

Possibilities of Bonding in a Culturally Diverse, Multi-Ethnic Nigeria

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Abstract— The difference is often a fact of most social setting. Because of this, systems and societies are regularly saddled with their management. People are eventually differentiated in peace, growth and development, based on their ability to engender harmony indifference (Nnoli, N., 1998). In societies where the difference is better managed, conflict, tensions and fears are likely reduced, leading to progress. The reverse may be the case in a social order where the ability to manage difference is lacking. Heterogeneity requires negotiation, consensus-building and control for advancement to come. Theoretically, homogenous societies are not also absolute, given the reflection of some difference, if not in ethnic identification, but other forms of classifications or divider like class, income or age groups, or in educational or social exposures (Mbogu, N. 2014). Sameness could, however, come from a difference over time and scale, given the possibility of experiencing common practices (Olukoju, 1997). In a society like Nigeria, the practices could be in language, manners and mannerisms, unconsciously developing over periods of intermixing and interrelationship (Edewor, P. et.al, 2014). This paper identifies accent and greeting as conducts through which boundedness have emerged, rather involuntarily, amongst peoples of the multiethnic nation, which could be identified and harnessed for unity, especially in the face of the continuing crisis of unification.

Index Terms— Language, Bonding, Ethnicity, Accent, Greeting, Patriotism, Nationalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

A range of features defines ethnicity. Some are language, intonation or accent, cultural practices, sometimes hovering around belief systems, historical background and patterns of greeting and bonding. Though accent is central, it is not always assured in the identification of a person's ethnic group. In Nigeria, however, it is sometimes possible for outsiders to spot a speaker's ethnicity, based on his/her manner of pronunciation. In classifying the speaker based on a group, regardless, care need be taken to avoid accusations of derision, or an undue typecasting, as there may be variations or departures from the perceived norm. But how do we put this in context? As an instance, could there be a common ring to the tongue of the over 500 ethnic groups in Nigeria? How possible is it for the accent of the Calabar man to share something common with that of the Yoruba man, or that of the Igbo man or the Hausa man? Thoughts of this may hardly arise in the conception of the Nigerian person, but might be

real in the estimation of outsiders, or supposedly a detached observer. As a way of explanations, language is a tool of exchanging meanings, while bonding implies a communion amongst people. Ethnicity denotes a cultural particularity, while accent means a manner of speaking or intonation. Greeting is salutation, while patriotism and nationalism are close in meaning, implying how a person's relationship with the state is defined.

II. METHODOLOGY

The fuse of Nigerian ethnic groups, in a natural dialectical process, has reproduced a yet to be determined feature. If this feature is determined, it would undermine disjunctions amongst natives, presenting in its stead, a necessity for stronger bonds. But how can leaders or the government note this? Would they ever make any meaning of this intangible public relation phenomenon? This study uses a mix of methods, including participant observation, discourse analysis and conversational analysis to investigate this question, and related ones. While participant observation flows from the writer's everyday engagements with the ethnic groups, discourse analysis is founded on the evaluation of the engagements from a critical, rigorous and objective point of view, to eliminate conscious or unconscious biases. Conversational analysis creeps in, as the paper uses instances of discussions with some participants. With all boiling down to qualitative research methods, elements of imputation, interaction, and narration are also in evidence, as the study establishes the possibilities of accent and greeting in the definition of the Nigerian identity. That the subject borders on intangibles cause the mix of methods to capture the inestimable details possible in the circumstances. It is expected that this approach helps conclusions and recommendations, as the paper seeks to locate commonalities or sameness, amidst the range of other nesses in a multi-ethnic nation-state, like Nigeria.

III. PERSPECTIVES, POSSIBILITIES IN THE COMMONALITY OF ACCENT

The management of diversity in Nigeria has been an elongated question, which has attracted different perspectives and investigations (Olukoju, 1997; Obasi, 2010; Edewor, Patrick, et. al, 2014; Amara Mary Uzoigwe&Kanayo Louis Nwadiolor, 2015). The examinations have spanned different dimensions, including understanding it from the perspective of historical, colonial heritage and proceeding from the instructions, therefrom (Olukoju, 1997), to devising ways of managing the difference, in the manner that is reflective of modern realities (Mbogu, N., 2014; Obasi, C., 2010). It could

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also be through situating the management within the larger contexts of global identity formations (Bhabha, Homi, 1990; Vertovec, Steven, 2001).

The perspectives have shaped the understanding of plurality, not just within the narrower context of a nation-state, but from the prism of the management of difference. While studies have shown that cultural identity formation can be natural and nurtured (Hall, Stuart, 1990; Bhabha, Homi, 1990), the processes are not just in flux, but can as well be better appreciated with the identification of specifics, like the Nigerian case, and the continuing possibilities of hybridization. The hybridity could flow from a commonness of understanding mutual practices, which may then be a subject of internalizing, towards harmony, as this paper will argue.

Ordinarily, accent denotes the slant of a tongue. It could tell the probable origin of a speaker. While one could be funny in the subjective estimation of a listener, another could sound interesting. The only one that may find his or her accent regularly satisfactory is the speaker or fellow kinsmen. Accents can be different from the world over. While the typical Indian accent could sound sharp, the Chinese accent may be seen as mild. These two can sometimes interest the African listener. This is shown where stand-up comedians mimic some of those accents to amuse. While it would not sound funny to the speaker, or some other nationals, it is amusing to the comedian and his or her audiences. The comedian's original accent might also amuse the one he mimics.

The Russian does not also sound similar, to the English or the French. Though the English language may be common to many, the accents of native speakers are different. While the Scottish accent differs from the accent of the Yorkshire man, that of the Liverpool man is equally distinct from the Newcastle person. So is the London bred speaker, different from the rest. Somehow, there is something common to the accent of the native English speaker, which is only probably recognizable by the non-Englishmen. That commonality does not mean the American and the British accents are same. They are disparate. The American may enjoy certain similarity with the Canadian accent, just as the Japanese, the South Korean and the Singaporean accents have similarity with the Chinese. The passion of the Indian may arguably be seen as different in that Asian ring.

And in Africa, the South African accent looks different from those of other Southern Africans like Zimbabwe, or Botswana, or Malawi. Those of the East Africans are equally easily distinguishable from the sound of the West African accent. The Ugandan and the Kenyan are not same as those of the Ghanaian and the Nigerian. Like the mirror, the speaker can hardly see him or herself. Only the listener can estimate. Therefore, it might be problematic for assessors to pinpoint ethnic origin based on intonation.

There was an instructive case like this during this study. At first, it came like a joke. "You are Nigerian?" they made the statement, with the tone of a question. "Yes," you answered. And then asked, "How did you know" "From your accent", you heard. You have as well been told of your country of

origin based on your pronunciation by many people. They have been Jamaicans, British, South African, Eastern Africans, Americans, Chinese and Indians. Because of the constant reoccurrence, and as attested to by some other distanced Nigerians, it provokes the question on whether there is a Nigerian accent.

If so, can we not sense this as a tool of bonding? And if not, could it be said that nothing similar has developed from years of interaction amongst the Nigerian ethnic groups? Observers may think you are special by typifying a Nigerian accent. But how could this be? Doubts come if there can ever be one, especially with the plurality of ethnic groups. Apart from this plurality, the ethnic groups constantly suspect themselves. Possibly because of historical accident, the amalgamated but hardly assimilating groups often still see themselves as different ethnic entities (Nnoli, N.,1998). It shows in opinions that are sometimes coloured by origin. Government positions are also distributed based on balancing (Mbogu, N., 2014). We value performances in offices with ethnoreligious colourations. Successive leaders have urged for unity in diversity, but years after political independence, it is still disunity in diversity.

IV. THE STATE OF NIGERIA AND LANGUAGE POSSIBILITIES

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country of nearly 500 ethnic groups (Nbogou, N., 2014). These are within a population of close to 200 million people. On top of these are many religions, mainly the Christians, Muslims and the traditional religious practitioners. The particularities contend in a continuous race for socio-economic and political dominance. It puts the corporate existence of the country on a cliffhanger. Other times, it casts doubts on the future of the country. We colour policy formulations and policy directions with this heterogeneity in mind. Opinions of leaders and those of the led are often judged not necessarily on merit but on the affiliation of the speaker. A positive aspect, for some reasons, is that the groups have seldom been at daggers (Nnoli, N.,1998; Edewor, P. et.al, 2014). Apart from the 1967-70 civil war and flashes of ethnic and religious crises, tension and heated national conversations, there has been no serious incidence that struck at the corporate existence of the country. Regardless, mutual suspicion amongst ethnic groups subsists. Against this sociological background, how can it be possible to discern a tongue peculiar to the plurality, possibly for the sake of integration?

A unity of dialects may exist among the populace in the manner in which it is inconceivable to the native but strong enough to class them as one people in the estimation of outsiders. This helps the process of identity formation, besides creating grounds for nationalism. And the search for identity and nationalism has been long drawn for the Nigeria nation-state but unfortunately unrealistic to many citizens. Because of its multi-perspective nature, it would rather be better not to conclude on what it is, or what it should be, but how the nation should go about it. This is so because the country is yet to decide whether to see identity and nationalism in national politics, or from the prism of micro ethnic identities' activities in the agitation for power and

wealth; or through the lenses of social process, as reflected in the industrial revolution in Britain, as an instance.

Again, the accent is natural and social. It is natural because it comes to the speaker over time, as he or she grows. It eventually becomes a pattern, and impossible to alter. It is social because the speaking patterns of a majority may influence a minority over periods, because of interaction and/or relationship. Because Nigeria's ethnic groups, especially the dominant Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba have interacted for years, would it be possible to rule out the commonality of accent, drawn from years of mutual understanding and interrelationship? Can it not happen when many citizens understand and speak each other's language? Can this not be a tool of Nigerians, integration, possibility of a Nigerian accent, after years of cohabitation, leading to familiarity, similarity, synchronization and synergy.

Though distinct from each other, the bond of geography, political authority, economic condition, constitution and laws are tools that have conditioned levels of integration, despite threats to continued existence, often seen in outbursts during contests for power (Nnoli, N., 1998; Mbogu, N., 2014). These tools of unity have engineered a common purpose in sports competition, such that the people reflect sameness, forgetting differentiations, while supporting the team. It does not matter anymore, whether players are from the same ethnic, state, or regional stock dominates the team. What matters is that they are now only a Nigerian team, angling for a Nigerian success. This occurrence is though physical and much easier to relate with. But if a commonness emerges through sports, does it not signpost the chances of other tangible or intangible commonalities?

The accent in question is though imperceptible and might be difficult to discern. But the fact of boundedness in geography, through laws, the constitution, interrelationships, and occasionally mutual understanding, have caused an intermixing, resulting in a bond of accent, which is possible to identify by the foreign listener. It may not, however, be the case for all the exposed citizen who is probably travelled, cosmopolitan, urban-dwelling and has therefore interacted with a broad spectrum of users of other languages., the intonation of the others unconsciously affect him or her, and unconsciously diminishing the originality of his natural accent, leading up to a fresh one, which could be common to persons of similar exposure.

That unfamiliar accent flowing from a diminished original native accent, laced with an accommodating outcome, considering exchanging meanings with other ethnic groups, is the Nigerian accent. It affects the natural accent of this citizen in the social process of interaction, resulting in modifications that may not be self-discerning. The native speaker that is not exposed might still, however, bear the pure, original identity, and remain undiluted, making the travelled speaker the sole scale of this possibility. The Nigerian accent is, therefore, the original accent, affected by the accents of other ethnic groups, and now resulting in another. This other accent does not affect the natural accent of this citizen in a negative way, as we associate it with individuals from all ethnicities, now collectively identifiable as unique by non-nationals. It is new, distinct and more easily recognised by the outsider than the

insider can. It is a blend of the major languages, coming slowly, mildly and sharply, as any of the major languages may sometimes sound. Other than this is the commonality of greeting, which the paper discusses next.

V. A PEDESTAL TO BONDING

Similar to the above is the evolution of patterns of salutation. Despite the multi-ethnicity of Nigeria, three groups are dominant, that is Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. Common to the three is Pidgin English, which is a loose corruption of the English Language, popular in the West Coast of Africa, with minimal speaking skills (Nnoli, N., 1998). It is popular amongst all classes of people, namely the rich and the poor, the literate, the semi-literate and the illiterate. The pidgin carries a tinge of ordinariness, simplicity and cordiality, such that an elite might speak it to dump down, while a non-elite could speak it, helping the pride of belonging. Greeting in pidgin is therefore welcoming, inviting, and most times a sign of friendliness.

Importantly, it is almost rare to find a major speaker of one of the three major languages, who are not knowledgeable in the ability to greet in any of the three. It is equally rare to find a citizen unable to greet in Pidgin, in the unlikely event that he or she cannot greet in any of the major languages. This feature has brought up a common lexicon for greeting, including *Kekime*, *Kedu*, *Ndewo* (Igbo), *Sannu*, *Yayade*, *Barka* (Hausa), *Bawoni*, *Sowa*, *Epele* (Yoruba), and *How you dey? Howdy? How now? Welldone* (Pidgin). The word list for greeting is therefore rich, resulting in the evolution of a common understanding for well-wishing, among the citizens. Regardless, how do we contextualize greeting?

The greeting is a gesture supposedly expressing warmth, or love. It defines friendliness, deference and cordiality. It comes in differentiated formats, with plural forms of salutations and physical posturing, depending on culture or contexts. Greeting introduces a meeting, an interaction and a relationship. It breaks the ice, thaws an atmosphere and frees up space for further socializing. The absence of a greeting could mean unfriendliness. It signposts distaste, hate or an unwelcome interaction. Greeting heralds good neighbourliness, friendship, togetherness, conviviality and gracefulness.

Greeting begins and ends an interaction. It is a gesture that opens and closes meetings, whether formal, informal or between individuals, or amongst groups of individuals. The greeting is more like a widely accepted practice. It is widely practised amongst disparate cultures, between multifaceted people, and across geographies. The average culture accepts it as proper, or ideal. They accept it as a courtesy, as the minimum way to show friendship. Primarily, therefore, the greeting is universal.

The universality of greeting is not however synonymous with its uniformity. There are different forms of greeting. The greeting is universally acceptable, but it does not make it compulsory. And there lays another point. Because it is a gesture, an ethical or cultural expression of affection, the greeting is not compulsory. It is though expected when the context is right. While some will do it in all contexts, some will choose the circumstance to do it. It, therefore, makes it

optional, a matter of choice, or interest. Some cultures feel a younger person should naturally greet the older, upon encounter. Otherwise, it might be termed disrespectful.

Others feel otherwise, whether old or young, thinking it is important, only when there is a need for interaction with the person. We consider greeting unnecessary in some cultures, as it negates the need to mind own business. To this group, it is a distraction and an intrusion into the thoughts of another. Some other cultures see it differently. Greeting is seen as necessary for a loving inhabitation, in a community or environment. A failure to practice it might be seen as an outlier of anti-conformism. The 'culprit' here looks rude, rebellious and different. It is especially so when the elder is ignored by the younger person. Between pairs, however, it might all be a matter of understanding, or mutual respect, or lack of it.

Sometimes, too, individuals re-construct greetings, probably based on circumstances. For instance, just as the young are expected to be the first to greet an older person in some cultures, we also expect a junior person to be the first to greet a senior official in a workplace. It might also be an employer/employee relationship. Regardless, a busy employer, or senior, might be too mentally pre-occupied to respond to multiple greetings from employees. The employer might in those circumstances be psychologically challenging the importance of the greetings. What is the value of the courtesy? I have a responsibility to you. You also have one to me. Why don't we mutually respond to our commitments as we are supposed, and leave out gestures? Why don't you let me figure out how best to respond to you, rather than the disturbance of greetings?

These thoughts might be in the minds of the senior or employer, who then devalues response. The junior or subordinate might also misinterpret this. In this context, the one who does not value greetings may be classed in unique lights. He could be seen as arrogant, sadistic, standoffish, lukewarm, reluctant, disrespectful, selfish or self-serving. Incidentally, the one who greets necessarily may be regarded as cheap, unnecessarily approachable, friendly, cultured, decent, proper, well mannered, reasonable and respectable. The contexts can be different, just as it is defined. It all therefore importantly rests on the circumstances, the culture and the environment. But what are the forms of greetings? How are they expressed? Of what significance is one form from the other? The paper turns to this next.

VI. SOME CULTURAL FORMS OF SALUTATIONS

The handshake is one popular form of greeting. Done through stretching of the palm and temporarily locking it in the hands of the person in the interaction. The handshake is widely acceptable and cross-cultural. But some cultures and religion would not permit it between the man and the woman. The handshake expresses affection, and it is the reason an obvious rejection of it from any party is frequently seen as a sign of dislike, rejection, or of unhappiness with the other person. Rejection of a handshake might even be done as a sign of protest because a handshake is expectedly pleasant and one sign of warmth.

Kisses are also forms of greetings. It comes in unique

ways. One party might use their cheeks to touch that of the other, on the left, right and left again, or just once on one side, depending on the culture. Some people might also do it conveniently by joining their lips. Greeting through kissing is however more common with the cheeks than with anywhere else, and could be restricted between man and woman, in some environment, while it does not matter in some others. Through intermixing of cultures, the kissing culture has as well spread.

Prostrating is yet another important variant of greeting. In many cultures, you prostrate to greet the old, the titleholder, or the traditional ruler. In this context, the male greeter lies on the ground, only supporting his weight with his hands. The female might just need to kneel. Prostrating is a common practice in Yorubaland, in south-west Nigeria, where it is seen as rudeness to greet the ruler standing. The age of the greeter vis-à-vis, the one in reverence does not matter. A typical example was when the septuagenarian former president of the country Chief Olusegun Obasanjo prostrated to greet the traditional ruler of Ile-Ife, the Oni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi, Ojaja II, who is in his forties. The message the former president was sending was that the king is the king, the holder and symbol of the referred Ile-Ife throne, and he must enjoy his reference, irrespective of his calendar age.

Simple bowing, "high five", removal of the hat, tapping of the back of the palm as against the palm with a handshake, and squatting are some other types of greetings available in distinct cultures, amongst others. But there is a sense in saying that though greeting may be a gesture expressing love, warmth, affection, and friendship, greeter and the greeted might also be exchanging meaning. Beyond a show of affection, they might as well be sending other messages of love that the gesture supposedly represents. How is this done?

Like the languages of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, patterns of greetings are also different (Mbogu, N., 2014). While the Yorubas typically prostrate to greet the revered, the Hausas clench the fist in obeisance, mainly. The Igbos slap the back wrist, thrice, ahead of a conclusive handshake, or bows. These physical practices are hardly copied by the other, in greeting the revered from another ethnic group. Regardless, the list of words for greeting, earlier identified, is easy to understand. They are reasonably appreciable amongst the groups. They are frequent when the other seeks to greet in the language of another. An Igboman can easily say *Sannu* to greet an identified Hausa man, just as the Hausa man may easily say *Kedu* to greet the Igboman. It goes with the Yoruba man who could also easily say *Sannu* to the Hausa man, or *Kekime* to the Igboman, and interchangeably.

The common understanding of the basic language of salutation is clear in interactions, after years of cohabitation, intermixing and interrelationships, in marriages, business, politics and governance. Growing from there is a hitherto discounted commonness, possibly for mentioning as a line of bonding, in an ethnically charged society. The ability to greet in the other's language in an interactional process heralds some affection, or an association, which reflects love, minimal knowledge of each other, and a marginal

appreciation of difference. It speaks to mutual acceptance, the possibility of further integration, and the likelihood of advancement within the collective. Greeting, therefore, stands as a tool of assimilation, when done in the common or basic words of salutation, amongst the different ethnic groups, for each other.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper explores chances of integration amongst multi-ethnic Nigeria, such that disparities will be better managed. It imagines the use of commonalities as threads for a bonding, ahead of not just a unification, but the resolution of the common geography that the country is sometimes described as. Difference is characterized by natural conditions and the possibility of further areas of divergences. The expansion of difference happens if its management is poor. When the spaces of difference expand, it points to diminishing understanding and a low level of trust that might even lead to conflict, crisis, and disintegration. When the difference is managed, however, the reverse is often the case. It could be appealing, interesting, and leading to progress. This could help positive psychology for the people, ease stress and delight their mindset. The appreciation of difference may create room for not just imagining how it can be better improved, but how the improvement can be sustained.

The plurality of the Nigerian condition may sometimes result in cacophonous outbursts, but at once embodies grounds for integration. These grounds are however open for search, or a conscientious search if they are to be discovered. The leadership factor is also necessary to create the vision for it, in the interest of viable nationhood. This is possible after years of living in a single geography, and after periods of socio-economic and political relationships. We have identified the tools of accent and greeting as avenues in this paper, given their peculiarities as practices that could emerge, or that is possible to share, respectively. In sharing, there would be bonding, leading to better psychological integration of a nation that is disparate in ethnicity, religion, culture, and much else.

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