Conflict Management Strategies: A Case of Igbo Language

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Abstract

The study aimed at examining the role of Igbo Language in conflict management. Igbo Language is a language spoken by the Igbo and it is means of communication by the Igbos which can be verbal or non-verbal. The study specifically assessed the extent to which arbitration, third party, sanction and dialogue can be used in conflict management and resolution. The purpose of this study is to find out how these strategies for conflict management can play a key role in conflict resolution. The study will encourage people in a way to manage conflict in order to achieve better or conflict free society. In carrying out this study the researcher adopted a survey research method together with existing literature to widen the horizon of the researcher. Findings showed that arbitration, third party, dialogue were adopted to resolve conflict while sanction is used to some extent in conflict resolution. The study goes further to show that early interaction to the root of the conflict and use of dialogue in solving problems is very necessary in conflict management and resolution. Based on the findings, some recommendations and conclusion were made.

Introduction

Language is a means by which people interact and relate with one another and it is the most important tool for communication of thoughts, ideas and feelings. According to Akidi (2012) the most important thing about language is its meaningfulness to those that use it and it must be understood by the people that have the language.

Every language is important to those that use it and the society at large. For Akidi (2012:213), "Language is the key to the heart of the people" that is why Eva (1965) in Akidi (2012:213) stated that "We should hold the key tight by nurturing, grooming and accepting positive changes in language" in order to push our language in a greater level.

Language is valued depending on how the society speaks it, because it is the integral part of the society and every language has element that will enable it to perform its communicative function (Ndimele, 2005). Language whether oral or written is used in communication and that is its basic function. More importantly, it is used to transfer information from one generation to another as well as educating people to the good use of language.

The use of language is being affected by norms and values of a given society that own the language. That is why Romaine (1994) in Ndimele (2005:214) states that:

> society impinges on language in various ways: In fact, the very existence of language critically depends on the availability of a social group who claim a variety as their own and maintain its distinctiveness from the variety spoken by their neighbours.

As a matter of fact, without society there will not be a language, vice versa. The two, language and the society, complement each other in terms of its existence.

Igbo Language:

Nigeria is a multilingual and multicultural nation where different languages exist, of which Igbo language is one of them. Among all these languages only few – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have a standard orthographies, while some other languages in Nigeria have not been standardized, no literature and no standard varieties but despite all these, the language still performs its basic function in communication.

Igbo Language is mostly transmitted orally because of the literacy of the rural dwellers. According to Ndimele (2005:213-214):

> Most rural dwellers do not have access to any other channel of information other than the face-to-face interactions between the sender and receiver of the information. The rural populace receive most of the information in local/indigenous language because the aim of giving out the information would have been defeated if the receiver could not decode the message due to language barriers.

Interaction in Igbo language is governed by a stable pattern which anchored on the values which includes respect for the rules and regulations that exist within a cultural context. Interaction with one another can lead to harmony, such like domination, cooperation, competition, hostility, unnecessary tension, disrespect to accepted norms and values and envy comes into play (Okolo, 2011). Whereas Igbo language inculcates the right values, and this right values can help the society where there is absence of conflict.

Language derives its vitality from the society that uses it and wrong use or misinterpretation of language can influence the people negatively. For instance, "I puta kochie uzo" can mean when you come out you lock the door or when you come out you swell up the door. "Ihu mma ochie" can mean familiar

face or look like an old knife. These misinterpretations can occur when the intended meaning is distorted due to misunderstanding in the use of language and the aim of given the information would have been defeated. All these expressions can cause conflict when it is wrongly interpreted.

Although, some words provide a fertile ground for conflict when referred to people, such words are: Onye iberibe, Onye ohi, Onye ara, Onye arabanko, Onye ufuobi, Onye akwuna, Onye anyaukwu, Onye ofuogiri, Onye ojoo , Onye gharagharagworogworo, Onye aghogho etc.

Apart from peoples reaction to these words when spoken, the use of these words should not be ignored notwithstanding, although it is highly provocative and have destructive manifestation which may lead to conflict. Ndimele (2005) observed that it is sacrilegious for anybody to use a word or words the society regards as derogatory and a taboo.

Igbo language inculcates the right code of conduct in the use of words especially with regard to respect one another, for instance:

- hu nwanne gi n'anya
- onye aghala nwanne ya
- uto bu elecha aghara
- asu nwanne anaghi abula ya elu
- iwe nwanne anaghi eru n'okpukpo
- anya bewe imi bewe
- nwanne di na mba
- igwe bu ike
- onye riwe ya cheta nwanne ya, etc.

These words or phrases cannot express anger when used instead it expresses the culture of the people, which is the right code in addressing issues. Ihezuonu (2014:127) asserts that "It is language that provides the available ideas and categories with which we think and we act."

An Igbo man believes that "Olu oma ka ejula ji a ga n'ogwu, Olu oma na-eme ka onuma juru" etc. With this there will be peace, security and development in our various communities.

Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict according to Ihezuonu (2014:130) ... is defined as disagreement through which the parties involved precise a threat to their needs, interest or concerns." Okolo (2011) in Oparah and Akpu (2017) noted that conflict is a social act which can bring positive or negative change and may have creative and destructive manifestation. Conflict can be any unhealthy situation that can disrupt the peace of the people and it can lead to struggle among the parties concerned. These unhealthy situation in the community can arise when the Eze or Igwe ruling the community could no longer perform certain duties creditably and do not accept people's opinions. Such may be in the provision of necessary amenities which will lead to confusion, tension and unhealthy environment in the community as a result of different interest groups and the society will be in anarchy and disunity

Management according to (internet source) is the process of dealing with people or controlling things, which can be an organization or government body. It can also include the activities of setting the strategy for coordinating the efforts of the employers in order to accomplish the objectives or the set goals with the available resources. Management as it concerns this article is a process through which people can be controlled to avoid the escalation of conflict or a way through which conflict can be resolved.

When conflict emerges, the next step is how to manage and resolve it for the community to live in harmony. The management approach for resolving conflict includes arbitration, third party, dialogue and sanction in communities.

Arbitration

According to Ezegbe (1997) in Nwafukwa (2011:81) arbitration is the process by which a peacemaker, arbitrator or a peace panel settle problem that arises in the community through appealing to the people in question. In this case other people can be invited in order to resolve the conflict. The conflict can be between the Eze and his cabinets, between Eze's cabinet and the village heads or even between the members in the community. The peacemaker can be a selected committee from the community, clergymen, government officials, etc. In this case polite speeches such as "asu nwanne anaghi abuli ya elu", Iwe nwanne anaghi eru n'okpukpu" are used to resolve conflicts in the communities.

Third Party

Third party according to Ejiogu (1990)in Nwafukwa (2011) is when the people in conflict cannot resolve the problem by themselves. For instance, conflict between two brothers, father and child, Eze and some members of the community, then, the eldest or their spiritual director could be the third person to resolve the issues.

Dialogue

According to Ezegbe (1997) in Nwafukwa (2011) dialogue involves bringing the individuals together in face-to-face contact in order to enable them expose and discuss the problem before other people. In this case they are allowed to air their mind, discuss the factors, issues and problem that led to conflict. This is to air their views to avoid bearing grudges or feeling cheated at the end.

Sanction

According to Nwafukwa (2011), sanction can be in form of expedition or suspension. In this case a member of a community can be asked to step down in order to give another person his or her position to resolve conflict. In case of

suspension, the Eze or the village heads can disassociate a member of the community or in some cases may be asked to pay fine for their wrong doings in order to discipline and stop them from causing problems in the society.

Conclusion

Conclusively, conflict is inevitable in every community and members of a community should be educated on appropriate use of Igbo language to avoid escalation of conflict. According to Oparah and Akpu (2017:104) "People should be consciousin the use of language in order not to cause confusion or abuse on language since abuse on language is an abuse on culture of the people." Therefore, there is great need for communities to adopt these conflict resolution strategies to ensure peaceful coexistence when conflict arises in the communities. They should manage and resolve it through the use of one of the followings arbitration, third party, sanction and dialogue.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion carried out on the strategies for conflict management strategies, the researcher therefore recommends that:

- Village heads should involve the youths in resolving conflict. This will help our youths to learn the culture of the people early enough in their growth.
- Seminars and workshops should be organized by the government to create massive awareness on the need for peace in the communities.
- People should welcome the use of arbitration, third party, sanction and dialogue for the management of conflict in the communities.
- Parents and community leaders should ensure that peace reigns in communities and as much as possible

avoid conflict because no community strives well in a situation that is filled with anarchy.

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