

JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES AND MANAGEMENT



An Official Journal of the
Department of Educational Studies and Management,
University of Benin
Benin City, Nigeria.

ISBN: 2354-2470

website: jesam.uniben.edu

Vol. 02. No. 01. March 2014

JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES AND MANAGEMENT

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INVESTIGATION OF THE LEXIS OF VIOLENT LANGUAGE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OJO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

One's existence as a person remains dependent on the recognition and confirmation of others. Injurious words put this existence of a person into jeopardy to a greater or lesser extent. Our status as the embodiment of a community is thereby challenged or belittled. The technical repertoire of linguistic violence is large: an injury can be inflicted by insult, humiliation, degradation, vilification, debasement, and much more. An unobtrusive participant observation was employed to elicit the lexis of violence from students' interaction in the classroom. Findings showed that violent lexis were freely used uncontrollably like careless pelis; suggestions were made based on the findings.

Word Count: 102

Key Words: Lexis, violent language, secondary school, students

Introduction

"Our civilization is decadent and our language, so the argument runs It follows that any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or cabs to aero planes. Underneath this lies the half conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes".
George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," p. 12.

Violence is not simply an action or a practice, it has many dimensions. It is a perception, an expression, a way to be seen or heard, a form of domination, a mode of discrimination and a lack, absence or decline of communication. Violence is a social, economic, cultural and political issue, instilled in language. Language acts as a map that mediates reality through everyday communications; so violence becomes instilled in reality. Evans (2010) reiterates that violence is not simply material force: it is the use of force as a tool for some human purpose, individual or social. Hirschi (2002) is of the opinion that every society exploits the possibility that actions can be controlled by the fact, memory, and anticipation of pain inflicted by others. Children are hurt to make them behave, sometimes with blows and sometimes with words, but equally with pain. Theories of child development make

it easy to forget how often parents make children cry and how basic this violence is to the socializing process (Kessler, Avenevoli and Merikangas, 2001). Theories of economic and ideological domination, likewise, can obscure how the powerful exploit the powerless through pain. Violence exerts its social effects as much through what it means as through what it physically does (Sullivan, Kung, and Farrell, 2004).

Levin (2007) explains that there are two types of violence: First, the physical, harm violence which is executed by things like fists, canes, batons and guns. Second, the softer forms of violence such as verbal violence are executed by: the Brain's speech centre, the vocal cords, the lips and tongue- in the form of violent words. Soft violence usually happens with no consequences, no responsibility and no accountability for the perpetrator. This is otherwise called Violent Language. Violent language includes "All harsh and rude speech, wounding the feelings of others by gesture, expression, tone of voice and unkind words" (Miller, 2007). It also entails showing contempt towards another person, by entertaining unreasonable dislike for or prejudice towards anybody, by frowning at, by hating and by speaking ill of others". Hatred is an intense feeling of dislike which is often associated with feelings of anger. There is a connection between the emotion of hate and human language by stating that hatred is spread through our words. "hatred lives in language, the seeds of hatred exist in human cognition" (Lakoff and Ide, 2005).

Reasons for Violent Language

Violence is not merely capable of depicting violence or locating its consequences with language; rather, one's speech in its execution can be a form of enacting violence (Jaccard and Turrissi, 2003). Violence can be defined as an instance someone inflicting injury upon someone else. The addressee of violence is always a person. In the concept of 'person', however, there is already a "double corporeality" attached; we are always both physical and symbolic bodies, we are unquestionably individuals and at the same time part of a community. As a result we can give and receive both physical and social injuries. Agnew (2006), hinging his explanations on Cooley's theory opines that one's existence as a person remains dependent on the recognition and confirmation of others. Injurious words put one's existence as a person into question to a greater or lesser extent; our status as the embodiment of a community is thereby refused or belittled. Verbal injuries, like acts of violence, are not purely individual acts. Physical as well as verbal forms always appears together in historical and social orders as symbolically coded, that is, as legitimate, recognized, or illegitimate violence (Beeghly, 2003). Like Max Weber's sociological analysis of violence, violence-forming/formed speech can be adopted for the implementation, reproduction, or resistance to power

authority relationship. On the one hand, violent speech acts presuppose authority relationships in order to be effective at all, but on the other hand function as instruments to construct or transform these relationships.

Miller (2007) reveals that the technical repertoire of linguistic violence is large and an injury can be inflicted by insult, humiliation, degradation, vilification, debasement, and much more. Consequently, there is a demand for a differentiated description of the 'rhetorics of injury' which are applied in violence-forming/formed speech (Stith, Rosen, Middleton, Busch, Lunderberg, and Carlton, 2000). What mechanisms are used? Contempt, for example, can be realized distinctly through different forms of linguistic violence - as the distinction and distancing of the speaker from the addressed subject, or as the barbed reminder of the addressed subject's social place.

Classification of Violent Language

Miller (2007) classified violent language thus:

Defamation: Defamation is a false accusation of an offence or a malicious misrepresentation of someone's words or actions. Defamatory communication tends to harm the reputation of another. Defamation is false, malicious and injurious statements about the reputation of another.

Slander: Slanders are words falsely spoken that damage the reputation of another.

Character Assassination: Character assassination is an attempt to tarnish a person's reputation. It may involve exaggeration, misleading half-truths, or manipulation of facts to present an untrue picture of the targeted person. Such acts are often difficult to reverse or rectify, and the process is likened to a literal assassination of a human life. The damage sustained can last a lifetime. Character assassination may involve doublespeak, spreading of rumours, innuendos or deliberate misinformation on topics relating to the subject's morals, integrity and reputation. It may involve spinning information that is technically true, but that is presented in a misleading manner or is presented without the necessary context.

Antilocution: Antilocution is defined as: verbal remarks against a person, group or community, which are not addressed directly to the target. This is generally referred to as 'talking behind someone's back'.

Dysphemism: Dysphemism is the use of an intentionally harsh word or expression instead of a polite one; they are rough opposites of euphemism. For example, the dysphemism of the neutral term rebel is: a terrorist; the euphemism of a rebel is a freedom fighter.

Theoretical Framework: Johan Galtung's Theory of Violence

Galtung (1988) states that violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations. The opposite of violence is peace, which encompasses "peace with nature, peace between genders, generations and races, where the excluded are included not by force, and where classes, nations and states serve neither direct nor structural violence." He differentiated between personal violence and structural violence. In structural violence, violence is built into the structure, and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances. It is the unequal distribution of resources, and the unequal distribution of the power to decide over the distribution of resources that give rise to structural violence. In this interpretation, resources are seen as not only material or economic, but also nonmaterial. So, for Galtung (2002), when one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when 1 million husbands keep 1 million wives in ignorance there is structural violence.

The Biological Level

Due to the fact that humans are physical creatures, it follows that there can be biological risk factors for violence. While very few people believe that biological factors ultimately will account for more than a small amount of family violence, some violence do appear to be associated with intellectual deficits, organic problems, head injuries, and hormones. Buss (2005) argues that critically, biological risk factors are potentially helpful only for understanding the behaviour of people who are violent in all spheres of their lives. Biology cannot be referenced when people use violence against family members but not against strangers, employers, or friends.

The Psychological Level: Buka, Stichick, Birthistle, and Earls (2001) expound that humans are characterized by complex and symbolic thinking, remembering, emotions, needs, and desires. It follows that there can be psychological risk factors for violence. Psychological risk factors of violence that are routinely relayed through the mass media often are trite and mundane and rely on circular reasoning. Psychological theories are of no help in understanding why "spankings," "pushes," "shoves," and "slaps" are a routine feature of family life; they become necessary when violence is obviously and most certainly abusive. While recognizing biological and psychological risk factors, sociological perspectives strongly argue that these rarely are sufficient, and often are not even necessary, to understand violence. Travers (2010) asserts that the search for the risk factors of violence cannot end at the level of individual biology or psychology.

The Interactional Level: Because classroom violence involves people who know one another, violence might be associated with characteristics of interactional level and therefore can account for only some violence. Too much emphasis on this interactional level can divert attention from understanding the complexity of violence. Loseke (2003) cautions that it could serve to unjustly blame victims.

The Social Structural Level: While recognizing that in some ways each group is unique, sociological perspectives focus on examining characteristics shared by many. Ackerly (2000) explicates that a full understanding of something as complex as group violence requires looking closely at how social environments can be a risk factor for violence. There is not one sociological theory that can adequately account for all violence.

Control Theory: Rather than asking why some people are violent, control theory asks why most people are not violent. The theoretical answer is that people are controlled by bonds to other people and to social institutions and by the fear of punishment (Tyler, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Today in Nigerian communities as well as in schools abusive pellets are common place. What many do not realize is that verbal violence is at the root of physical violence and it seems a lot of people are really forgetting the effects of the lexis of violence on others. The question that bugs the mind that forms the crux of the matter is what is the provocative lexis in classroom interaction?

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate the lexis of violent language among secondary school students in Ojo Local Education Area in Lagos State.

Methodology

The researchers employed unobtrusive participants' observation in two Secondary school classrooms in Ojo Local Government of Lagos State. Whereas the first school is a Federal Government Secondary School, the second school is a State owned Secondary School. Permission was sought from the Principals of the Schools to observe students' interaction unobtrusively. Thirty students – in SSS1- were observed in a class in the first school while thirty-five students in SSS1- were observed in the state school. The students were allowed to interact freely while cases of perceived violent lexis used by them were recorded. Information and clarifications were sought where needed.

Findings

Students' Use of Violent Language

Abuse:

English: You're mad! You're crazy, shameless animals, stupid, Big fool, your head is not correct. Your father! Prostitute. Witch. Son of a bitch.

Nigerian Languages: *Onyiara, Shege, Oni ranu. Mumu, Ashewo, Olodo, Ili, Mumu, oponu, deju, ode, Ole.*

These abusive words were freely used among students. The reactions differ. Some students ignored the abuse, others smiled or grinned at it while some others react violently.

Bossing:

I'm I your mate? What do you mean? Are you out of your senses? What's the matter with you? Don't ever mention it to me again.

Cursing:

Bastard (Omo ale), You will never prosper!

Shouting:

I hate you! Let thunder fire you! (otorogbabuegi).

Threatening:

Take your time. Just try it. Try me. I warn you
o. Leave me alone or....

From the observation, it was deduced that usage of violent lexis are precursors to violent actions and reactions among students. Abuses, cursing, shouting and threats are common place. This violence lexis among adolescents is a widespread crisis with potentially fatal consequences. One's existence as a person remains dependent on the recognition and confirmation of others. Injurious words put this existence as a person into question to a greater or lesser extent; our status as the embodiment of a community is thereby refused or belittled. Verbal injuries, like all acts of violence, are not purely individual acts. Like Max Weber's sociological analysis of violence, violence-forming/formed speech acts can be adopted for the implementation, reproduction, or resistance to power and authority relationships.

Conclusion

It is important therefore that teachers are sensitized to this phenomenon so that they can get attuned to and nip violent languages in the bud. Teaching is an act of communication between knowledgeable scholars and active learners, effective communication depends on how the information is presented and on its content. Adolescents are inexperienced in relationships and may, therefore, overlook obvious signs of abuse as well as misinterpret abuse as love. Change of language is the first and decisive step. Teachers should begin to alter and adjust the patterns of classroom communication so as to create an environment that promotes students' use of civil lexis.

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