

# Language and Literature: A Synergy for Peace, Security and Development in Nigeria

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## Abstract

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*This study explores the role of language and literature as strategies for peace and security of any nation. The study relies on critical and textual analysis of some selected texts which unveil language and literature as catalysts for harmonious socio-political existence and development of a nation. The study submits that literature and language use are pivotal in social emancipation, national consciousness and nation building.*

**Keywords:** Language, Literature, Global Peace, Security and Development

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## Introduction

Peace and tranquility are critical in the uplift of any nation. From time immemorial, security has become a major challenge impeding progress of several nation states. From Boko haram insurgency, herdsman/farmers clash, kidnapping, armed robbery, to Al Qaeda menace, among others, security agents have continuously devised means and struggled to checkmate activities of insurgents. It has been argued that the quest for peace, security and development has been the major target in every country of the world. At the inception of the United Nations Organization formed shortly after the end of World War II, the major aim then was to maintain international peace, security and to develop friendly relations among countries of the world and to ensure mutual cooperation in solving various human problems among the members of the organization. Despite the desire of every society to have peace and tranquility, so as to ensure development, it is now becoming more elusive. Several efforts have been put in place to make the realization of relative peace a reality at the Local, State, National and International levels, yet one cannot boast of the existence of peace in the country, as insecurity, threats to life such as kidnapping, assassination and Herdsmen attack now become regular features on the pages of our newspapers and major News item on Radio and Television, cum the social media.

Ibeanu (2006) sees peace from sociological perspective to mean “a condition of social harmony in which there are no social antagonisms, there is no social conflict and individuals and groups are able to meet their needs and expectations” (P.5). He opines that peace is a process involving activities that are

directly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specified societies and in the wider international community (P.10). Security simply connotes the protection against threats of fundamental values, while development implies a process of improving the conditions in which human beings live.

This paper addresses how language and literature can be used in enhancing peace, security and development in Nigeria. The three concepts, peace, security and development are interwoven and can be driven by language and literature in the society.

## Language and Literature: The link

Language is the vehicle through which feelings, opinion, thoughts, ideas, messages and experiences are expressed or conveyed. Nigeria is a country with about 515 languages, out of which 505 are living that are being actively used by those who own them –Kolawole (2006). Yet, it is sad to note that these languages have not been given appropriate usage. This situation has contributory effects on the part of the issues the country is battling with today, hence, the need to put language to effective use both English and indigenous languages, in ensuring peace, security and development in the country.

Olaoye(2013) sees language as an index of identity which serves as a repository of a people's culture, industry and exploits. According to him, language in general is a tool for national and global integration and sustainable democracy; hence, it is a tool for actualizing human ingenuity and creativity. Languages whether indigenous or foreign, are indispensable tools in the life of individuals, since no

aspect of human activities can be successful without effective use of language (Ayodele 2013). Jayeoba (2016) opines that language is a body of words and the system of their use common to a people of the same community or nation.

From Kin, Rodman and Hyams (2011:284) identify the essence of language in their argument that: The possession of language, perhaps more than other attributes, distinguishes humans from other animals. To understand our humanity, one must understand the nature of language that make us human. According to the philosophy expressed in the myths and of regions of many people, language is the source of human life and power.

Akinola(2008) argues that language is one singular significant factor of man's social existence. With language, common societal values, norms, culture of other forms of acceptable behavior can be forged and passed on to new generations, thereby sealing the nationhood of a people (Wikina 2003).

Literature on the other hand, has been given varieties of definitions by different scholars and their definitions explicate the same idea, thought in different forms. One thing that is common to most of their definitions is that it is an artistic work of art that expresses the mind of a literary artist. It is a composition or work of art, oral or written, which has beauty and value created by man and handed down from generation to generation.

From this definition, it is obvious that literature can be written or oral, hence literature in this paper refers to both written and oral literature. Oral literature here includes oral verses, music, proverbs, legends, myths, folk-tales etc.

Literature is a slice of life, an avenue to mirror the society, and that is why William Wordsworth describes literature as a subject that mirror life in order to teach some salient moral lessons which we see every day but refuse to recognise, accept and practice; it is an essential instrument to the growth of any human society and its culture.

Since literature is seen as a useful instrument in the society as a result of its numerous functions and importance, using it to enhance peace, security and development in a country like Nigeria is a right step in a right direction. The three genres namely Poetry, Drama and Prose are veritable instruments of achieving the laudable objectives of ensuring peace, koorderliness and security in Nigeria.

### **Language: A Tool for Peace and Security**

Language can be seen as a double edged sword, it can aggravate or prevent insecurity in the society, depending on how it is used. The way the leader uses language in the society can bring peace or chaos or turbulent situation in a country. There will be peace in a society devoid of hate speech and foul languages.

A particular ex-president of Nigeria once said that 'there is no ambition that is greater than a life of a Nigerian'. It is unreasonable to waste lives because of personal ambition, hence there is no need to pursue any ambition that will bring loss of life, disunity and insecurity in Nigeria. If others emulate the way language is used here, peace and unity would be guaranteed.

Language is a tool for peace, however, if used otherwise, insecurity, chaos and crises reign in the society. Some leaders in the past had used language to incite some set of people against others e.g .“Eyin ara 'A' won so pe ibo meta ledi You people “A” they said you gave me only three votes, Fun mi, ti ko ba ri be, e ko oko, e ko ada.....if otherwise take cutlass, guns and other forms of ammunicions,,,,,,

### ***The following day, riot erupted during which many innocent lives were lost***

Language occupies a pivotal position in ensuring Peace and Security in Nigeria. Adesope and Tiamiyu(2011) see the use of language as transactional and interactional. Transactional function implies using language to pass information from one person to another, while interactional function of language, sees language as the major tool for cultural transmission. Adedimeji (2005) argues that mere words that language produces can make or prevent wars, bring understanding or inflame prejudice, sell shoddy or superior ideas, justify man's worst action or express his highest ideas.

Asade (2010) opines that language has continued to play a vital role during peace and imbroglio. It has been the instrument for initiating war and establishing peace. Industrial actions that occur all over and initiating instruments, negotiation are entered through language and finally resolutions are reached through language. Language is a tool for promoting mutual understanding among members of a society and it is the key to the heart of the people.

Effective use of language by various stakeholders in the society, at both macro or micro

levels ensures and promotes peace, hence the paper argues that language can be used to ensure peace in the society, hence the need for the subtle use of language by both the leaders and followers. This implies that everybody must watch his/her utterances so as not to bring about anarchy and chaos in the country.

#### **Literature: As a tool for Peace and Security**

As we stated earlier, all the three genres of literature are veritable tools in enhancing peace and security in Nigeria. Various literary artists or writers have used their works to show or x-ray the society. Here, we argue for continuous use of genres to preach for unity, cohesion, peace and security in Nigeria. According to Amusa and Jayeoba (2013) Many Nigerian literary artists have used their work to project the life of their people and communities. Soyinka's *The Trial of Brother Jero* calls the attention of the people to the deceptive activities of the collaborated men of God whose behaviours and preaching do not conform with the tenets of Christianity. Others include Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, and Niyi Osundare in *They Too are the Earth* just to mention but a few.

Amusa and Jayeoba (2015) opine that there are literary texts that paint horrific pictures of war, carnage, avoidable loss of human lives and destruction of properties, fear of insecurity, lack of peace, hunger and denigration of the integrity and respect of the human person. Citing Osofisan(2006) "Women of Owu", using Yoruba lores, music and dance drama revealed the terror of war through the genocide of the Ife warlords and their allies against the Owus of Egbaland. During the war, men and women were killed in cold blood which Maye called the logic of war. This clearly depicts a state of insecurity and a total collapse of peace.

Iroh, E (1976) in his work "Forty-eight guns for the General" depicts how the underage who were forcefully enlisted into the army without any prior military training, and not properly equipped were sent to the war. The consequence was unpalatable, hence, there is need for peace and security in the country, so as to usher in the expected development.

In the same vein, "Witnesses to Tears" by Gimba(1986) shows a state of social insecurity, that is, kidnapping, abductions and killing of citizens. The story depicts horrible state of the Nation. Many school children were abducted from Nelson Mandela Primary School in South Africa, a replica of Nigeria's experience of Chibok girls in 2014. Literary writers should intense efforts of revealing the operations of

these evil minded perpetrators in their writings. It may help in reducing these acts and promoting peace and security in the country.

Drama is one of the genres that can be used to ensure peace and security in Nigeria. Shifan (2005) argues that drama helps us to understand human problems, feelings, challenges and relationships, which invariably would promote unity. Satire can be used to correct abnormalities in the society in a ridiculous manner e.g. "Rere Run" by Oladejo Okediji (1973) clearly depicts the clash between the workers and the ruling political class courtesy, dehumanizing treatment of the workers. The playwright exposed the cause of industrial disharmony or crisis in the society and its untold effects on the country's development.

In the same vein, Akinwunmi Isola's (2001) play titled "Kosegbe" catalogues the level of bribery and corruption, cum economic sabotage that transpires among the custom officers and highly influential personalities in the society (leaders).

Also, a movie titled "Bakassi Boys" x-rays the activities of militants in the Niger Delta. The play shows the grievances of the indigenes in the area as a result of negligence on the part of the government despite accrued monetary gains by the government through their natural resources (Crude oil), hence, peace eluded the area as the boys waged a serious war against the expatriates and oil companies existing there, which led to economic losses and had negative effect on the development of the country with many lives and properties lost in the process. Drama can be used to show the negative effect of such act on the nation. No peace can exist where security of lives and property is not guaranteed.

Another Yoruba Movie titled "Ijaya nla" depicts the rate of insecurity on Nigerian campuses. In the movie, groups of cultists are tormenting lives and properties on campus, creating a sense of insecurity, thereby making peace elusive. In the same manner, a playwright, Muyiwa Ojo in his play "Forgotten Dream" also uses drama to reveal the activities of cult-groups on campus and their menace. The essence of all these references is to show the menace of cultism, that its consequence is insecurity in the society.

It is noteworthy that Nigerian playwrights use drama to x-ray the society via analyzing the evils plaguing the nation and the level of insecurity and absence of peace in some quarters and proffering possible solutions to the problem, so as to make the society worthy of living.

Poetry as a genre can also be used to

enhance peace and security in the society. Poems of poets like Niyi Osundare, Wole Soyinka, J.P Clark, Bayo Adebowale, Olufolake Jegede and some notable growing poets, their works preach peace and security importance in the society while some poems also reveal the effect of violence in the society.

In a poem titled “Book A Ram, Kill A Ram” by Barth Akpah (2019), the poet laments the effect of Bokoharam insurgency in Nigeria, which is threatening the peace and security of the country with many lives wasted by the sect. He finally calls for the end of this act, so as to restore peace to the country. He uses the poem to lament the effect of the insurgency on the life of the people of Nigeria and calls for peace and unity.

Your sacrifice sings for our sorrows  
As you truncate our tomorrows  
In the wilderness of sleeveless hopes  
Singing bifurcations in our homes  
Your book is a ram. .... Book-a-ram?

You plant your druthers  
And breed our sorrows  
In the dark corners  
Of wailing trumpets  
Your book is a ram. .... Book-a-ram?

Your asphyxiation chases a million graves  
And stultifies our diversities  
You sacrifice your souls  
In the vain hopes  
Of celestial dividends  
Your book is a ram. .... Book-a-ram?

Listen to the lyrics  
Of our orisons  
One nation bound in freedom  
Peace and unity  
And your thunderous hurrahs

This poem depicts the effect of the activities of Bokoharam in Nigeria, yet it reminds us the dictates of our national anthem, that Nigeria as a country cherishes peace and unity. The message here is that it is in an atmosphere of peace that security can be guaranteed.

Also in “*Songs of Gadafi*”, by the same poet, in his collection, reveals the state of insecurity in Libya under the leadership of the dictator. Going through the above poem, which clearly depicts a state of violence, torments, suffering and torture in such a situation, peace is bound to be elusive. Poetry is seen as one of the tools that can be used to condemn such acts in our society.

Jegede O.T (2019), in her collection ‘*Treasure Pods*’, talks about the effect of violence and war in one of her poems titled *Gains of war*, where she calls attention to the futility of violence, war and all acts that may result in the shedding of human blood. The poet depicts the gory sight of human carnage as a result of war, she calls for peaceful settlement of various disputes as a means of ensuring peace in the society.

“His arrival proclaims doom  
The man in red, his hand on steel  
Your visitation force opens the tomb  
Innocent lives ready to steal...”  
“Handshake at table a day then set  
Each to groan and moan at his losses  
Regrets at last, dialogue best bet  
What a waste of chariots and horses!”

Also in another poem titled *Blood letting* by the same poet in her collection, she re-echoes the carnage of war and the need for peaceful resolution. The horrors of war are portrayed; the dirges for the dead ones, the orphans of war and the shattered utilities. The poet laments the effects of war on the society which she traced to the ego on the part of the protagonist.

“Dirges from your devastated land,  
Reach the high heavens up above,  
Emanating from war worn widows.  
Fettered orphans' ghostly features  
Litter all streets, lanes and valleys...”  
“Pacific ocean unfit to cleanse  
Innocent blood flooding the streets,  
Vultures feast at Canom's beckon  
Futile feuds birthing Tsunami...”

Literature can be used as one of the instruments of enhancing peace and security in the society. For example, songs and music can be used to foster unity as seen below:

<b>Nigeria yi ti gbogbo wa ni</b> <b>Ko ma gbodo baje</b> <b>Tori ko si ibo mi ran</b> <b>Ti a le lo</b> <b>Ajo ko da bi ile</b> <b>Eje ki a so owo po</b> <b>Ki a fi imo so kan</b> <b>Gbe, ki emi gbe</b>	<b>Nigeria belongs to all of us</b> <b>it must not spoil</b> <b>because there is no place</b> <b>that we can go</b> <b>foreign land is not like home</b> <b>let's jointly lift</b> <b>Nigeria up</b> <b>lift it and let me lift it</b>
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This song preaches the need for unity and calls on Nigerians to remain intact as a nation where peace reigns. In another popular song titled *Laye Olugbon*, which sings:

<b>Laye Olugbon</b> <b>Mo daborun meje</b> <b>E o ma fiwe lorin</b> <b>Laye Aresa</b> <b>Mo daborin mefa</b> <b>E o ma fiwe lorin</b> <b>O daye Alabi</b> <b>Mo ra cocoa</b> <b>Mo raran</b> <b>Mo ra sanyan, baba aso</b> <b>Afole</b> <b>Lolepe ile yii o dun</b> <b>Afole</b>	<b>In Olugbon's reign,</b> <b>I bought seven headgears</b> <b>Please note my song</b> <b>In Aresa's reign,</b> <b>I bought six headgears</b> <b>Please note my song</b> <b>Now, in Alabi's reign,</b> <b>I bought cocoa,</b> <b>I bought velvet dresses,</b> <b>I bought sanyan, the King of all clothes</b> <b>Only a lazy person</b> <b>Will say this land is not sweet</b> <b>Only a lazy person</b>
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This song shows that in a peaceful atmosphere, development is inevitable, as this can be seen in different eras of the kings that reference were made to in the song.

Similarly, Onyeeka Onwenu also re-echoes this in one of her albums titled "One Love Keep Us Together" in which she also emphasizes the need for unity among different tribes, races, religions etc. in the country, stressing that our strength as a nation rest on unity and cohesion.

Incantation is another oral- literature tool

that can be used in the maintenance of peace and security. Our position in this paper is that Yoruba incantation popularly called "Ofo" could be used for the maintenance of peace and security. We have tried the use of modern sophisticated weapons like guns, bullets, cartridges to fight the Bokoharam, Kidnappers, Herdsmen, Niger-Delta Militants etc. The security personnel should learn how to use various incantations to check the excesses of these people. If incantations are used, it will reduce the loss of lives. To fight Bokoharam. Incantation like

<b>Firifiri loju n ri mu</b> <b>Booboo laguntan n wo</b> <b>Ewure kii gbenu ole ko riran</b> <b>Aguntan kii gbenu ole ko riran</b> <b>Bi oru, bi oru nii seku inu agbe</b> <b>Bi tatanbiri ba lugi</b> <b>A a fe e ku ni</b>	<b>The eyes cannot see the nose clearly</b> <b>The sheep look dull always</b> <b>The goat cannot see inside the mother</b> <b>A rat inside the guard will see cloudily</b> <b>If Tatanbiri porches on a tree</b> <b>It will disappear immediately</b>
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On chanting of this incantation, the troupe will disappear from the trouble zone instantly without any record of any calamity (Nwolise 2014).

In socio-linguistics, there is no way we can talk of language without reference to its use in the society, hence, the need to consider some popular slogans that emphasize the need for peace in a society. Such slogans include:

“No peace no development”

“Jaw jaw is better than war war”

“Ogun ko da bi iyan” meaning war is not like pounded yam

“Ogun a maa so ile ola dahoro” meaning war makes the house of the rich desolate

The use of language in this manner frowns at war and absence of peace in the society because it is believed that this is inimical to the progress and development of the society.

### **Recommendations**

To achieve the desire for peace, security and development in Nigeria, based on insights gotten from this paper, the following recommendations are made:

- The leaders and followers should use language appropriately in different situations, devoid of abuse and hatred that can cause disharmony and friction in the country.
- The literary artists, writers must continuously x-ray the society objectively to capture the happenings in the society, project in their writings and to ensure that sanity reigns and unity is achieved.
- The idea of bi-lingualism and multi-lingualism in Nigerian language context should be encouraged. This will promote cordiality and understanding among the nationals, since it will encourage the speaker to speak at least one additional language apart from his/her own language.
- The literary artists be it poets, playwrights or novelists should strive more to use their works to promote peaceful co-existence, security and development, and such can be recommended to students in schools.
- The musicians should also use their songs to teach morals and preach peaceful co-existence of people in the society.
- There is the need to review our educational curriculum to reflect the new realities. This becomes necessary, so as to introduce new area of study that will inculcate the right national values in our children in the areas of language, literature and cultural development for the achievement of

peaceful society and secured communities, where love reigns supreme.

### **Conclusion**

It is our belief that this paper has explored the roles of language and literature in attaining peace, security and development in Nigeria. There has been marginal interest on how language and literature play pivotal role in advancing global peace, security and nation building. The study concludes that peace is the backbone of growth and development in most nations of the world. Engaging the resources of the languages and literature in Nigeria is one of the instruments that can be employed to facilitate peace.

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