
Interreligious hate speech as a source of insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract: This article has assessed Interreligious Hate Speech as a Source of Insecurity in Nigeria. It concentrates mainly on Christianity and Islamic religions' hate speeches against themselves using the Speech Act Theory. The speech act theory according to Austin (1978) has three assumptions; locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts which explain that a speech made is referential, performative and result effective respectively. The research uses the theory with the intention that it covers what the hateful speech (referential) is, the reaction of the person to whom the hate speech is referred to (performative) and the consequences of the reaction of the victim (result) which in most cases are attacks. The work uses descriptive research design and its data is achieved through an observational method which sourced data from both primary and secondary sources (documented materials) and the data is analysed using a qualitative technique. In relation to the related existing literature, the work has achieved the reality of the struggle between Christians and Muslims in their battles through offensive words (hate speeches) which culminate to crisis in Nigeria. This study points out the linguistic implication of crisis/insecurity in Nigeria through religious people and suggests that government should put in place control mechanisms that can regulate the use of language to curtail hate speech that degenerate into insecurity in Nigeria.

Keywords: Christianity, Hate speech, Insecurity, Interreligious, Islam

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1. Introduction

The manner of use of language determines the perception of people that it is directed to. It may provoke anger, discard relationship and it may relate people, depending on the choice of words and manner of their usages. For example, when you say a man from an ungodly religion, you have expressed a hate speech. But if you earnestly say my friend from a peaceful religion, your speech is not hateful. Hence, when language is used negatively to address people/situations, it is

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considered to be impolite and can be referred to as hate speech. Such hateful language results to crisis like it happens between Odewale and King Adetusa when Adetusa referred to Odewale as a man from a bush tribe (Rotimi, 1971).

Hate speech is an expression of hostility towards individuals or groups based on race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, gender and religion. This concept has been defined by many writers in varying perspectives but the approach by the Council of European is more embracing and it throws more light to the others. Hate speech is a form of discrimination that is communicated to the victim(s) intolerable hatred that involves xenophobia, ethnicity, minority and nationality sentiments (Council of European, 1997). People who use language in the manner and purposes above are considered to be linguistically impolite and their speeches are capable of creating tensions that can result to fear (insecurity).

Hate speech in Nigeria is characterised by violence perpetrated by Nigerians in different perspectives, especially amongst the religious groups who may have being preaching peace on one hand and perpetuating prejudice amongst themselves on the other hand, thereby generating tensions that escalate to violence/crisis. This article is hence basically concerned with the interreligious hate speech in Nigeria; precisely between the two major religions: Christianity and Islam; especially the ones that culminate into violence that bring about insecurity in Nigeria.

2. Literature review

Many works are carried out that are related to interreligious hate speech as a source of insecurity in Nigeria, but no work has exactly pointed out hate speech between religions in Nigeria as a source of insecurity in the country. Such works relating to the topic of this research are discussed here to better the position of the study.

2.1. Conceptual review

Interreligious hate speech as a source of insecurity in Nigeria hinges on an assimilation of three concepts namely: Interreligious, Hate Speech and Insecurity in Nigeria. The concepts as they are married together, they really contradict the usual perceptions of people and attract attention for research. This is because hate speech is a negative concept to humanity since it is an expression of dislike against a person or group in order to cause harm/pain to the victim(s). Religion on the other hand is the belief and worship of God or gods that is considered to have superhuman power. Consequently, insecurity is the situation of uncertainty, anxiety and lack of confidence of a person/people about themselves in different places in the nation. Insecurity is the state of being open to danger or threat and lack of protection.

From the forgone explanations hence, need has arisen to know how religions that are supposed to be mothers of peace should be alleged to be sources of hate speech and subsequently insecurity which is destructive. Lamenting on the scenario, Weinstein (2015) asserts that conflict is generated when separate people, collectively in their groups lay claims to the fact that salvation is achieved through their ideologies. To that note, there is always tension between religions which results to hateful expressions. That salvation is based on their claims. To that note, religion and hateful or offensive speech often overlap in complicated ways. Weinstein further regret how Christians dispute Mormons practices because of their belief in a fake prophet. Jews on their part hesitates the multiple deities that the Hindus worship. There has being prosecution of Muslims by the Buddhist not adjusting to their beliefs. Even within same religions, hate is bound to take place as seen between Sunnis and Shia Islam, Intra-orthodox versus Reform Jews, Protestants versus catholic (Wseinstein, 2015). These religious ringers bring about interreligious hate speeches that result to anxiety and lack of confidence among people.

The way religions hate speech and insecurity relate is complex when the concepts are cross examined from the perpetrators and their victims alike. This is because hate speech is grossly directed at religions and the religious faithful also use derogatory and extreme speeches against members of other religions but claims their speeches are their religious freedom (Bonoti, 2017). Such instances in Nigeria create tensions and sometimes provoke crisis.

2.2. Empirical review

Joel (2012) in her study on Ethno-religious Hate Speech in Nigeria stresses that the present insecurity situation in Nigeria, Boko Haram insurgency including the tension between Christian South and Muslim North is as a result of religious hate speech in the country. She hence re-iterates that the increasing menace of ethno-religious hate speech witnessing in the country have disabused the peoples' minds on what speech/statement constitutes hate when it is communicated as comedy and publications in the media.

The bane of hate speech among the religious groups in Nigeria is an obvious threat to the security of Nigeria. This is because the destructive effect of the menace in Nigeria (as pointed out by Joel) has desensitised Nigerians to the present state of insecurity (Joel, 2012). In an effort to curtail the menace in the country, Mac Arthur Foundation (2012, in Joel, 2012) in 2009 awarded grant of three hundred thousand Dollars as a cushion to eliminating faiths based hate speeches and instilling interreligious unity in the nation, given the differences between Christian and Muslims. Consequently, Maginnis (2012) adds that even in the same religions, hate speech has been directed on other members as obviously heard from Muslim that the southern Muslims are partially faithful to their religion, unlike those northern Muslims who claim to be most faithful.

Culpeper, Iganski and Sweiry (2017: 2) on their part investigate linguist impoliteness and religiously aggravated hate crime and resolve that there is not much work on hate speech hence, the paucity of scholarly analysis on linguistic

based grudges in religious affairs. To that note, Walter (2013) opines that demonstration of hostility linguistically is worth to be considered as an aggravated offence. The above positions have shown that scholarly attention is lately drawn to hostilities that accompany hate speech in all spheres of life, including religion, but the hostilities are much and they amount to offenses which are capable of creating tensions. The positions on hate speech, as mostly considered as impoliteness and religious aggravated hate crime reveal the consequences relating to anguish.

Bonotti (2017) carried out a research on Religious Hate Speech and Non-Domination in the United Kingdom and weighed both the freedom/free speech and hate speech relating same to truth, autonomy and democracy. The study argues further that the menace of hate speech as perpetrated chiefly by religious faithful as their religious freedom should be controlled like every other crime (Bonotti, 2017: 1). The idea supports the fact that in expression of religious freedom, propagation of hatred and subsequently, hostility because hate speech is capable of provoking insecurity for either the victims or the perpetrators. It is hence worthy to argue further that the domination of hostile languages in the religious affairs should be curtailed to avoid domination which leads to chaos. Prior to the Bonotti's research, Brown (2015) posits hate speech violates the dignity of their victims; it causes discomfort, distorted progress and jeopardizing cultural diversity. On the religious perspective of hate speech also ANON (2014) previously has it that even without labeling a religion heathen or satanic, disapproval of religions takes place in expressions of religious messages which amount to denunciation of other religious activities.

On the other hand, Gofwen (2004) holds that prejudice and hate emanating from religious groups with different ideologies have been observed throughout history as the causes of religious conflict (though politics is the primary source of conflict) with prolonged diverse harms hostility portrayals and stereotyping of groups and minorities are dangerous and lead to dehumanisation. This is because when rhetoric gets to the people through broadcasting, printing/digital media, they can lead to violent hate crime/genocide. It is observed also that most social media users' derogatory language. Reports consist of Muller and Schwarz (2018) opine that social peace can expose victims of hate speech to influence actual behaviour including genocide. The assertion agrees with the position of Fyfe (2017) who opines that the twentieth century was full of the spread of hate speech which mostly escalated to dehumanisation leading to hate crimes as witnessed in the Holocaust and genocide in Rwanda.

Ozarslan's (2014) study also empirically relates to this intended research work. The study analyses hate speech in relation to critical discourse analysis and posits that the stereotype of people brings about hate speech when communicated and it obviously leads to hate crime Ozarslan's study examines hate speech, critical discourse analysis, free speech and other related crimes using Speech Act Theory and has come out with hate speech act which he suggests to be a solution to the consequences of hate speech. Tracing the origin of hate speech, Ozarslan adds that hate speech spreads on the internet and it is capable of changing social practices of people (Ozarslan, 2014). The opinion is in accordance with the fact that "...texts are often sites of struggle in that they show traces differing discourse and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance" (Wodak & Meyer, 2011: 11).

2.3. Theoretical review

Hate speech and its harm are approached by Calvert (1997) using two models: Transmission and Ritual Model of Communication Models. The two models were postulated by Care in 1989 to provide knowledge on to suit different approaches to investigating hate speech and its related issues. Even though the models are in contrast, they focus on different harms caused by hate while transmission model guides courts' to direct, immediate, overt behavioural changes, physical responses, and mental difficulty suffered by the speech the ritual model on the other hand explains cumulative harm with repeated use of racist epithets that target ministries. This is because language of racists, sexist, homophobic and epithets provide wholly, treat people as subordinates (Delgado, 1995; Altman, 1995).

The Article depends on Speech act Theory as its Frame. The Speech Act Theory was finally put forward by John L. Austin in 1978 after series trials by different scholars. According to Austin (1978), words uttered go beyond just saying something; they also perform certain actions that go with the speech consciously/unconsciously to the parties in speech. The theory explains the fact that language is referential, informative, entertaining and performative.

Speech act theory according to Austin (1978) is based on three assumptions; locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary: the three types of acts in speech exist in any speech such that the locutionary dimension is the referential aspect of an utterance which ensures that a statement made is grammatically correct and communicatively meaningful in a language. On the other hand, illocutionary act is an act performed; when a statement is made it is a command, promise, order, persuasion etc. As such, when any of the actions above is carried out, there is a performance - illocutionary act. This is because illocutionary speech performance takes place at the moment of the utterance (Butler, 1997). Consequently, perlocutionary speech act entails what is got from the action that takes place by saying something. It is the consequences of the action performed based on the speech made.

From the forgone three assumptions, it can be deduced that; while locutionary speech act demands for what should be done, illocutionary speech act stages the deed demanded for. Consequently, the consequences of the deeds are the perlocutionary speech acts. The theory agrees with the perception of interreligious hate speech that produces insecurity. When a hateful speech is made, it calls for an action, and when an action takes place, there must be consequence and in this case the consequences are crisis that leads to insecurity.

3. Research methodology

This work uses descriptive research design and its data is achieved through observational method. The method became necessary because of the fragile insecurity situation of Nigeria that easily explodes through religious bigotry. Data is considered from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data is achieved through observational discussions with both Christians and Muslims on the subject matter while the secondary data which is chiefly explored are sourced from documented materials that relate to this work.

4. Findings and discussions

The prejudice by religious faithful of the major religions; Christianity and Islamic religions in Nigeria have always been provoking crisis in many parts of the nation, especially in the northern part of the country where the religions do constantly speak against each other. This attitude hence generates a lot of interest to researchers and consequently, many research works towards it are bound. Works exist that examine hate speech, especially as a source of insecurity. Specifically also the perspective of interreligious hate speech as a source of insecurity has been given attention by many researchers, most profoundly in Nigeria where two major religions (Christianity and Islam) compete for dominance in all spheres of life causing religious crisis every now and then. Hate speech as a source of insecurity can be traced to Germany where Maas (2015: 6) opines that; “hate speech is often not restricted to mere acts of hateful speech. It often moves from words to deeds”.

The forgone perception emphasises that hate words move to deeds and they bring about violence which can serve as a source of insecurity. This idea is related to the allegations on Christians and Muslims who are often pointed out in certain crisis in the country, and some time they themselves claim responsibility of some violent attacks. For instance, the Jamatul Nasir Islam (JNI) (2018) criticised the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) for promoting hate speeches through Apostle Suleman, Bishop Oyedepo, among others. According to Khalid - J.N.I Secretary General (2018), Apostle Suleman once stated that, if you see a Fulani man, kill him, while pastor Oyedepo added that; crushed them and kill all of them. Aliu (2018) on his part relates the hate speeches of the Christian (CAN) clergies to the killings/crisis of herdsmen in Nigeria in 2018. He posits that the issue of herdsmen heightened in 2018 because CAN unnecessarily over heated the polity because 2019 was around the corner. He further claims that “We nonetheless make bold to say that CAN is deliberately covering up by using the “herdsmen” debacle as a franchise to perpetuate evil as witnessed in the Boko Haram tale” (Aliu, 2018: 5). The positions of JNI have shown that inter religious hate speeches are sources of insecurity in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the most dreaded insurgency (Boko Haram) in Nigeria can also be traced to hate speeches perpetuated mostly by the Islamic and Christianity rivalry. To that note, Mahmood (2017: 15) holds that: “A core Boko Haram grievance has been... mistreatment of Muslims in Nigeria The resulting illegitimate post Christian community in perpetrating abuses, leading to the need for Muslims to defend themselves”.

The above expression explains the fact that religious tensions can explode into violence like it happened in Kafachan (1987), ZangonKafan (1992), Langtang (1994), Shendam, and Jos which were possible in order to galvanise support and provide evidence of unite and insult Muslims (Mahmood, 2017). Consequently, Thurston (2016) posits that Mohammad Yusuf (2009), who is the founder of the worse insurgency (Boko Haram) in Nigeria up-held that his complaints against Borno State Government was his perception of the attacks on Muslims in Nigeria. Yusuf aggravated tension between Muslims’ and Christians, the state and the western allies. Mui, had humiliated Muslims inside Nigeria and around the world. He therefore asserted that al-wala’ wa-l-ba-ra’ and Izhar al-din; demand of an aggressive defense of Islam, since the Islam enemies were on the move (Thurston, 2016).

5. Conclusion

This article has identified and examined interreligious hate speeches that cause violence/insecurity in Nigeria. It has discussed the religious war of words in relation to the insecurity havocs in Nigeria with focus on Christianity and Muslim. The discussions are related to the insecurity incidences in Nigeria hence, the work has made known the linguistic causes of some/most of the crisis in Nigeria. These realities call for adjustments/control of the speech behavior by the perpetrators. The government authorities will now understand the linguistic implication of the crises in the nation and proffer appropriate control mechanisms for peace and unity of the religious and the nationals at large.

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