Role of Language in Promoting Social Cohesion and Peace: Insights and Examples

Barthelemy Muzaliwa Balume
Junior Lecturer, Teacher Training College of Kaziba
Email: barthmuzal@gmail.com

Abstract: *This article examines the role of language in fostering social cohesion and peace. The article emphasises the role of language as a tool for peacebuilding, drawing on insights from 15 peer-reviewed theoretical and empirical articles on language, peace and social cohesion. The document analysis conducted on the 15 articles in question reveals two major directions of language power in peace-building and conflict management. On the one hand, it has been demonstrated that language has the capacity to intensify conflict and erode social cohesion, resulting in discord and confrontation even in contexts that are otherwise peaceful. Conversely, it has been demonstrated that language is conducive to peace and social cohesion. The capacity for social cohesion within a society hinges on the existence of a shared set of meanings that enable members to comprehend the world. This is made possible by language. The impact of language on social cohesion and peace depends on how it is used. By developing speech that is tactful, respectful, inclusive and empathetic, the speaker demonstrates sensitivity to the interlocutor's feelings and emotions, which can help to ease tensions and foster an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. Additionally, through active listening, positive decoding, honest interaction and politeness, the worth and dignity of the interlocutor is recognised, which can contribute to a strong sense of unity and belonging.*

Keywords: Language, Cohesion, Peace, Conflict.

INTRODUCTION

This article deals with the role of language in promoting social cohesion and peace. In several meetings attempting to identify mechanisms for building peace and cohesion, various factors have been mentioned, including democratisation, economic development, education and awareness, conflict resolution, international cooperation, protection of human rights, inclusive governance, and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration as the most important. Very few mentioned the function of language as a

peacebuilding tool. Forgetting that the peace building and dispute settlement processes may be hampered by a variety of obstacles, but that language can help remove or at least lessen them (Osimen et al., 2015, p. 167; Drabarz et al., 2017, p. 42).

Language has always played an important role in bringing people together, but can also be the source of their separation through conflicts (Yastibaş, 2021). The importance of language in promoting social cohesion and peace has increased in today's world of widespread conflicts and differences. When it comes to fostering tolerance, respect and understanding between different populations, language can be a very powerful tool. It serves as a vehicle for culture, history and identity as speaking the same language creates an inextricable link between people. However, speaking the same language is not enough. In the use of language; the choice of words, tone of voice, understanding, body language, etc. are elements that control and shape the peace building process (Wong, 2019, p. 50). For peace to be achieved, mutual understanding of each other's values, principles and beliefs can encourage cooperation and help build trust. Otherwise, miscommunication due to language barriers can lead to tensions and misunderstandings (Vorozhbitova et al., 2019, p. 205), which in turn can lead to conflict and division.

It is thus in this perspective that the present article has been developed. It is the result of a document analysis of 15 peer-reviewed theoretical and empirical articles on language, peace and social cohesion. These articles are "Language and conflict resolution: the limits of English" (Cohen, 2001), "Language and communication in conflict resolution" (Adejimola, 2009), "The importance of language studies in conflict resolution" (Ngabonziza, 2013), "The impact of language in conflict management and peace building" (Osimen et al., 2015), "The role of language in peacebuilding: The case of the 2008 Kenyan coalition government" (Barasa et al., 2016), "Multilingualism and social cohesion: Insights from South African students" (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2016), "Language as an Instrument for Dispute Resolution in Modern Justice" (Drabarz et al., 2017), "The Peace Dividend of Valuing Non-Dominant Languages in Language-in-Education Policies in Myanmar (Wong, 2019), The role and place of language in social conflict" (Vorozhbitova, 2019), "Integrating peace education into English language teaching in primary schools" (Yastibaş, 2021), "Introduction: Discourse, conflict and conflict resolution" (Chiluwa, 2021), "Impacts of Language Use in Conflict and Conflict Resolution among Senior and Junior Secondary School Principals in Ebonyi State" (Nwani-Grace & Agbiole, 2022), "Religion and language as a panacea to peacebuilding and development in Zimbabwe A Critical Discourse Analysis approach" (Mavengano et al., 2022), "Language and Communication Discourses in Conflict Management A Case Study of the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon" (Muluh & Solange, 2022), and finally "Language dimensions of social cohesion: the significance of linguistic inequalities in the context of refugee settlement" (Svensson, 2023).

The problem in this article stems from the fact that scientific research has not yet clearly and precisely demonstrated the dual nature of language and its factors that favour peace

and harmony. The aforementioned target articles already address the linguistic elements necessary for the promotion of peace and social cohesion. But they do not significantly address the fact that the same language can also be a source of conflict, separation, segregation and even war. It all depends on how it is used. And this is where lies the danger, because everyone has the linguistic power either to start war or to consolidate peace through language. Therefore, in order to minimise the use of language for conflict and war, and to promote the use of language for peace and cohesion, it is necessary to warn those who have both powers. The research process was guided by two main questions which are (1) what is the type of language that promote peace and social cohesion?, and (2) How can language be used for developing conflicts?

Thus, this article is an organisation of the existing scientific literature in order to inform the public about the factors of language to be promoted, because they are favourable to peace, and those to be avoided, because they are likely to generate conflicts.

METHODOLOGY

This article is the result of a qualitative research on the role of language in promoting social cohesion and peace. A document analysis was carried out on 15 peer-reviewed theoretical and empirical articles. These articles have in common that they all deal with language in peacebuilding and social cohesion, but have been developed from different contexts in Africa (Nigeria, Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, South Africa), Europe and Asia (Poland, Turkey) and America (United States). Therefore, the researcher first read the target articles several times to understand them and derive codes. These codes were then used as a conceptual framework to group the data into meaningful categories. After that, the grouped data were then organised in accordance with the codes obtained. And finally, the grouped and organised data were interpreted, analysed and presented by the researcher, sometimes with pragmatic illustrations taken from the same publications.

FINDINGS

The role of language in maintaining peace and social cohesion in the world is indisputable. The findings discussed in this section are based on an examination of fifteen peer-reviewed scientific publications that provide representative cases from various global contexts, with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa.

The authors of the analysed articles agree that language is a system of non-instinctive human communication methods for exchanging ideas, emotions and desires by means of a set of voluntarily produced symbols (Adejimola, 2009, p. 2; Osimen et al., 2015, p. 165; Muluh & Solange, 2022, p. 29; Mavergano et al. 2022, p. 31). With this definition, emphasis is placed on that language is the way to access the personality of an individual. Thanks to its dimension of communicating feelings, emotions, views, ideas, opinions, perceptions and judgements about people, objects, places, things, information and situations; language facilitates understanding, comfort, appreciation,

inspiration, empathy and sympathy (Adejimola, 2009, p. 2, Chiluwa, 2021; Mavergano et al., 2022, p. 24). Therefore, language forges close connections between individuals, groups of individuals, and even communities. This is the process that gives rise to the idea of social cohesion, which is nothing other than the level of connectedness and solidarity within a society. The only thing that makes social cohesion feasible for a society members is to have a shared set of meanings that allow them to make sense of the world(Cohen, 2001, p. 26; Drabarz et al., 2017, p. 41).

However, the happy results of language communication are only one side of the dual function of language in peace-building and social cohesion. If not managed properly, Language has the power to exacerbate conflict and undermine social cohesion (Wong, 2019, p. 50). Inappropriate language can lead to disagreement and confrontation even in peaceful environments. Ineffective communication undermines relationships and can lead to hurt feelings, anger and frustration; sometimes to the point where the connection is permanently damaged (Muluh & Solange, 2022, p. 29; Adejimola, 2009, p. 2). This approach even extends to the idea that language, as discussed in this chapter's second section, has been blamed for starting conflicts that have resulted in wars, civil wars, and even genocides in some countries (Barasa et al., 2016, p. 80; Adejimola, 2009, p. 3; Chiluwa, 2021; Ngabonziza, 2013, p. 34).

The type of language that is prone to disrupt the peaceful atmosphere, according to Muluh et al. (2022), is characterized by hurtful remarks, name-calling, insults, and harshness (p. 32). Therefore, for the promotion of peace and social cohesion, this type of language should be avoided. Language factors conducive to a climate of peace are present in the literature reviewed in this article, the key elements of which are presented in section 1 of this chapter. Section 2 of this chapter discusses the use of language and its power in leadership and politics, section 3 presents the influence of social media on the process of promoting peace and social cohesion, and finally section 4 discusses the need for concepts of peace in language education.

Language for peace and social cohesion

Language is a key element in the process of building peace and social cohesion. The mere fact of speaking the same language is seen already as a symbol of unity. This is why Western scholars see African and Asian multilingualism as a potential threat to social cohesion, because of the challenges of nation-building, social cohesion and human development associated with multilingualism (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2016, p. 240; Svensson, 2023, p.1). However, it is not only about mono- or multilingualism. The power of language, as revealed by science through the publications analysed as part of this research, is bidirectional (Adejimola, 2009, p. 2; Nwani-Grace & Agbiole, 2022, p. 704). However, the focus on this power in this article is firstly oriented towards its positive perspective. I only refer to its capacity to harm to indicate what is to be avoided. Thus, to develop the elements of language that are conducive to peace and social cohesion, this article condenses the extensive literature into a few factors. And these

factors are discussed in two points in this section. The first is peace maintaining and the second is conflict resolution.

Peace maintaining language factors

In an environment of peace, language is a tool for the consolidation of peace and the strengthening of social cohesion. It has a social dimension, which relates to its ability to foster relationships between people (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2016, p. 240; Wong, 2019, p. 51), and a psychological dimension, which relates to its ability to elicit a particular response or influence human behaviour (Osimen et al., 2015, p. 165). Its work for peace would therefore lie in the effective building of links between people, through the encouragement of notable reactions of union and fraternity. To achieve this, the literature proposes 3 articulation strategies and 3 ethical strategies. The articulation strategies are:

Tactful language

Tactful language is the use of carefully chosen words and phrases to avoid offending others (Muluh & Solange, 2022, p. 32). It is the language that takes into account the feelings and perspectives of others and is phrased in a way that does not provoke any negative reaction. The choice of words is therefore a key and very sensitive element because, if not managed well, it can be a serious source of conflict. Science has shown the role of language through the choice of words in serious conflicts. In the 1994 genocide in Rwanda for example, several words have been used to demonstrate the necessity of the murder of a large Tutsi population. Negative expressions such as "Inzoka", which translates to snake, were used to construct an anti-Tutsi concept. This and other words acted as transmitters of ideas and thoughts of hatred that led to killings (Ngabonziza, 2013, p. 36). Similarly, Zimbabwe went through a period of instability between 1982 and 1987 marked by a wave of politically driven violence in the Midland and Matebeleland provinces that claimed the lives of 20,000 civilians. The horrific violence was known by the Shona phrase "Gukurahundi", which compares the political violence to a summer storm that removes the chaff. The term was developed by political party leaders to manipulate the population (Mavergano et al., 2022, p. 24). This type of language, which is considered to be "inflammatory" as opposed to "tactful", has been formulated and disseminated in the community with the intention of inciting violence. This means that a choice of words and concepts favourable to peace, love and connection would rather have a more positive effect (Drabarz et al., 2017, p. 43; Muluh & Solange, 2022, p. 32). Based on this, the literature under review suggests the need for lexicalization in the development of tactful language.

Lexicalisation refers to word choice and word production strategies used by the speaker for definite purposes. The same concept is also used to describe the study of the meaning of words, the structure of sentences, coherence and other relationships between them (Barasa et al., 2008, p. 83; Muluh & Solange, 2022, p. 32). In the perspective of this article, it is a call to speakers to be aware of the thoughts and feelings

of those they are speaking to, to organise their language for entertainment, to speak thoughtfully and appreciatively, and to develop neutrality and positivity in their language. Therefore, a positive lexicalisation, which implies the choice of a vocabulary that entertains and unites while avoiding offence, is beneficial to the establishment of peace.

- **Inclusive language**

Inclusive language is a type of lexicalisation that avoids prejudices, slang and concepts that stigmatise or marginalise certain racial, gender or socio-economic groups (Cohen, 2001, p. 30; Mavergano et al. 2022, p. 31). It is an aspect of tactful language, but which is limited to the only binding power of language. Other aspects such as sensitivity to the feelings and emotions of others, entertainment, consideration, appreciation, neutrality and positivity are left behind. The focus is on the use of language for globalization, combination, collection grouping, unification, and inclusion.

Inclusive language is materialised through the "collectivisation" strategy, which is nothing more than a language design of collective action, collaboration and cooperation among people. It promotes plural pronominal lexical elements such as "we/us" that refer to the entire group, and other collective noun phrases, possessive adjectives and pronouns (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2016, p. 240; Mavergano et al. 2022, p. 31), as a way to rally all the group members together towards a common cause.

Inclusive language and collectivism are used as opposed to hate speech. By hate speech, I mean any speech that promotes violence against an individual or group on the basis of their race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation, or any other individual characteristic (Chiluwa 2021; Mavergano et al. 2022, p. 24; Muluh & Solange, 2022, p. 32). It is the language design of the "othering" ideology that results in dehumanization, marginalization, and/or exclusion (Vorozhbitova et al., 2019, p. 204). A typical example of this is mentioned by Mavergano et al. (2022), as they indicate that president Mugabe's government's use of othering ideologies to exclude some people from participating in politics and society was the root cause of the Zimbabwean conflict (p. 31). However, under President Mnangagwa's administration, the trend is in the other direction, and peace is gradually being felt. The widely accepted phrase "Together we rebuild Zimbabwe" indicates a focus on incorporating the entire populace (Mavergano et al., 2022, p. 31).

Therefore, for the sake peace and social cohesion, inclusive language and collectivism are encouraged
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- **Empathetic language**

Empathetic language is a type of language that seeks to convey compassion and empathy for other people. It involves using language and expressions that recognise and validate the emotions and experiences of the listener (Wong, 2019). Both parties put themselves in the other's position in order to better understand the other and steer clear of hurtful comments. Consequently, empathetic language style is heavily influenced by humanistic and non-violent psychology ideas, and is linked to non-

violent communication (Vorozhbitova et al., 2019, p. 204; Muluh & Solange, 2022, p. 35).

One of the key aspects of empathetic language is 'active listening'. This means listening attentively, recognising the speaker's feelings and responding in a way that demonstrates empathy. Active listening is based on respect for the other person, non-judgment in all situations and silence when necessary (Muluh & Solange, 2022, p. 33). The crucial process that emerges from active listening is "decoding", which is also a linguistic element and essential for promoting social cohesion and peace. This is the process of determining and understanding the meaning of a message (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2016, p. 257; Chiluwa, 2021). If active listening is not carried out effectively, a number of barriers to the use of compassionate language can arise, including linguistic limitations, cultural differences, ambiguities and biases, and assumptions.

These elements of peace maintaining language factors, which summarise the various factors presented in the target literature of this research, can also be summarised as follows:

Table 1.   Summarizing table for peace maintaining language factors

Unity discourse	Discriminatory discourse
Tactful language → Lexicalisation	Inflammatory Language
Inclusive language → Collectivisation	Hate speech
Empathetic language → Non-violent communication	Verbal aggression

Source : Data

In addition to these three basic language principles that promotes social cohesion and peace, the target literature also recommends that language peace builders' attention focuses non-verbal language, honesty and politeness.

Non-verbal language is a system of communication that does not involve words or oral expression. It is made up of various physical signs such as the use of gestures by the speaker to ensure active participation, speech through signs, hand and body movements, facial expressions and occasionally unique voices, sounds, and constant visual contact as a means of maintaining and connecting the interest and attention of parties involved (Adejimola, 2009, p. 3). This non-verbal language plays an important role in the process of peace and social cohesion. It needs to be handled with care, especially as it can be confusing and easily misunderstood. Misunderstandings can occur when gestures, facial expressions, or body language are interpreted differently by different people, cultures, or situations. messages conflict, leading to confusion. It is therefore an element to manage carefully during communications that seek to promote peace.

Another important element of language that deserves special attention in the peace process is honesty. The target literature suggests that in a divided society, honest interactions between people and organisations of different backgrounds and moral standards converge and lead to 'building bridges' between them (Chiluwa, 2021; Nwani-Grace & Agbiole, 2022, p. 708). Honest and open communication builds mutual trust and helps develop real, long-lasting relationships. Any peace and social cohesion process revolves around this.

And finally, politeness, which is the conduct deemed socially acceptable and which shows regard and respect for other people's feelings. Being polite in speech is essential for maintaining harmony and peace because it promotes respect and understanding between individuals from different backgrounds (Vorozhbitova et al., 2019; Nwani-Grace & Agbiole, 2022, p. 704). On the basis of this, Lakoff (1973) invented a politeness principle based on what she called Pragmatic Competence (PC). This PC is the ability to use language effectively, taking into account the context of the conversation (field), the person we are talking to (tenor) and the mode of communication (mode). And to materialize this, she put forward three guidelines for politeness: (1) "Don't impose", (2) "Give options" and (3) "Make A feel good, be friendly" (Nwani-Grace & Agbiole, 2022, p. 704).

a. Conflict resolution language factors

The dimension of language in the peace process is not limited to the consolidation of existing harmony, but also extends to the resolution of emerging conflicts. Words have been demonstrated to have the ability to start conflicts or bring about peace (Drabarz et al., 2017, p. 42; Svensson, 2023, p. 3). Even in situations where there is disagreement, language can foster understanding when used properly (Cohen, 2001, p. 26). This is why conflict resolution trainings often emphasise the importance of language, and especially effective language.

Therefore, the target literature suggests 4 language alternatives to conflict. Of these 4 alternatives, 2 are social proceeding arrangements, and 2 others are law proceeding arrangements.

The law proceeding arrangements, on the one hand, are adjudication and arbitration. Both represent a process in which a dispute is submitted to one or more neutral parties in order to reach an impartial conclusion that is legally enforceable or binding. The length of time the parties spend in dispute resolution is the main difference between the two processes. When a claim is submitted for adjudication, the parties receive a binding decision within 28 days, which usually speeds up the process. The arbitration process is much longer. The whole process can take several months or even years (Adejimola, 2009, p. 3; Cohen, 2001, p. 27). Another difference is that arbitration is conducted in a less formal legal context than adjudication, as the parties choose the arbitrator themselves and agree in advance to be bound by his/her decision.

What is worth noting is that both processes are crucial for resolving conflicts and promoting peace because they provide a structured, impartial way for parties to work out their differences without resorting to violence or other harmful methods. The principles of justice and fairness are essential because they help the parties to maintain their relationship.

On the other hand, the social proceeding arrangements are negotiation and mediation. Negotiation is a process by which a common agreement is reached after discussion between the two or more dispute involved parties. Conversely, mediation is a structured process involving an impartial third party to facilitate communication and help the parties resolve the issue on their own (Barasa et al., 2008, p. 75; Osimen et al., 2015, p. 165). Both negotiation and mediation are useful techniques for resolving disputes, promoting mutual understanding and preserving relationships. However, the success of both processes depends entirely on the careful and appropriate use of language.

The four language alternatives to conflict resolution are therefore summarized in the below table:

	Law proceeding		Social proceeding	
Starting point	**Adjudication**	**Arbitration**	**Mediation**	**Negociation**
Decision-making authority	Judge	Arbiter	Disputants	Negociators
Outcome of intervention	Binding	Binding	Non-binding	Non-binding
Focus of intervention	Law-based outcome	Law-based outcome	Management & pragmatic outcome	Management & pragmatic outcome
Nature of outcome	Win-lose	Win-lose	Win-win	Win-win
Parties required	One	All	All	All

Source: adapted from Adejimola (2009, p. 8).

These elements, together with the aspects of language for peace discussed in the previous section of this chapter, are very important in creating a climate of peace and social cohesion through language. It also remains important to examine language and its forms in politics and leadership.

b. Language and politics

In politics, language has a significant role, as it is the primary means of communication between the politicians and the public. Political actors use language to inform, organise, persuade and convince people to adopt their ideologies and beliefs. As a result, the public's perspective and analysis of information is often strongly influenced by the language they use. They use language positively or negatively to further their aims. And

as discussed in the previous sections, several political leaders have used language to create conflict in their respective regions. This concept will be reiterated here with some examples from different parts of the world, followed by a demonstration of how the same language can promote harmony and peace.

The role of language in political crisis in the world in general, in Africa in particular is very significant. The target literature in this study has highlighted this role with many examples, which cannot be mentioned exhaustively.

The first case to be mentioned is that of Rwanda, where language use has been shown to play a role in post-genocide peacebuilding. The Rwandan Commission for Unity and Reconciliation twisted genocide ideology through language; and lexical analysis revealed that 85% of President Paul Kagame's speeches in 2003 contained significant use of concepts like unity, reconciliation, peace, work and integrity (Ngabonziza, 2013, pp. 36-37).

The second case that can be mentioned is that of Cameroun. In response to the protracted situation in Cameroon, the government of Cameroon set up a committee in January 2017 to hold talks with representatives of the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC), led by Tassang Wilfredo. During the first meeting, the CACSC refused to talk unless the government released all detained activists. Further arrests followed, infuriating members of the consortium. The failure of the discussion only served to exacerbate the problem (Muluh & Solange, 2022, p. 33). But the interviewees of Muluh & Solange (2022) still convey their conviction that the Cameroun situation can only be solved by effective communication, abstaining from hate speech, and nonviolent communication (p. 34).

The other case is that of many other African countries that are victims of post-election conflicts. Ethiopia, Liberia, Kenya, South-Sudan, Uganda, Nigeria, Liberia, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe (Barasa et al., 2016, p. 77); and of course this list is not exhaustive, since many countries are not mentioned like Ivory Coast (2010 conflict between supporters of President Gbagbo and opposition leader Ouattara, resulting in thousands of deaths and a humanitarian crisis), Democratic Republic of Congo (2018 post-election violence linked to electoral irregularities and allegations of fraud), Mali (2013 military coup that sparked internal conflict), many others. However, for all of these conflicts, the target literature in this article, based on practical examples from other countries, suggests that language can be an effective tool for restoring peace and social cohesion (Adejimola, 2009, p. 4; Ngabonziza, 2013, p. 36; Barasa et al., 2016, p. 75; Muluh & Solange, 2022, p. 34).

c. Influence of social media

Social media has become an increasingly important tool for promoting social cohesion and peace. Social media platforms allow people from different backgrounds to connect

and engage in dialogue. This can help to break down barriers and promote understanding between different groups.

However, social media can also be used to spread hate speech and promote violence. The media is seen as an amplifier to which everyone in society has access. Everyone has the freedom to express their opinions without worrying about the size of their audience or the impact of their opinions. According to Barasa et al., a textual analysis during the Zimbabwean crisis revealed a significant frequency of recurrence of the discourse of change through the phrase 'Mugabe must go' in various newspapers in the fundamentalist South African press. The propagation of these evil concepts by the media hampered efforts to find sustainable answers to Zimbabwe's problems (Barasa et al., 2016, p. 80; Mavengano et al., 2022, p. 27). It is important for social media companies to take responsibility for the content that is shared on their platforms and take action to remove harmful content.

Overall, media and communication can play a powerful role in promoting social cohesion and peace. Responsible journalism and the responsible use of social media can help to create a culture of peace by promoting understanding, tolerance, and dialogue.

CONCLUSION

In a world where divisions can seem overwhelming, language stands as a beacon of hope. It is not just a means of communication; it is also a powerful force for social cohesion and peace. By developing tactful, respectful and inclusive, and empathetic speech; the interlocutor feels that the speech is sensitive to their feelings and emotions, which in turn will ease their tensions and forster an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. Through active listening and positive decoding, honest interaction and politeness, the worth and dignity of the interlocutor is recognized, and this builds a strong sense of unity and belonging. Additionally, the best language-based conflict resolution procedures are negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and adjudication. While negotiation and mediation are used to address a problem by assisting the parties in reaching an initial agreement, arbitration and adjudication, on the other hand, offer a framework that the two parties can use to address their dispute. As for the use of language in politics and social media, the target literature has revealed the psychological power of language, which allows interlocutors to reach each other's hearts and provoke reactions. It is this power that is deliberately used in politics and deliberately, or often not, in the media. By spreading messages of inclusion, harmony, dignity and integrity, this power can be used as a tool for peace and unity.

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