

Language Use in Conflict Resolution: Nigeria and South Africa 2019 Xenophobic Attack

Abolaji S. Mustapha PhD

*Department of English,
Lagos State University, Ojo,
Lagos State.
abolajimustapha@yahoo.co.uk*

Abstract

Experts in conflict management argue that intra and inter-conflict in and between nations can be managed if only there are proper channels of negotiation, or else, a degeneration of conflict leading to either civil or trans-national war may ensue. Similarly experts in language studies have proposed that one of the ways to manage conflict is the appropriate use of language in negotiation that could convert supposed adversaries into partners. Consequently stakeholders in conflict negotiation have called for language studies in conflict resolution. Thus, this paper examined the interactions between Nigeria and South Africa during the 2019 xenophobic attacks for the function and quality of language use in resolving the conflict. Qualitative analysis of the data was conducted using linguistic cues on the five conflict resolution strategies proposed by the Harvard Law School. In addition, the relational theory, which among others holds that “what we say conveys information about how we perceive our relationships with others” together with the politeness model that recommends the use of politeness strategies to ameliorate face threatening acts are used in the analysis. The analysis revealed the important role language play: linguistic cues that actualize conflict resolution strategies, politeness strategies and proper perception of relationship that contribute towards the resolution of the conflict. These results support previous studies’ findings that emphasize the important role language plays in conflict resolution and suggest better use of language – linguistic cues that can be implored to resolve conflicts.

Keywords: Language, conflict management, politeness, relational theory, xenophobic attack

1. Introduction

Language has been reported in many studies as one of the effective tools for conflict negotiation and resolution. This report has called for experts in language studies to investigate practical ways to use language for the management and resolution of conflicts in order to remain partners rather than become enemies because according to Taylor (2014), conflicts are a ubiquitous part of social life. It is not surprising then, to observe that warring parties often resort to dialogues (using language) in negotiation. Such dialogues often help to resolve conflict although sometimes there might be breakdown, and consequently, aggression and violence. Chilton (1997, p.174) says “there is something intuitively plausible both in the notion that violent conflicts are linked with dysfunction of human communication and in the notion

that communicative strategies are equally involved in the repair of conflict”. Similarly, Smith (1997, p.190) submits that, “in conflict resolution, the issue of discourse is important as discursive choices reflect view about a conflict, its origins and where justice lies; and decoding the pattern of those views can give hints on how to avoid violence”. Therefore our assumption in this study is hinged on how language can be used in conflict negotiation that may “resolve the conflicts and turn adversaries to partners ...” (www.pon-harvard.edu/daily/conflict-resolution-strategies) and bring relative peace for organic growth.

2. Background

Studies in language use in conflict and conflict resolution (Cohen, 2001; Dieu, 2013; Mazurama & Proctor, 2013; Adejimola, 2019; Opara 2016; Taylor 2017; Tobalase, 2017 among others) have reported the important role language plays in conflict resolution. For example, Dieu (2013) reported the role language played in the Rwanda genocide and in the resolution of the conflict that ravaged the country. She stressed that the meaning loaded words used did help to fuel the conflict just as language meanings also helped to resolve the conflict. She noted that aside from arbitration, negotiation and mediation, language use contributed in peace building in Rwanda post-genocide, especially in conflict management, conflict prevention and transformation. Thus she asserts that it is near impossible to resolve or change conflicts without language means just as Ndahiro (2000, p.54 cited in Dieu (2013, p.11) observed earlier that from the face value, one whose knowledge is limited on what happened in Rwanda may tend to think there is no problem with the concept in the language used several times in press releases”.

However, in conflicts that involve speakers of different languages, Cohen (2001, p.25) who examined how language use in conflict may vary across cultures recommends differences in approach that should rest on contrasting understanding of the nature of the conflict and society. He compared English, Hebrew, and Arabic and noted that the model of conflict resolution implicit in English terminology is merely one possible way to depict reality. To non-English speakers it may even appear idiosyncratic. Thus “it might be inappropriate to use a language paradigm as a baseline against which to measure non-English versions, speakers of other languages he concluded. He suggests that conflict resolution should be studied with full regard for the source language in which it is articulated and conducted. In fact, Opara (2016, p.11) stretched the issue of language further and argued that if English must serve as the language of conflict resolution in Nigeria, it must accommodate the diversity of culture and language use of the people thereby emphasizing the challenges of English in intercultural conflict resolution and the need to consider the different uses of the language. To Opara (2016, p.12) language and culture are effective tools for conflict resolution because interpretations of events are bound by socio-cultural and sociolinguistic perceptions. Her study concluded that since communication in English is not homogenous, if English is to be used as in intercultural conflict, it should take cultural and local linguistic factors into

consideration. Chijioke (2017) supports Opara (2016) but noted that language is insufficient since other key players such as the culture, gender ideology and the literature of the people concerned should be considered along with the language.

Taylor's (2014) study that is rooted in the social psychology theory of language examined the functions of language in conflict negotiation how different communicative acts relate to speakers' motivational goals and conflict outcome focused on the link between thought and talk. The study submitted that basic language choices have a profound effect on perception and cooperation, which in turn shape language. In his study, he called for research undertakings that should focus on practical issues of how to better use language in conflict resolution. From our literature search it appears that this call has not received the attention of scholars in this field of study. Thus in this study, we shall focus not only on the place of language in conflict and conflict resolution but also on the practical issue that Taylor (2014) raised – "how to better use language in conflict resolution".

To address such practical issue, we examined how language used in the interactions between Nigeria and South Africa during the 2019 Xenophobic attacks index better use of language or otherwise in the resolution of the conflict. In doing this, we adopted five strategies for conflict resolution proposed by Harvard Law School in order to x-ray how the language used by the representatives of the two countries actualizes conflict resolution strategies. The questions for which answers were sought are: did language play important role in the resolution of the conflict? How do the exchanges display better language use that is geared toward conflict resolution? In sum how does the language use in the interactions actualize the strategies for conflict resolution?

It is not impossible to question the relationship between language use and conflict negotiation strategies thus the need for clarification. An understanding of language use as social actions where language users are seen as social actors using Jaworski & Coupland's (1999) paraphrase of Goffman's works on discourse throws some light. According to Jaworski & Coupland (1999, p. 294) language users are social actors and their discourse (interaction) does not merely happen but is achieved as part of strategic performance. Thus interactions between dyads are strategically geared towards achieving set goals that may either aggravate or resolve conflict. Perhaps this consideration might have been part of the assumptions that informed Harvard Law School's conflict resolution strategies.

The Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School (www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/conflict-resolution-strategies) has proposed some strategies that can turn adversaries (actors in conflict) into partners. The abridged version of the five strategies are as follows: (i) recognize that all of us have biased fairness perceptions, that is, each party involved in a conflict naturally holds rights to claim. When embroiled in a conflict, we need to try to overcome our self-centered fairness

perceptions; (ii) avoid escalating tensions with threats and provocative moves - When we feel we're being ignored or steamrolled, we often try to capture the other party's attention by making a threat, such as saying we'll take a dispute to court or try to ruin the other party's business reputation. Before making a threat, be sure you have exhausted all other options for managing conflict; (iii) overcome an "us versus them" mentality – Whether dealing with conflict as a group or as an individual, you can overcome the tendency to demonize the other side by looking for common grounds in terms of identity or goal. Begin your conflict management efforts by highlighting your common goal of reaching a fair and sustainable agreement. Try to identify and discuss points of similarity between you, such as growing up in the same region. The more points of connection you can identify, the more collaborative and productive your conflict resolution process is likely to be. (iv) look beneath the surface to identify deeper issues - The next time you find yourself arguing over the division of funds, suggest putting that conversation on hold. Then take time to explore each other's deeper concerns. Listen closely to one another grievances, and try to come up with creative ways to address them. This conflict management strategy is likely to strengthen the relationship and add new interests to the table, expanding the pie of value to be divided in the process. and (v) separate sacred from pseudo-sacred issues - conflict management can be particularly intractable when core values that negotiators believe are sacred, or nonnegotiable, are involved, such as their family bonds, religious beliefs, political views, or personal moral code... So it is important to thoroughly analyze the benefits you might expect from a negotiation that could allow you to honor your principles. ([www.pon-harvard.edu/daily/conflict-resolution-strategies](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/conflict-resolution-strategies))

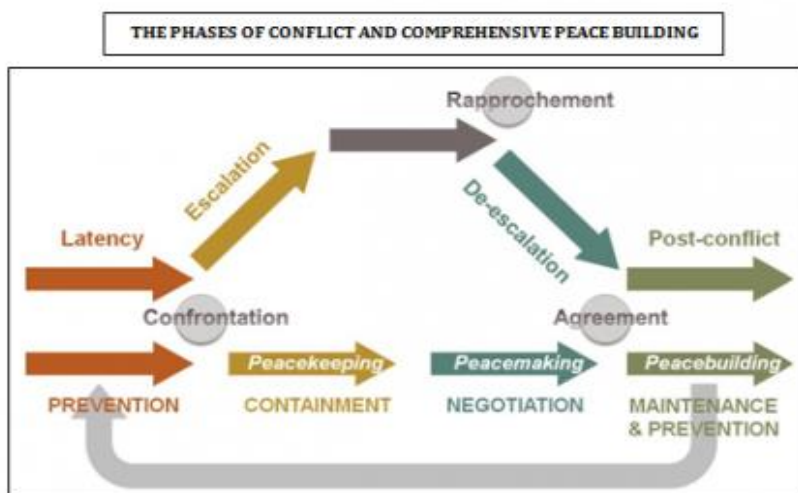
In addition to the strategies proposed in the preceding paragraph, the role language plays in conflict resolution can be investigated using a number of linguistic theories. One relevant linguistic theory is politeness model with its positive and negative politeness and the strategies for actualizing them. For example, an application of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness holds that it is possible to ameliorate face threatening acts (in interaction) using certain linguistic elements that portend politeness and cordiality. In addition, the relational theory which is rooted in the assumption that what we say conveys information about how we perceived our relationships with others and how words that are associated with affiliation affect the outcome that we get in exchanges is another window for viewing interaction during conflict. This relational theory is unconnected with the position that discursive choices reflect views about a conflict therefore decoding the pattern of this discursive choices can give hints on how to avoid violence (Smith 1997, p.190). What the assumptions in these theories suggest is that language can play an important role during conflict negotiation and different communicative acts of key players relate to speakers' motivational goals and conflict outcome. In addition, their tools and frameworks are available to unpack linguistic features that are forms of better language use in conflict resolution.

3. Method

3.1. Data

Nigeria and South Africa’s official exchanges sourced from Reuters, BBC, Africa News and Aljazeera online reporters were used. Excerpts from the BBC interviews with the South African President, the exchanges representing the three major parts of the conflict were carefully selected and collated for this study. The data were naturally categorized into three sections of the conflict, namely: (i) “period of latency” characterized by conditions that will possibly generate situations of confrontation between at least two of the actors; (ii) “period of confrontation” which often comes in a violent manner and leads either to escalation or stability for a given duration; and (iii) “period of rapprochement” between the actors which can lead to *conflict de-escalation*. There is often a fourth one called **post-conflict period** which does not always signify the end of the conflict but instead, indicates a vicious cycle of entrance into a new state of latency. These categories are pictorially represented below:

Image: The phases of conflict and comprehensive peace building:



Source: www.ireneet.com

One advantage of the above categorization is “the careful sorting out of latent meaning and hidden assumptions as well as pragmatic load borne by various linguistic choices during the verbal jousting cross-fire. Open selection of materials becomes necessary in order to describe, interpret, analyze, and critique social-political intrigues reflected in the texts” www.ireneet.com.

For example, at the beginning (“a period of latency”), the President of South Africa was quoted to have said:

President Cyril Ramaphosa (henceforth PCR)... *tension were inflamed after videos and images were shared on social media purporting to show Nigerians being attacked and killed. The Nigerian government said there was no evidence that this had taken place. But it did say that Nigerian-based businesses had been targeted.*

Nigeria Foreign Minister ... *Nigeria cannot rule anything out for now... we are still receiving reports and weighting options...the federal Government says it will not rule out any option to its response to xenophobic attacks against Nigerians by South Africans*

In the middle of the conflict (“a time of confrontation”):

President Buhari’s envoy expressed the following: “ ... we expressed the deep concern of President Buhari (henceforth PMB) and Nigerians about intermittent violence against Nigerians and their property/business interests in South Africa. PMB stressed the need for South Africa to stop the violent attack against citizens of brotherly African nations. PMB is worried that the recurring issue of xenophobic could negatively affect the image and standing of South Africa as one of the leading countries on the continent...if nothing is done to stop it/ The special envoy conveyed the assurance of PMB that the Nigerian government is ready and wishing to collaborate with the South African government to find a lasting solution to the involvement of few Nigerians in criminal activities and to protect lives and property of the larger groups of other law abiding... Nigerians and indeed Africans in general are against all forms of attacks including xenophobic...PMB further stressed that the Nigerian government will guarantee the safety of lives, property and business interests of South Africans in Nigeria.

PCR’s diplomats... *our President says that South Africans are not xenophobic and he wants the rest of Africa to know this...diplomats have been dispatched to several African countries with a clear mandate of repairing the country’s image ...they are to go and explain what happened and also to offer our apologies. And for those that have been killed, our condolences, and for those who have been injured as well. We have got to do it because our standing on the continent has always been high and as this has lowered it considerably. The team will also visit the African Union to assure the continent body of his country’s commitment to the ideals of Pan Africanism and African unity.*

Towards the end (“a time of rapprochement”): we have the excerpt below:

PCR...*the violence was most disconcerting and embarrassing; his government completely rejects such acts which undermine not only the country’s image but also its relations with brotherly African countries. We affirmed our stand against criminality and he is committed to do everything possible to protect the rights of every Nigerians and other foreign national in the country.*

3.2. Analysis

Qualitative method was used at the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, “different forms of cue-response sequences and their role in managing information exchange and structuring relationships in conflict” (Taylor, 2014) were analyzed. At the macro-level, how “episodes of language produce phases and cycles that escalate conflict or move it toward a resolution” were examined. In the final section, “the link between thought and talk, showing that basic language choices have a

profound effect on perceptions and cooperation, which in turn shape language and contributes toward conflict management” Taylor (2014) were highlighted.

We used an eclectic analysis approach blending the relational theory, face management (positive politeness theory of Brown and Levinson that improved on Gumperz’s notion of face) together with African cultural model on relationships are brought to bear in the analysis in order to answer the guiding question on how conflict can be managed with the use of language especially how language use is calculated to actualize the five strategies for conflict management highlighted above. It is noted that our analysis concentrated on how the better use of language in the official exchanges between the two countries actualize the five strategies mentioned in Section 2 of this paper.

4. Analysis

4.1 Analysis I

At the beginning of the conflict, PCR employs certain words that tend to play down on the seriousness of the conflict as it affects Nigeria. He quotes the official response of Nigeria in Excerpt 1 thus:

PCR ... tension was inflamed after videos and images were shared on social media purporting to show Nigerians being attacked and killed. The Nigerian government said there was no evidence that this had taken place. But it did say that Nigerian-based businesses had been targeted.

In Excerpt 1, there is the deployment of ironical understanding using positive report to emphasize the contrary. As a discourse cue, it is a face-saving strategy deployed to maintain peaceful diplomatic relation with Nigeria. With the same strategy, the South African authorities push the blame to make the social media as the under-dog. This initial response of the South African government rather uses language to actualize Strategy 5 which separates the sacred from pseudo-sacred issues. However, human life which is sacred is not addressed in Excerpt 1. The other pseudo-sacred issue is that “*Nigerian-based businesses had been targeted*”. The use of the phrase “*purporting to show*” is deliberate, a mitigating strategy deployed to cast doubt on what was displayed on the social media. It was used, again, as face-saving act that further douses the inflamed tension in an attempt to minimize the conflict.

In a typical diplomatic response, PMB, in Excerpt 2, stresses a need for South African government to take necessary actions to stop the violence against citizens of brotherly African nations:

... a recurring issue of xenophobia that could negatively affect the image and standing of South Africa as one of the leading countries on the continent; if nothing is done to stop it. PMB commits itself to support South African government to find solution to the menace ... we convey the assurance of PMB that the Nigerian government is ready and willing to collaborate with the South African government to find a lasting solution to the involvement of few Nigerians in criminal activities and to protect lives and property of the larger groups of other law abiding

Nigerians and indeed Africans in general against all forms of attacks including xenophobic. (Excerpt 2)

From Excerpt 2, the Nigerian diplomatic team anchors its points on a technical *argumentum ad populi* used to appeal to the positive face need of the South African government. PMB's acknowledgement of the existence of a "few Nigerians in criminal activities" suggests that the Nigerian government accepts its citizens' contribution to the crisis but the perpetrators are "few Nigerians". By doing this, his utterance meets the positive face need of the interactional partner by performing what the partner likes (accepting your people's role in the conflict). This strategy ameliorates the face threatening act of reminding the South African government what it ought to have done. Thus PMB appeals to reason, stressing the fact that the South African authorities ought to be responsibly committed to protecting "lives and property of the larger groups of other law abiding Nigerians and indeed Africans in general against all forms of attacks including xenophobic". PMB's utterance defines the roles for both parties in resolving the conflicts – blame and role sharing. In sum, the utterance seeks to suggest a need for collaborative efforts: "PMB commits itself to support South African government to find solution to the menace". The crux of the foregoing is that the setting of such conditions is carefully couched in a high degree of politeness that ameliorates the face-threatening act of delegating responsibilities.

However, it appears that the pronouncement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the latency period of the conflict does not employ the better use of language to accomplish Strategy 3. In other words, Excerpt 3 appears to be face threatening in its use of language. In Excerpt 3, we have the pronouncement of a Minister in the Nigerian government.

Nigeria cannot rule anything out for now... we are still receiving reports and weighing options it will not rule out any option to its response to xenophobic attacks against Nigerian by South Africa (Excerpt 3).

This pronouncement is rather provocative and face threatening capable of inciting South Africans to start preparing against any form of aggression from the Nigerian government. To pronounce that "Nigeria cannot rule anything out..." or "it will not rule out any option..." portends threat. However, the Minister's utterance might have been calculated to douse the tension created among its citizens (Nigerian citizens at home and abroad) that are uncomfortable or growing impatient with the purported silence and inaction of its government at the latency period of the conflict. But it is clear the utterance does not employ a better use of language to resolve the conflict.

By using the "citizens of brotherly African nations" in Excerpt 4 below, the Nigerian President appeals to the African cultural model of relationship which extols African relational concept that holds that all Africans and African states are brothers and sisters (siblings of the same larger family). Thus hurting them (Nigerians and citizens of brotherly African states) amounts to hurting themselves (Africans as a whole) South Africans inclusive. This use of language accomplishes the task of

Strategy iii thereby “highlighting your (their) common goal of reaching a fair and sustainable agreement ... try to identify and discuss points of similarity between you, such as growing up in the same region.”

...PMB stresses that the Nigerian government **will guarantee**, property and business interests of South Africans in Nigeria... the Federal Government **has appealed** to Nigerians not to attack South African companies operating in Nigeria in retaliation for the ongoing...conflict... assure **the safety of lives** in spite of the xenophobic attacks against Nigerians in South Africa... (Excerpt 4)

PMB’s commitment to ensure safety of the lives of South Africans in Nigeria does not only prioritize the sacred but also assures the safety of the interests of South Africans. This use of language tends to satisfy the positive face needs of the partner as it accommodates their interests. The verb phrases “*will guarantee*” and “*has appealed*” in Excerpt 4 help in no small way to ameliorate the conflict and to disarm the agents of xenophobic attacks who might want to escalate the conflict.

The constant use of the phrase “*our brotherly African nations*” as in Excerpt 5 below, suggests strong positive relational bond and the way the Nigerian government perceives its relationship with South Africa. In fact, the import of the choice of words, phrases and sentences in the Nigerian government pronouncements from the relational theory point of view (“what we say conveys information about how we perceived our relationships with others and how words that are associated with affiliation affect the outcome”) suggest that the Nigerian government has a wholesome perception of its relationship with the South African government and peoples as sacred, brotherly and sisterly in spite of the attacks on some Nigerians in South Africa. It appears that the Nigerian government would not want any conflict to sour the good relationship between them and would rather have an outcome that would correct the odds and make amends. In a nutshell, it appears that Nigerian government in its use of positive politeness strategies such as the linguistic cues of “*we*” “*us*” suggests togetherness in spite of the conflict as it remains committed to ending the conflict and forging ahead with the cordial relationship that existed between the parties in the past.

The use of “*thanks*” in Excerpt 5 expresses appreciation which is a positive politeness strategy that satisfies the positive face need of the South African people and government. It is noteworthy that PMB’s tactful pronouncement avoids the mention of Nigerians as objects of the attacks in this excerpt rather he used a general term “...leading to the killing and displacement of foreigners...”. He deliberately avoids the use of Nigeria in this Excerpt although he uses it in Excerpt 3. He stresses what is sacred to the government of Nigeria - “*lives and relationship*”. Referring to the latter, the PMB looks forward to a solidified relationship with the affiliation affect words “...*citizens of brotherly African nations*”. Having stressed what his government would do to ensure safety of lives and interests of South Africans in Nigeria, he calls on the South African government to take “... *visible steps to end violence against citizens*”. This command is more of an imposition that appears to

violate the rights of the other party or rather violates the negative face need of the partner to be left alone or at least not to be reminded of their failure to protect the lives and interests of Nigerian or foreigners in South Africa. However, the command uses another positive politeness strategy to ameliorate the infringement “... *citizens of brotherly African nations*” which suggests that as Africans, what we are expecting you South Africans to do is your obligation to your brothers and sisters, in other words, as siblings of the same parent Africa, you owe us protection just as we owe other brotherly African nationals protection of their lives and interests in Nigeria.

Excerpt 5

PMB: *Thanks for coming to explain to us what happened in South Africa recently, leading to the killing and displacement of foreigners...the relationship between the two countries will be solidified ...government has to take visible steps to end violence against citizens of brotherly African nations ...*

It is noteworthy that the Nigerian government in its use of language satisfies all the five strategies except one, Strategy 4 – failure to look beyond the surface – the root cause of the recurrent attacks on foreigners in South Africa. In fact, what PMB sent through its envoy relates the President’s commitments in Excerpt 4 that is void of addressing the root cause of the conflict.

Analysis II

In this section, particular attention is given to the analysis of South African pronouncements. Again the main objective is to identify better language use that actualizes the five strategies for conflict negotiation, politeness strategies and relational theory imports. In Excerpt 6, South African President responds through his envoy to the various reports and the comments from other countries.

Excerpt 6

... the violence was most disconnecting and embarrassing... his government completely rejects such riots which undermine not only the country’s image but also its relations with brotherly African countries ... he affirms his stand against criminality and he is committed to do everything possible to protect the rights of every Nigerian and other foreign nationals in the country ... The incident does not represent what we stand for... South Africa police will leave no stone unturned in bringing those involved to justice.

The use of language in Excerpt 6 is calculated to actualize all the five strategies barring Strategy 4. Core values such as lives and human rights are addressed as the South African government commits itself to protecting lives and respecting people’s rights. His message dissociates his country from the acts that have violated and disrespected these core values in its own country – “... *the incident does not represent what we stand for...*”. The excerpt contains elements of in-groupness that is a feature of positive politeness strategy in the use of “... *brotherly African*

countries” that achieves solidarity and cordial relationship. In another vein, the use of this phrase also suggests not only how the South African government perceives its relationship with Nigeria but also suggests affiliation affect that scores a strong point on one of the values of African cultural beliefs that tends to predicts the outcome of the conflict – peace and partnership. Finally, PCR’s commitment to address the undesirable acts also portends the outcome of the conflict, a move to the resolution of the conflict. However, it appears there are no linguistic cues in this excerpt that address underlying cause(s) of the conflict - strategy 3.

Similar commitment to addressing what is considered sacred between the two countries - lives and relationship are contained in the PCR’s response to former President (of Nigeria) Obasanjo’s comment on the issue. By referring to what is at stake, Cyril underlines the importance of the relationship between the two countries and indeed all the “*brotherly African nations*” in Excerpt 7. By accepting the mistake that South Africans had made, this acknowledgement ameliorates the threatening acts. In addition, PCR commits his country to make amends “... *we have to correct it*” which points to where his country wants the conflict to lead to. PCR to Obasanjo in Excerpt 7:

There is so much at stake, and whatever mistake we have made, we have to correct it. Look, what can we do or should we do? (Excerpt 7)

In Excerpt 8 we have another response of PCR at the Mugabe burial ceremony.

South Africans are not xenophobic and they want the rest of Africa to know this ... diplomats have been dispatched to several African countries with a clear mandate of repairing the country’s image ...to go and explain what happened and also to offer our apologies. And for those who have been killed, our condolences, and for those who have been injured as well. We have got to do it because our standing on the continent has always been high and this has lowered it considerably...the team will also visit the African Union to assure the continent body of his country’s commitment to the ideals of Pan-Africanism and African unity... we would not want to see that happening to our own nationals, who are in other countries around the world because South Africans have spread themselves around the world.

In Excerpt 8 which is directed at all African states, there is a mixture of linguistic elements that are more of negative and positive politeness strategies, the treatment of what is considered sacred (core values) and elements of how South Africans perceive their relationship with other African nations. However, there is non-use of words that connotes affiliation affect aside from membership of official bodies that bring all African nations together – African Unity and Pan-Africanism.

The denial in Excerpt 8 of how other African nations perceive South Africans as xenophobic people violates the positive face need of their partners that accused South Africa of wrong doing “... *South Africans are not xenophobic*”. The import

is a denial of name calling, denial of the reported facts about what had happened in South Africa. As a form of disagreement, it violates strategy 3 as it fails to overcome an “us versus them” mentality” which tends to escalate the provocation (Strategy 2). It widens the relationship and pitches the other African nations against South Africa. However, the PCR acknowledges some persons were killed and offers apologies as a positive politeness strategy, which ameliorates the face threatening acts of the denial/disagreement with the other African nations. Again, PCR’s emphasis on *us versus them* together with self-praise “*our standing on the continent has always been high and this has lowered it considerably*” does not satisfy the positive politeness face need of its partners. However, the positive politeness strategy that satisfies the face needs of those who are hurt is also contained in the condolences and apologies that his envoy was to deliver to the African countries they visited. It is interesting that the use of words of affiliation affect such as “*brotherly African nations*” is absent in Excerpt 8 rather the PCR uses non-affiliation affect words and phrases such as “*several African countries*” to distance his country from the other countries.

It is also interesting, that PCR, in the same Excerpt 8, ameliorates some of the harsh language use by stressing the core values or ideals that bind South Africa to other African countries especially the ideals of Pan-Africanism and African Union which help to actualize Strategy 3 that has not been given attention in the earlier pronouncement in Excerpt 6. The latter part of the speech also reiterates the PCR’s commitment not just to the ideals of the two African bodies but his commitment to avoid the “us versus them” syndrome which according to the proponent of the strategies also “promotes suspicion and hostility toward members of out-groups. In fact, Strategy 3 stresses that you can overcome the tendency to demonize the other side by looking for an identity or goal you share. The more points of connection you can identify, the more collaborative and productive your conflict resolution process is likely to be.

In sum, there is no doubt that Excerpt 8 contains a reaching out for common ideals especially the ideals that the Pan-Africanism and African Unity uphold although there is much emphasis on disagreement and a pitching of South Africa against the other African nations in PCR’s use of language.

In Excerpt 9, we have PC’s response to BBC interviews on the conflict

We are very concerned and of course as a nation, we are ashamed because this goes against the ethos of what South Africa stands for... No Nigerians were killed in the violence in South Africa, but Nigerian-owned shops and businesses are believed to have been targeted by the mobs ...of the 12 people who were killed 10 are reported to be South Africans and two were from Zimbabwe...

In Excerpt 9, PCR acknowledges the faults of his country and tenders an apology on behalf of his country, “*we are ashamed*”. This pitches the South African people

with the rest of African nations that were hurt and non-African nations that condemned the actions of some South Africans. This acknowledgement satisfies the positive face need of its partners in the conflict and as a positive politeness strategy it ameliorates the face threatening actions of South Africans in Excerpt 8. In condemning the actions perpetrated by some South Africans, PCR addresses what is treated as sacred or core values of Africans and of course the core value of relationship in African culture and people. By aligning with those who were hurt through loss of lives, PCR also highlights the fact that South Africans grieve more for losing ten persons which is higher in number than those who lost their lives in the other African countries (Zimbabwe and the others). This comparison tends to attract sympathy from the other African nations. By stating that no Nigerians were killed, PCR might have thought this would placate Nigerians. However, displacing people and targeting their means of livelihood disrespect their rights or violate the ideals and core values of African society and the ideals of Pan-Africanism and African Unity. The use of the verb phrase "... *are believed*" in Excerpt 9 does not signify acceptance of the report of what had happened. The use of language here violates the positive face need of the interaction partner as it does not suggest agreement with what had been reported about Nigerians who had experienced xenophobic attacks in South Africa. In the same vein, it stresses the notion of "us against them"... that South Africa had suffered more casualties than the other countries had experienced.

5. Summary of findings and discussion

Our analysis reveals copious use of linguistic features in the pronouncements of both countries that actualized all but one of the five strategies for conflict resolution. In addition, there are linguistic features that reveal how the countries perceive the relationship between them (*African brothers*) which also signal affiliation affect as the phrase "*the brotherly African nations*" appears in both countries' utterances. It explores values that bind them together as reference to Pan Africanism and African Unity are stressed "... *commitment to the ideals of Pan Africanism*". In addition, there are linguistics cues that explore positive and negative politeness strategies such as the use of collaborative "we" and "us" that are geared towards resolving the conflict.

However, our analysis did not reveal similar copious use of linguistic elements that actualize Strategy 4 which stresses the need to go beyond the surface: "look beneath the surface to identify deeper issues"; where parties (are) to "take time to explore each other's deeper concerns". It is only in the pronouncement of the Nigeria government that its utterance acknowledges one of the possible causes of the conflict: the activities of some criminal elements among Nigerians in South Africa as in Excerpt 2.

It is interesting that both countries are caught in the web of failure to use appropriate language features that "Recognize that all of us have biased fairness perceptions as

contained in Strategy 1. The Nigerian government consistently emphasizes the hurt of its people just as the South African government laments the damage done to its prestige and high position among African States, the loss of ten natives and that they would not want to see any form of attacks to South Africans and their interests in any part of the world as in Excerpt 8.

It is also worthy to note that Nigeria's use of language tends to emphasize or utilize most of the five strategies for conflict resolution by employing copious words and phrases that signal how it perceives its relationship with South Africa and words that portray affiliation affect. Linguistic items that actualize positive politeness strategies are rife in their utterances. These linguistic cues tend to reduce conflict or ameliorate the face threatening acts emanating from the conflict. The Nigeria Minister's utterance that appears to issue threat, however, does not support what the other utterances actualize. However, it appears, according to our analysis that this is rather minimized in the pronouncements of the South African government. The latter's use of language in the management of the conflict appears to be a mixed bag of employing more linguistic strategies for conflict management that help to reduce conflict than those features that tend to aggravate the conflict e.g. "*South Africa is not xenophobic we would not want to see that happening to our own nationals, who are in other countries around the world because South Africans have spread themselves around the world*"

Our analysis notwithstanding, PCR and his people merit the empathy of other African states for some reasons. One, certain persons appeared to have hijacked the conflict using the social media to heat up the polity in Nigeria and other African nations by exaggerating the conflict with an intention that is best known to them. In fact, with the images displayed for the rest of the world to watch, there could be but one interpretation which was to settle some scores. The agencies behind the images and messages in the social media appear to be up to another agenda not far from turning the world against South Africa. Thus the government of South Africa had to make some self-defence utterances that are calculated at correcting the bad impression made.

Above all, our analysis revealed better use of language for conflict resolution in the utterances that actualize nearly all the five strategies and how the players perceive themselves and their relationship which is the practical issue that Taylor (2014) raised. Finally it is interesting to note that both countries used two different varieties of English (Nigerian English and South African English) from two different cultural backgrounds and the two parties were able to reach a common goal – resolution of the conflict. In fact, it did not encounter the difficulty posed by cultural differences that affect different users of English from different cultural backgrounds that Opara (2016, p.11) reported in her study. Although our research participants used different national varieties of English – Nigerian English and South African and operated

from two different cultures, that did not affect the interpretation of their utterances nor impede the process of resolving the conflict.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study supports the claim of previous studies that language plays an important role in conflict resolution. In addition, the language use in the utterances of both countries' representatives actualize linguistic politeness strategies, relational expressions that portray how the two countries perceive not only their relationship but also each other and the five strategies for conflict resolution. Thus this study provides an answer to Taylor's (2014) question on the practical issue on how to better use language in conflict resolution. Language use that is polite – satisfies the positive and negative face needs of interactants and ameliorates face threatening acts and that actualizes the five strategies for conflict resolution is a better use of language in conflict resolution. Also there are linguistic cues that help to “strengthen the tenuous unity and foster partnership, progress and less strained diplomatic relations” (www.Irenees.net) between them. Finally, this study has shown not only the applicability of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, but also the usefulness of interdisciplinary investigation – the law and linguistics and the significance of relational theory in conflict resolution.

References

- A Relational Approach to Peace Initiatives in Conflict situations www.irenees.net/articles/21/3/2020. accessed 22/3/2020
- Adejimola, Sunday 2019. Language and Communication in Conflict Resolution. *Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution* 1/1:1-9 available online www.academicjournals.org/JLCR
- BBC Interviews on xenophobic attacks <https://www/bbc.com.news.worldafrica>
- Brown, Penelope & Levinson, Stephen. 1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chilton, Paul. 2010. The role of language in human conflict: prolegomena to the investigation of language as a factor in conflict causation and resolution *Current Issues in Language and Society* 4/3:174-189.
- Cohen, Raymond 2001. Language and Conflict Resolution: The Limits of English. *International Studies Review* 3/1:25-51
- Dieu, Amini Jean de 2013. The importance of language studies in conflict resolution. *Journal of African Conflict and Peace Studies* 2/1:11-15.
- Gumperz, John 1982. *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harvard Law Program Strategies for conflict resolution [https://www.pon-harvard.edu/daily/conflict-resolution-strategies](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/conflict-resolution-strategies) accessed 30/3/2020.
- Jaworski, Adam & Coupland Nikolas (Eds) 1999. *The Discourse Reader*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Mazurama, Dyan & Proctor, Keith 2013. Gender, Conflict and Peace: *Occasional Paper by World Peace Foundation*

- Opara, Chika Glory 2016. Language and Culture in Conflict Resolution Tools: Rethinking English as a Linqua Franca. *British Journal of English Linguistics* 4/5: 11-15.
- Smith, Dan 1997. Language and discourse in conflict and conflict resolution. *Current Issues in Language and Society* 4/3:190-214
- Taylor, Paul J. 2014 the role language in conflict and conflict resolution. In Thomas, M. Holtgraves. (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Social Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Tobalase, Adegbite 2017. Conflict and resolution: The role of culture, gender and literature. In Chijioko Ogbonna, Adegbite Tobalase & Alao Olatunji (Eds) *Discourse in Peace and Conflict: An Interdisciplinary Approach* Accessed from www.researchgate.net/publication/317661513 22/4/2020.
- Wright, Sue 2010. Language as a contributing factor in conflicts between states and within states. *Current Issues in Language and Society* 4/3:215-235
www.reuters.com – article south-africa-nigeria-xenophobic-violence-
www.bbc.com worldafrica south-africa-nigeria-xenophobic-violence-
www.africanews.com 2019/9/04 south-africa-nigeria-xenophobic-violence-
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/south-africa-apologies-nigeria-xenophobic-violence-190916174014436.html>

This article was published while spending my sabbatical at the Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria in 2020.