



FOUL LANGUAGE AMONG TERTIARY INSTITUTION STUDENTS: ROLE OF THE ACADEMICS

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication is determined by the speaker who in turn determines the response from the receiver. A Yoruba adage says "oro rere lo n yo obi lapo" meaning that good words in turn produce good response. The use of foul language is prevalent among tertiary institution students which may tend to affect conversations and relationships. This paper examined the role of the academics in curbing foul language among tertiary institution students and was organized under: character development, indiscipline in schools, sources of students' use of language, use of foul language among students, effects of foul language on conversations, role of academics, and, way out.

Keywords: Foul language, Tertiary Institutions, Character, Indiscipline, Academics.

INTRODUCTION

The language of a people is the identity, culture and value of such a people. Language is a very important natural and unnatural phenomenon in any society. Its importance entails the whole spheres of life of the citizens. Language has codes and systems that are used for representations and communication. Communication is at the center of any language acquisition and learning processes because it is basic to the transmission of values, culture and the identity of a people. A loss of a language translates to the loss of a people, their values, culture and identity (Ofodu, 2014). The higher education system is seen to make a fundamental contribution to the future of any country and plays a vital role in country's intellectual, economic, cultural and social development. The sector educates our future professional workforce, produces future leaders, provides jobs, drives much of our economic and regional success, and facilitates cultural and trade links with other countries. It plays a key role in the growing knowledge and innovation-based economy, enriches our social environment and promotes the tolerance debate that underpins society. Therefore, all the enterprise in this sector must be conducted with integrity. Disciplined behaviour is a necessity for individuals, small groups, organizations for national health and survival (Jekayinfa, 2013).

Character Development

Any organisation or society that does not have moral inclination is not likely to stand, hence, Nigeria had a system of moral education before the advent of the colonial masters. Ofodu (2014) noted that studies such as Taiwo (1986) and Osokoya (1997) asserted that before the colonial government came to amalgamate the southern and northern protectorates Nigeria, the geographical area called Nigeria today had been in existence. It was made up of people of various ethnic entities with a common identity. They lived in various communities with their communal language, people, culture and leaders (Taiwo, 1986). Furthermore, Osokoya (1997) claims that in the pre-colonial period, the area called

Nigeria was made up of various independent ethnic groups commonly called tribes which were a people with a different indigenous languages, fairly common tradition and territory. These ethnic groups had their distinct way of educating the young ones via the medium of their indigenous languages. The system of education was aimed at inculcating attitudes and values in children. Children were corrected whenever a wrong sound or speech was made. Character development was one of the main objectives of such education and the responsibility of building a good character was not left to parents alone; neighbours, relatives, peer groups and members of the community contributed their quota. Moreover, youths were taught indigenous proverbs, riddles and folktales that dwelt on moral and ethical behaviour, and the consequences of bad behaviour and misconduct. It was an education that attached a high premium on cultural transmission. Children learn by imitation, observation, and participation in activities or actions of elders. It was an educational system that encouraged social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and moral values. Character is essential for success in any endeavor and for a nation to succeed, there is the need for its citizenry to be developed in character (Fasae (2018). Character reflects our values, ethics and morals which define us as a people (Omole, 2014); it is a set of qualities that make somebody distinctively interesting or attractive, especially somebody's qualities of mind and feelings and reputation (Wiki, 2013). Furthermore, language is a tool of character. The way a person uses language reflects what his character is (Fasae, Ajayi and Olowe, 2019).

Indiscipline in Schools

The values that we entrench so much have been eroded as students use different foul languages which shows bad character. Idu, and Ojedapo (2011) noted that the problem of indiscipline in schools has persisted over the years. These acts have either been carried out individually by the students or as a group which result to rioting or revolts. There is no doubt that students' indiscipline generally militates against effective teaching and learning and production of useful acceptable members of the society. The moral character of most of our students at almost all educational strata has been eroded which is actually affecting the image of the Nigerian nation. Citing Zubaida (2009), Idu and Ojedapo (2011) identified various forms of indiscipline among the secondary school students such as truancy, lateness to school, cultism, drug abuse, insulting/assaulting, stealing, rioting, and many other antisocial vices, despite the fact that one of the cardinal objectives of education as spelt out in the National Policy on Education (2004) revised, is to inculcate right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and Nigerian society. Ali, Ada, Isiaka and Salmon (2014) opined that it is any form of misbehaviours which the student(s) can display in the following ways: general disobedience to constituted authority, destruction of school property, poor attitude to learning, stealing, lateness, use of abusive or foul languages, among others. Jekayinfa (2013) posits that discipline is a very important issue that tend to undermine the provision of quality education in the higher educational system in Nigeria because the overall goals of the higher educational system as enunciated in the National Policy of Education can hardly be achieved by all the stakeholders without strict conformity and adherence to the rules and regulations and



the ideals of the entire society. She emphasized the necessity for teachers, parents, government and all the stakeholders in education to pull resources together and not relent in their efforts to maintain and guarantee discipline as well as promote the habits of piety and obedience among the students and workers of our higher institutions. For peace to reign in any society, there are rules and regulations to obey but where people deviate from the rules, chaos occur. Oluwasanmi, Akande and Taiwo (2016) noted that there is a common consensus among experts that deviance is a social vice and could be seen as a product of both personal and social traits. Citing Osarenren (2002), he averred that any behaviour which does not conform to the rules, regulations, norms and values of a given time is viewed as defiance, among which are drug abuse, cultism and thuggery, sexual promiscuity, examination malpractice, indecent dressing, etc. Among the probable factors responsible for indiscipline among students as noted by Onyije and Ojedapo (2010) are government nonchalant attitudes to education, parental factors and teachers' attitude. However, Maccoby (2000) said many factors other than parents' actions influence how children grow and develop. As children grow beyond the preschool years, they are exposed more and more to other adult socialization agents (teachers, coaches) and, of course, to individual friends and larger peer groups. Also, Olaoye (2015) noted that the gang or peer group is a typical and very important unit for the child and the adolescent.

Ahmadi and Heydari (2011) noted that unlike politeness which has greatly been studied by researchers, the impolite or rude language has mostly been neglected. Their study focused on whether the impoliteness aspect of language should be taught in an Iranian EFL context but found no significant difference in the ideas of the four groups concerning "the importance of impoliteness as compared to politeness", "the equal treatment of genders in teaching impoliteness", and also concerning "the context of teaching impoliteness". Significant results were; however, found in their ideas concerning "the general significance of impoliteness in everyday language", "teaching impoliteness in language classes", "methods of teaching impoliteness (direct vs indirect)", and "the level of proficiency required for teaching impoliteness". Mugford (2008) in Ahmadi and Heydari (2011) also argued that the world of L2 is not always a polite and respectful one. L2 users must be prepared to be involved in impolite and rude, as well as congenial and social interactions. While the learners' language level will be of paramount importance, L2 students, at the very least, should be aware of impoliteness in the target language. In the classroom, teachers can discuss perceptions of impoliteness in terms of intentionality, speaker purpose, and level of aggressiveness.

Sources of Students' Use of Foul Language

The use of foul language or inappropriate words by students is a factor of so many things – parents, family, peers, socio-economic status, teachers, school, environments, among others. Parents are important to children's development because children always imitate whatever their parents do and this has strong impression on children than what they are taught or told to do (action speaks louder than voice). Proper upbringing of children will not allow them to easily succumb to pressures outside the home. A child whose parents

use refined language at home will not find it easy to use foul language outside because it shows from what type of family a child comes from. Ofodu (2014) defined language as anything that enables a person to express ideas, emotions, facts and disseminate pieces of information to people in an understandable manner. It enables people to interact and transact within any society. Language is one of the sterling features of human beings that make human interaction peaceful, possible and pleasant. It is a natural resource that can be used for personal, communal and national development.

Language is a tool of communication and when language is not used in the appropriate manner, its objective of effective communication is not achieved. The kind of language in use by tertiary institution students today is uncalled for. Vaz & Relvas (2007) in Oluwasanmi, et al (2016) see the family as the most important agent of socialization, called the cradle of social virtues. Being a mini society, acts as a transmission belt between the individual and society. It is the centre of the child's life as infants are totally dependent on others. Olaoye (2015) posited that each learner acquires what his language is from his home and the immediate environment, especially his peers. The language of the working-class child in the classroom situation and even under examinations is poor compared to that of the middle-class child. The former speaks "public language" while the latter speaks "formal language". The structure of the language inhibits verbal expression and so the learning attendant on such expressions. The speaker of public language attempting to refine his language to suit the formal, elitist classroom situation sees himself as guilty because it is tantamount to rejecting the language of his peers. Here comes the confusion which brings about social break down. The typical form of breakdown will tend to be delinquent, especially where the existing social structure no longer provides effective, realizable expectations. There will therefore be a considerable resistance to formal education and a high degree of failure, unless other special conditions are present.

Olaoye (2015) posits that peerglossic (peer-group) language, as a social agent, has an inhibitory effect on the SSS students' language use. It was discovered, for instance, that social class is one of the possible sources of differences in language development. According to him, morphologically and syntactically, it was found that students' parents' occupation and socio-economic background influence students' choice of words and sentence construction. Their words and sentences exemplify their sub-culture of violence, brigandry, anti-establishment posture, their inanity, militant posture and crude and rude heterosexual manner. For instance, these words and expressions were elicited from their conversation and essays: "fork you, shit men, I'll dagger you, don't care at all, you gonna do it, your ass, pierce him well, rob her, I'll carate him, that guy, are you leaking? Groovy party, no pain me, night guard, I care less, don't mind that fork shit principal, he no serious, flabby chest, slippers breast, mad dog, goro mouth, chizzle her mouth, naked her, balcon the girl'. From the essays of the students who come from educated homes or the middle-class homes these words and expressions were gathered: 'doxology, penal, moneybag, satellite dish, military uniform, my father is a cop, my ambition is to become a medical doctor, our radio is fine, what is your future plan?, my success, salad gifts, air



ticket, car park, lecturer, nice drinks, night party, kind principal, nice classmates, electronics, salary, fuel crisis, bookworm, poultry farm, contract awards'. Hence when three or two groups of students meet in their various peer-groups, they are forced to conform to their group norms. There is clear evidence that parents can and do influence children. There is equally clear evidence that children's genetic makeup affects their own behavioral characteristics, and also influences the way they are treated by their parents. However, Maccoby (2000) said it has been equally obvious that children are learning many things through their daily experiences in interacting with the physical and social world, and that what is learned is not encoded in the genes. Idu, and Ojedapo's (2011) study ascertained if parental influence contributes to indiscipline among secondary school students and found that parental influence constituted a contributing factor to indiscipline among secondary school students. It is therefore, observed that some parents appear to have denied their parental roles or responsibilities towards their children and when this happens, the social environment takes over. Furthermore, Olaoye (2015) emphasized that students come from different socio-economic backgrounds. The students' socio-economic background dictates or influences their choice of friends and peer group, and their peer-groups resist Standard English. It was found that students cannot totally divorce their peer group language from the classroom language situation. Co-curricular activities serve to enhance students' language use. Idu, and Ojedapo (2011) also ascertained if peer group influence is a contributing factor to indiscipline among secondary school students, and found that peer group influence is a contributing factor to indiscipline amongst the students. Peer-group influence contributes to indiscipline among students in the form of uncomfortable environment where the students are scared of their parents.

Use of Foul Language among Students

Language plays a very important role in human lives. It is a social phenomenon. One of the main goals of language is to communicate with people and to understand them. When someone speaks, he intends a specific purpose; to convey a message, to express his feelings, ask for help and apologize. Language has functions it performs both to the speaker and the hearer. The expressive function of language is to express its originator's feelings and attitudes – swear words and exclamations are the most obvious instance of this (Ahmadi and Heydari, 2011). In the past, character was highly valued in Nigerian cultures because it determined who you are and how you are seen. This is because what you say speaks volume about your person (Fasae, 2018). Akanbi and Jekayinfa (2016) stated that the goal of Yoruba traditional education has always been to foster strong character in the individual and to prepare each person to become a useful member of the community. The evident attribute of a good character as highlighted by Omole (2014) are intelligent and expert use of language/utterances or rather oratory skills, having good intent towards others, truth, intelligence and gentle character/self-restraint. Students' use of foul or profane language is rampant in schools. According to Shore (2020), profanity has become increasingly common in children's everyday language -- no doubt reflecting the frequency with which they hear foul language in the media, as well as in the casual conversations of adults. The commonplace use of profanity in adult society, however, does

not guarantee its use by students. Students use profanity for a variety of reasons: to gain the attention of their teacher or classmates; to impress their peers; to express strong emotions, such as anger, distress, or frustration; and to attack someone who has hurt them.

Ofodu's (2014) study laments the situation of language use and attitude of youths in many Nigerian communities. In her (2012) study, she observed that we live in a society where moral rectitude is almost extinct and many young ones have gone haywire. One of the possible causes of this moral bankruptcy is the use and dominance of a foreign and cultureless language. Moral values are taught through a people's language and literature such as tales, myths, taboos, songs, proverbs, stories, religion and so on (Ogunlola 2012). These are fast fading away and being replaced by technology. In Jekayinfa's (2013) view, the purpose of discipline in the higher educational system is to produce graduates who will be well behaved in the society by differentiating what is good from what is bad and striving to do good for the general welfare of the society. Therefore, both the students and the workers in these citadels of learning should be properly disciplined. She outlined other acts of indiscipline among students such as drug abuse, smoking, alcohol consumption, disobedience to teachers and school's rules and regulations, armed robbery and stealing, absenteeism (staying in hostel or having social club meeting during lectures, unauthorized exit from school), noise making during lecture/shuffling of feet during lecture, participation in students' unrest, among others. When students participate in these indiscipline acts, they engage in the use of inappropriate language. Shacklady (2013) argues that swearing is on the rise in schools and asked whether foul language is more tolerated in society nowadays but noted, however, that, society these days and the lives of the children she teaches are full of foul language. In a discourse with her colleagues, the possible reasons seemed to boil down to relaxed tolerances of acceptable language and asked that 'when television shows programmes containing words we would not accept in our classrooms, how can we argue?' However, Ahmadi and Heydari (2011) contested that in order to master a language, youths as learners must learn both politeness and impoliteness aspects of language in school. Impoliteness is part of everyday language use and language learners need to be able to make distinction between polite and impolite use of language. Citing Mugford (2008), language learners have the communicative right to be rude if they want to as long as they are aware of the consequences of their actions. Teachers need to take the lead by preparing learners to communicate in pleasant and respectful way, helping them to identify potentially impolite practices and offensive language.

Dozie & Otagburuagu (2019) discussed that reprimand discourse acknowledges that in human interaction there is always the tendency for an out of line behavior and in the event of any impropriety, the defaulter is always censured, criticized or even condemned for such acts. They examined Igbo perception and expression of reprimand speech act in line with politeness as a conversation strategy in the conversational English of Igbo native speakers and found that reprimands were conversational norms of Igbo bilinguals and were evident



in their English language conversations as participants engaged in reprimanding occasioned by forms of misconduct. Spencer-Otay (2000) offered a framework for various types of impoliteness as can be found among the students in various institutions of learning:

- Individual impoliteness: the hearer perceives as a personal attack
- Social impoliteness: the hearers perceive as an attack on his or her social roles
- Cultural impoliteness: the impoliteness which the hearer perceives as an attack on his or her ethnic group
- Banter: impoliteness which reflect on the playful use of impolite language.

Effects of Foul Language on Conversations

The world is a global language and there is the need to acquire effective and appropriate language in order to contribute meaningfully to language use and global sustainability. It is certain that inappropriate words will have no place in globalization. Zygmunt (2016) opined that we usually forget that the final success in human contacts and mutual relations requires a reciprocally agreed and used tool of communication which is, in this case, language. The employed language of communication must be realistic, meaningful and well balanced through the use of appropriate language functions. Creative communicative competence is not the need of philologists only but philologists play only an instrumental role in spreading knowledge to those people who may contribute to effective changes in their natural vicinity. Hence, the development of linguistic competence, both in the sphere of the mother tongue and a foreign language, parallels the intellectual development of language users and therefore, contributes to their sustainable development. Zygmunt noted studies conducted on the need for effective language education. Skye (2015) realized the need for a successful construction of a social environment whose protection must be clearly understood and globally accepted, hence emphasized for language education which would view a language user as a partner in negotiations and discussions over environmental issues and an interlocutor sensitive to environmental dangers; he stressed that language education becomes a corner stone of education for sustainable development viewed in a holistic way. Pullen (2015) noted that human contacts on the macro scale are only possible via language. Not only do human contacts enable the exchange of knowledge and experience; they also develop people intellectually and make them creative as well as tolerant to culturally rooted differences and behaviors. Understanding each other better is a guarantee of sustainable development, which, in turn, contributes to human universality. Furthermore, Hopfinger (1985) noted that language is also a system that connects space and time, connects people, directs its users onto the pathway of culture and makes them culture consumers. In this way language users become the participants of culture by having their share in its creation. Undoubtedly, language behavior and the system of message coding and transmission are culturally determined and deeply rooted in the minds of users of a given language. Therefore, both the way of thinking and expressiveness has much to do with the socio-cultural environment of the language user. This was affirmed by Ofodu (2014) that language acquisition and learning processes are basic to the transmission of values,

culture and the identity of a people and that a loss of a language translates to the loss of a people, their values, culture and identity.

Foul language can go a long way to affect conversations both within (teaching and learning) and outside (home, peer and society) the classroom. Zygmunt (2016) stressed that in order to reach mutual understanding and respect towards the interlocutor, it is essential to use the properly developed means of communication in negotiations. Misunderstanding is more dangerous for discourse and its final output than the lack of understanding. Hence, to foster the speaker and make him function at a variety of socio-cultural levels on both the micro and macro scale, we have to teach him how to communicate and be creative expressing his thoughts. However, Kamalu and Fasasi (2018) investigated the specific patterns and functions of impolite and face-threatening acts (imp/FTAs) among undergraduates of state universities in the southwestern part of Nigeria in order to find out whether they (imp/FTAs) necessarily lead to a disruption and breakdown of conversations and note that despite the profusion of imp/FTAs in the conversations, they did not lead to a disruption or breakdown of conversations as hearers often disregarded the tokens or made mild comments to show that they noticed the imp/FTAs while they still sustained the conversations. They conclude that imp/FTAs among undergraduates are discursive and context-bound since interactants regard imp/FTAs as conversational strategies. Dozie & Otagburuagu (2019) affirm that reprimand signals disagreement which expresses or shows tension arising from a discord. The implication therefore is that there exists an offence. In trying to censure an offender, the severity of the offence is taken into account. This means that a mild offence will attract light criticism while a grave offence would attract weighty criticism other variables notwithstanding.

Role of Academics

Identifying the underlying reason for a student's use of profanity can allow you to respond more effectively (Shore, accessed 2020). Because parents are usually the ones who spend the most time with young children over extended periods of time, these questions of changing plasticity do matter in our efforts to understand the parental realm of influence. Still, parents are never the only source of influence on children, and as children grow older, they are more and more subject to the influence of peers, of schools and teachers, and of television (Maccoby, 2000). Shore (2020) shared experiences on what can be done when students use foul language such as:

- **Do not ignore a student's profanity.** Failing to respond may convey to your students that use of foul language is acceptable. Confronting the use of profanity also is important because some students swear so often, they might not realize that their language was inappropriate. Address the issue even if you are not certain who made the inappropriate comments. Rather, let your class know that that kind of language is unacceptable; perhaps saying, "I expect students in this class to talk respectfully to one another." Then return to your lesson.



- **React calmly to foul language.** If you perceive that a student is speaking to get your attention or to upset you, react in a low-key, restrained manner. Instead, let him know in a calm, brief manner that his language is unacceptable and that there are more appropriate ways to get your attention. If you give consequences, do so matter-of-factly. Avoid lecturing or justifying your decision.
- **Bear in mind that a young student might not realize the inappropriateness of his language.** A student may tell you that he thought the words were okay because he heard them used by his parents or friends or on television. If that is the case with one of your students, you might say to him: "I understand that you may have heard others use these words but they are not okay to use in school." Let him know that the words can hurt others' feelings and cause classmates to avoid him. Make sure he understands which words are objectionable.
- **Teach the student who uses foul words he can substitute for the words.** Help him find inoffensive words or phrases he can use when he is frustrated or upset. The student might have some ideas of his own, or you might suggest some words.
- **Consider a mild consequence.** You might establish a rule that students who speaks inappropriate language will lose five minutes of recess for every incident. With younger students who need an immediate consequence, consider giving them a brief time out, explaining that students cannot remain with their classmates if they use inappropriate language.
- **Arrange a signal to remind the student about his language.** Agree on a silent signal (for example, putting a finger to your lips) that you will give when the student uses profane or inappropriate language. Tell him that you expect him to stop the profanity immediately when he sees that signal.

Way Out

It is most likely that the failure of higher institutions of learning to establish an academic ethos would often create campus environment that tends to encourage academic dishonesty (Jekayinfa, 2013). Academic advisers can assist in attaining this goal by impressing on the faculty to adopt Cole and Kiss' (2000) strategies for academic integrity which include, among others:

- (a) Stressing the importance of academic integrity in the class, and discussing why it should matter to the students, faculty and the administrators.
- (b) Impressing on the teachers the need to be role models.

Furthermore, Catapano (2020) agreed that to deal with foul language in schools,

- there should be some policy in schools about what language is acceptable and what language is not.
- School administration should have a stance on foul language in schools and to what extent it is expected of teachers/lecturers to reprimand students, and how much support they would receive where they initiate discipline.
- Beyond the standards laid out by school policy, teachers/lecturers should consider what standards they personally demand from the students in their classrooms by ensuring that they have clear classroom rules and consequences related to language.

- A clear and reasonable system of discipline needs to be enforced if students are heard using obscenities as students may end up feeling encouraged to speak in such ways if they notice that teachers/lecturers do not correct them.
- Teachers/lecturers can approach the student(s) using inappropriate language and state, with firmness and respect, that those words are not allowed to be used in his class.
- When teachers/lecturers speak up, those students become more conscious of their own behavior.
- If one teacher/lecturer stops and says something to a student in the classroom or the hallway, then that one teacher has played his part toward better serving their school community in limiting poor language used.
- Perhaps the most powerful way to curb the negative trends of student language is to create a culture of **positive** language usage. When students see that all the adults stand as a united front in setting a high standard, then this will undoubtedly greatly diminish the frequency of those unwelcome cusswords.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no doubt that use of foul language by our younger generations in the tertiary institutions is demoralizing because they are seen as lacking good character. Students' languages are also a reflection of home/parents' language. Appropriate use of language is a must in sustainable development and must be built into students for globalization. It is therefore recommended that people in academics should help students to be of good character models in terms of their utterances, hence, should, among others:

- do not ignore a student's profanity but react calmly to foul language and try to correct students of the consequences of the inappropriateness of his language.
- teach the student who use foul language the appropriate words he can substitute for.
- try to have policies about what language is acceptable and what language is not.
- consider what standards they personally demand from the students in their classrooms by ensuring that they have clear classroom rules and consequences related to language.
- enforce rules if students are heard using foul and inappropriate words.
- approach the student and state, with firmness and respect, that those words are not allowed to be used in the classroom/school.
- try and create a culture of positive language usage.
- design and carry out a language program of studies which can offer the widest possible approach to students' language use.
- language should be designed from the socio-linguistic and pragmatic point of view to stress practical consequences and values as standards.
- help students to be creative users of language which becomes a decisive factor in negotiations and communication in general.
- development of full competence of the language user, especially the need for creating a friendly social environment.



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