.

3.2 Grandiloquence or Bombasts

This concerns a penchant for jaw-breaking words and sheer linguistic flamboyance. Two examples here will also serve our purpose. The first is the icon of Ibadan politics, Adegoke Adelabu of the *peculiar mess* ("penkelemesi") fame who wrote the book, *Africa in Ebullition*. According to him (as cited in Omotoso, 1988:199):

An overdose of doctrinaire socialism, without a judicious admixture of progressive conservatism, of orthodox liberalism and of that centre-stabilizing process leads inevitably to communism, to totalitarianism, to regimentation, and to fanatical, ideological and doctrinal intolerance of opposition!

Another grandiloquent politician (or militician) is the Ikemba Nnewi, Odumegwu Ojukwu who often wants people to know he attended the prestigious Oxford University. His sample (cited in Okolocha, 2002:7):

Political followership in certain areas of this great nation is, to say the least, extremely supine. Followership has become such that our leaders are seduced and tyrants are made of them. We are sycophants. We even applaud executive imbecility. We genuflect mediocrity and defend the indefensible executive indiscretions.

3.3 Sheer Cloudy Vagueness or Linguistic Exuberance

This is another manifestation of bombasts at a different level. Sheer cloudy vagueness involves almost unintelligible expressions that are borne out of politicians' eccentricities. There is a deliberate attempt at playing semantic gymnastics and exuding unnecessary linguistic exuberance here. Nobody typifies this better than the flamboyant self-acclaimed 'Agadagbacharuzo of Aro-Ndizogwu', Dr. Kinsley Mbadiwe. His predilection for wordiness is unprecedented in the annals of Nigerian politics. "Where two words would do, he offered four. Where a typical, common-place phrase would convey instant meaning, K.O. looked for something rather quaint" (Okolocha, 2002:7). When he was launching the NPN (National Party of Nigeria) campaign for the 1983 elections, as the party campaign leader for the West, he declared:

When the come comes to become, they will know that we, the men of timber and calibre and of caterpillars and bulldozers have come to stop all stoppables and bulldoze all bulldoze-ables. Go and tell Awolowo that I have declared "operation earth-quake" in the Western Region and the grounds are shifting.

saying something meaningful and he bowed foolishly to every additional round of applause... Many politicians, and government officials, who are otherwise educated do not necessarily fare better. A well placed *oga* was reading a speech, I recall, when he came upon the word constitutive. He finally succeeded in pronouncing it, but he nearly lost a tooth in the process. A few minutes later, he encountered yet another word – I guess signification. When he could not pronounce it correctly, the man inserted the word significant and moved on. *Effectively, we are in the season of illiteracy* (emphasis ours).

3.5 Innuendo

Innuendoes are indirect hints and sly remarks that are often derogatory and sharp. As Nigerian politics is largely a battle (Former President Obasanjo referred to the 2007 general elections as "a do-or-die affair") where real and linguistic missiles are often hauled at the 'enemy' camps, a peculiar ballistic missile or "loaded weapon" (Bolinger, 1980) that is very effective and often employed is innuendo. Two masters of this feature are Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Owelle of Onitsha and Bola Ige, the Cicero of Esa Oke.

When President Shehu Shagari's political adviser, Dr. Chuba Okadigbo (who later became Senate President in 1999 and was subsequently impeached in June 2000), attacked the views of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as the "rantings of an ant" and the inconsequential words of a frustrated old man, the latter retorted: "So you do not like old age, may you not be old". Dr. Okadigbo surrendered (and some people still believe that the old man's curse came to pass). Also, when Dr. Ukpabi Asika as the administrator of the old East Central State earlier dismissed Dr.

Azikiwe's request as an "ex-this, ex-that" who should allow him to govern in peace, the great Zik was said to have replied thus (Okolocha, 2001:7):

Dr. Ukpabi Asika, son of ex-post-master, ex-lecturer and ex-administrator to be, no condition is permanent, so says the old mammy wagon that plies the unmaintained roads to East Central State.

The innuendo hit the target and he capitulated. And when the five political parties created during the regime of General Sani Abacha unanimously picked him as their presidential flag-bearer, Bola Ige was reported to have said that he was not surprised, afterall, the political parties were the "five leprous fingers of the same hand" (Igboanugo, 2005:C3). General Abacha was said to have felt terribly bombarded that he decided to award Bola Ige a life jail.

There was also a linguistic crossfire between former President Obasanjo and former Governor Orji Kalu (of Abia State). Obasanjo fired the first shot, an innuendo, on the 26th of November, 2004 when he said:

This government which I head will continue to fight against corruption. Is it ethically right for a governor to establish an airline while he is still in office? Is it ethically right for a governor to establish radio and television stations while he is still in office, not that he is investing in the public one?

Though the President did not mention a name, as typical of many (not all) innuendoes, the target had the pragmatic competence of decoding the meaning. So, barely a week after, precisely on December 2, 2004 he (former Governor Kalu), said:

I want to tell Mr. President that he should mind his words because in my presence, the president was signing, as president, Ota Farm cheques of First Bank, which anybody can cross-check. He signs Ota Farm cheques till tomorrow... He is building an international factory in Ota; he is building so many factories. He is the owner of the factory that is making juice in Ibadan...Afterall, he ran a failed farm before becoming the president... The president himself should underscore the issue of morality in his action of running a University and building Ota Farm... I challenge the president to declare his assets openly to the Nigerian people before 1999 (*Leadership*, 2005:4).

3.6 Exaggeration

Exaggerations are over-statements, otherwise known as hyperbole. Hyperbole also features prominently in the language of politics in Nigeria. The intention is to deceive. Dr. K.O. Mbadiwe still features prominently here. During the first republic, when he was defeated in an election between him and a pupil teacher, he described his loss as "a national calamity". In 1979, he frantically tried to be the Presidential running mate to Alhaji Shehu Shagari but he did not succeed. He threatened his party, NPN that if it did not grant him his wish, he would quit the party. He said, "If I leave the NPN, I leave with 6 million Igbo votes". Igbo votes, however, went to NPP (Nigerian People's Party) even though he did not eventually quit NPN.

Another example here is the former Deputy Senate President, Ibrahim Mantu (as at the time this paper is being written) who was alleged to own a hotel in Gambia. He said, "I'll commit suicide if proven to be owner of

Gambia Hotel" (*Daily Independent*, 2005a:C3). Promising to resign would have made the point, ordinarily. And this is taken as an exaggeration because some people who said they would 'commit suicide' if General Abacha did not succeed himself eventually did not do so when he unexpectedly died. And when a retired Major General, Tajudeen Olanrewaju said that General Ibrahim Babangida is "the only solution to Nigeria's problem", and "nothing on earth will stop IBB from returning to power in 2007" (*NewAge*, 2005a:7), he was not only being mendacious but also rehashing the characteristic political hyperbole.

3.7 Lies

As pointed out by Orwell in the quotation at the beginning of this paper, lies are almost synonymous with politics and they are told everywhere including Britain (see Okomilo, 2005:40). In her essay, "The Ways We Lie", Stephanie Ericson identifies and illustrates the various types of lies that politicians and language users in general tell. These include: the white lie, facades, ignoring the plain facts, deflecting, omission, stereotypes and cliches, group think, out-and-out lies, dismissal and delusion (Kennedy et al., 1997:337-344). For the purpose of emphasis, lies are an integral part of political language in Nigeria. Illustrating the lies of former President Olusegun Obasanjo, Kawu (2005) quotes him thus:

From the time I won the election in February 1999, I have gone round the world not once. I have met all the people that matter politically in the Group of 8 and Group of less than 8. Occasionally, I get words. They then prescribe that you must do this you must do that and one of the things that they wanted us to do is the reform and as you know, we have a very comprehensive reform going. Though Nigeria

was doing things differently as prescribed by the creditors, this has not translated to debt relief.

It is thus pointed out that former President Obasanjo had told lies to Nigerians about the "so-called" home-grown reform programme. It is maintained that the reform programme is not actually home-grown but another colonial strategy of "systematically eroding our nation's sovereignty". So, "the veil has now been lifted from the lies we have been constantly fed about 'home-grown' economic policies" (Kawu, 2005).

Lies have also featured prominently in the contradictory statements of Senator Chris Adighije (as well as his colleagues) in the N55 million bribery scandal that rocked the Senate at the beginning of the year 2005 (see Mumeh et. al., 2005).

3.8 Scathing Remarks

The language of politics is also laced with bitter truths or scathing remarks. Such truths or half-truths are hard on the targets that either explicit or implicit reactions are not unexpected. Two examples in this category are the words of Chief Sunday Awoniyi (in reference to former President Obasanjo) and Senator Emma Okpede (in reference to Senator Chris Adighije). According to Awoniyi, (2005: C6),

Every Nigerian community has a proverb which states in effect that "a rotten fish starts to rot from the head". Similarly, according to the Economist Magazine of London, most of our corruption are traceable to the Presidency. The fountain head of our corruption is traceable to the Spiritual Corruption flowing out of Aso Rock.

When a man is afflicted with spiritual corruption, he corrupts everyone around him. He prefers to bring near himself men who are tainted; men who are filthy, and morally depraved, and easily blackmailed or manipulated. Spiritual corruption makes a leader keep away from himself, the clean, the bold, the unsoiled, the prudent, the fair-minded and the truthful. A spiritually corrupt man is intuitively attracted towards impropriety rather than correct conduct.

In the well publicized N55 million bribery saga in which he was implicated by his colleague, Senator Chris Adighije, Senator Emma Okpede said before the Senate Committee on Ethics, Code of Conduct and Public Petitions:

It is very regrettable, it is very unfortunate that a distinguished senator, 60 years of age, much older than myself, was told to lie and he agreed to lie. How are we even sure that he was not lying to the committee yesterday? The fact that Adighije can admit that at 60, he can be pressured (sic) to lie and he did, is unfortunate. Once he can prove that I was in his house, then I can rest my case... What Adighije is doing now is a case of a drowning man who doesn't want to go down alone (Mumeh et al, 2005:A2).

3.9 Verbal Violence

While violence is defined as the use of physical, harmful force with the objective of intimidating, enforcing dominance or killing others (Akinwumi, 2005:139), verbal violence is the use of language to intimidate, enforce dominance or disparage others. In

verbal violence, the intention is to 'fight' and malign as the language falls short of fulfilling minimum decorum. It is deployed as a powerful weapon "that pierces the body more deeply with greater pains than does a dagger" (Odebunmi, 2002:191). The main features of verbal violence are insult and name-calling - by offensive words.

The best example here is also former President Obasanjo. His words, as cited in Balogun (2004:7) are thus:

Mr. Chairman of CAN, you are talking absolute nonsense, and don't provoke me. When I did invite people to Abuja in April, do you think I invited them for picnic? CAN my foot! As a Christian, what did Christianity teach you? Revenge? You are an idiot, a total idiot. And I have no apologies for that.

Another example is still former President Obasanjo's former Special Assistant on Public Affairs, Pemi Fani-Kayode, who seemed to have perfected the art of unleashing verbal violence on his boss' critics. A general description of his language is thus: In 2003, he reacted to a letter written by retired Colonel Abubakar Umar and called the writer "an opportunist". He is reported to have not only poured "venom on Achebe" but said he "was no longer deserving of the country" when Professor Chinua Achebe declined the award of "Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic" (CFR) conferred on him in 2004. In 2005, he is reported to have written a letter "dripping in Fani-Kayodesque" (bad and undiplomatic language) to the British High Commissioner in Nigeria, (*NewAge*, 2005b:7) and referred to President Obasanjo's critics as people "demented in mind, defective in hearing or jaundiced in sight" (cited in Onigie, 2005:8).

3.10 Meaningless Words

There are many lexical items that have formed part of political language in Nigeria and each of them "anesthetizes a portion of one's brain" especially in relation to the reality of life in Nigeria (Orwell, cited in Kennedy, et al, 1997:537). Such words and phrases are "dividends of democracy", "sustainable development", "rule of law", "justice", "free and fair election", "home-grown economic reform" "necessary sacrifice", "poverty alleviation", "power to the people", "in the interest of the Nigerian people", "jump starting the economy", "overheating the system" etc. These phrases have been used and over-used to deceive that they no longer possess any meaning, like the Orwellian "lay the foundations", "achieve a radical transformation", etc. (cf. Kennedy, et al. 1997).

Other features like evasions, question begging, euphemism, etc. further characterize the language of politics in Nigeria. The implication of all these is that the society decays with language in a bad taste. "If thought corrupts language", Orwell says further, "language can also corrupt thought" (Kennedy, et al. 1997: 536). So, with corrupt thought and corrupt language, it is not surprising that Nigeria remains a leading corrupt nation. Anti-corruption campaigns can therefore only succeed when individuals are cured from psychological and linguistic corruption both of which give a boost to social conflicts and crises.

4.0 Conflicts and Resolution

The language of politics in Nigeria has often engendered conflicts, rather than resolutions. Conflict is defined as contradictions arising from differences in interests, ideas, ideologies, orientations, perceptions and tendencies. It involves struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the aims of

the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values and goals but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (Adeogun, 2006: 89– 90). Such conflicts can be social, ethnic, religious, political or economic. Conflict breeds violence and the two types are often used synonymously. Adedimeji (2005b) lists some thirty four major conflicts in Nigeria between 1980 and 2002 (see also Usman, 2003:19 – 20). With a special focus on Kwara State, Salawu and Onimajesin (2005) also discuss "Political Conflicts and Violence in Nigeria 1999 – 2005" even though their discussions traverse the first, second, third and fourth republics. The obvious pattern in these analyses is that conflicts are increasing in Nigeria.

We maintain that the unprecedented upsurge in socio-political conflicts and ethno-religious violence can be traced to the failure of man to use language appropriately and effectively. "Language, the overall function of which is to communicate meaning, is the underlining factor for conflict in any human society and when man uses it functionally, the antidote to his problem is found" (Adedimeji, 2005a:193). The goal of politics, which is the attainment of development, is thus being eroded by decadent linguistic behaviour or vice-versa. In other words, if language is used functionally, conflicts will be resolved or at least, reduced drastically.

For, Thomas Hobbes in his *The Leviathan* (cited in Schorer, et al. 1968:463) identifies four uses and four abuses of language. Uses of speech are to register thought, to pass information across to others by counseling or by teaching, to interact with one another "so that we may have the mutual help of one another" and to please and delight ourselves and others. The corresponding abuses of language, evident in most of our

First, when men register their thoughts wrong, by the inconstancy of the signification of their

words; by which they register for their conception, that which they never conceived, and so deceive themselves. Secondly, when they use words metaphorically; that is in other sense than that they are ordained for; and thereby deceive others. Thirdly, by words, when they declare to be their will, which is not. Fourthly, when they use them to grieve one another... It is but an abuse of speech (pp. 463-464).

We maintain that these abuses of language and the characteristic conflicts they engender, which undermine the goals of politics can be resolved by simply avoiding the Hobbesian abuses of speech in politics. Specifically, we recommend sincerity (for "the great enemy of clear language is insincerity") politeness [which includes the rules of formality, deference, camaraderie (as identified by Lakoff, 1975), and the maxims of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy (Leech, 1983)] and improved education as well as communicative competence in English for the Nigerian politicians. Effective language use or constructive dialogue is the ultimate method of resolving the conflicts and contradictions that impede or frustrate national development.

5.0 Conclusion

Like human beings that exclusively use it, language is dynamic and polymorphous. This dynamism makes language to vary according to the context and situation of usage. This sociolinguistic phenomenon accounts for language varieties part of which is register (Hudson, 1996:45). Thus, there are variations in the language of law, language of medicine, language of mathematics, language of politics, etc. with each having

its stylistic and linguistic peculiarities. The language of politics is especially important because language and politics are symbiotic and man is not only a *homo sapien* but is as well both a *homo loquens* ('talking being') and *homos politicus* ('political animal') (Adedimeji, 2006:250). This paper thus investigates the language of politics in Nigeria and illustrates such features as rhetoric, grandiloquence or bombasts, sheer cloudy vagueness or linguistic exuberance, illiteracy, innuendo, exaggeration, lies, scathing remarks, verbal violence and meaninglessness, the classification of all which is not water-tight.

With reference to the conflict, both literary and non-literary, which has to do with struggle among the contending forces that eventually lead to climax and the eventual resolution, the paper suggests that the tension and crises that often typify the Nigerian politics and polity can be resolved through appropriate linguistic behaviour. This includes avoiding the Hobbesian 'abuses of language' and upholding sincerity, politeness and the necessary trouble of 'communicative competence' achieved through education as necessary steps towards what Orwell calls "political regeneration" (Kennedy, et al., 1997:527) from our prevalent socio-political degeneration. To achieve this communicative competence, it is submitted that every speaker, writer and politician must ask himself the following six questions posed by Orwell (cited in Kennedy et al., 1997:534):

What am I trying to say? What words will express it?

What image or idiom will make it clearer?

Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?

Could I put it more shortly?

Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?

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