

**LANGUAGE OF ALTERCATION IN CONFLICT SITUATION: A CRITICAL  
STUDY OF SELECTED SPEECHES OF PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI  
AND MAZI NNAMDI KANU**

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**Abstract**

Language use in conflict situation is essentially a skillful undertaking that calls for meticulousness and diplomacy among interlocutors so as to mitigate the impact of conflict on human relations. While a cautious and diplomatic use of language has the potential to douse conflict, language of altercation escalates it and truncates peaceful coexistence among diverse multi-ethnic conglomerates. To this end, this paper examines language of altercation in conflict situation and makes a critical discourse analysis of selected speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari and Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. The motivation for the study is the expediency of examining linguistic choices that often characterize utterances of “powers that be” in the Nigerian socio-political landscape, with a view to ascertaining their implication on the peaceful coexistence of Nigerians. Data for the study were textual, culled from Daily Newspapers, live interviews and broadcasts on television stations. A textual analysis approach was adopted for the analysis. Findings revealed that the two principal actors, in many occasions, engaged in the use of language of altercation in advancing and explicating their views and perspectives on certain sensitive national discourse without taking cognizance of the effects of such utterances on national security, unity and cohesion. Consequently, the paper recommends, among others, that while occupants of exalted public offices should desist from making unwarranted and provocative utterances, the media professionals should not accept to publish writeups with explicit or implied language of altercation. The paper equally advocates that the Ministry of Information should organize public orientation to educate Nigerians on the need to ensure that their language use has a touch of civility and politeness.

**Keywords:** Language, Altercation, Conflict, Communication, Conflict management

**Introduction**

Language is, indubitably, an essential medium of interpersonal communication available to man in which he expresses himself and attracts reciprocal actions from his fellow interlocutors within his sociolinguistic milieu. The role of language in human relationships is fundamentally expedient in that it has the capacity to serve as a significant instrument of understanding, cohesion and peaceful coexistence, and also a potent instrument of disunity and alienation, capable of truncating existing peace among a people. Whatever role language plays in any sociolinguistic and political environment is solely dependent on how individuals deploy it as they address matters of personal, communal or national interest.

Indeed, language in a situation of conflict can be likened to a two-edged sword – it can be used to fan and intensify the fire of conflict, and it can also be cautiously and diplomatically used to douse and quench the raging fire of conflict and eventually restore normalcy, understanding and friendliness. Ike (232) observes that when individuals, communities or nations experience a sour relationship due to conflict of any magnitude, it is language that will resolve the matter, be it in or out of court, or in a panel or group discussion. However, if language of altercation is deployed in such a circumstance, it would inevitably escalate the existing conflict to an alarming proportion.

In most political entities comprising multi-ethnic and cultural nationalities such as Nigeria, conflict is an inevitable recurring phenomenon. This is usually occasioned by diverse interests and struggles over resource control and status symbols. Consequently, there is often unavoidable clash of interest among power brokers and among their teeming supporters. Conflict is a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, ideologies, beliefs and value systems. It is a clash of interest among individuals or groups over values and claims to scarce resources, status symbols and power (Nwaomah, 135; Daramola and Dararmola, 135). In such a situation, it is imperative that speakers, especially those in positions of authority, apply caution in their linguistic choices as they express their views on any sensitive national discourse. This is crucial because the use of language of altercation would only trigger off conflict rather than mitigate it.

Language of altercation, in the context of this paper, is an unguarded and provocative use of language that conveys an explicit or concealed hatred, enmity, resentment or bitter disagreement between the addresser and the addressee(s). It is an uncivil language use that projects a deep-seated contentious relationship between individuals or groups experiencing an unresolved clash of interest. Odo and Kayode (79) aver that the actual reason for the absence of peace in Nigeria is lack of appropriate language use that would truly unite and cement the unity of the diverse ethnolinguistic groups in the country. Indisputably, misuse of language in a heterogeneous society aimed at promoting primordial sentiments for selfish reasons only fuels disunity, acrimony and conflict among the ethno-nationalities. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines language of altercation in conflict situation (with particular reference to Nigeria) and makes a critical analysis of some speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari and Mazi Nnamdi Kanu.

### **Language, Conflict/Conflict Situation and Language of Altercation in Interpersonal Communication: Conceptual Overview**

Language acquisition and the capacity to deploy it competently during interpersonal communication are part of the profound distinguishing gifts God gave to man. With the use of language, individuals express themselves and eventually communicate intentions, desires, likes, dislikes and feelings about issues around them. Consequently, language is at the epicenter of most human activities; whether we are conversing with people, settling disputes, setting goals or planning on how to accomplish a given task, language is essentially deployed for the actualization of the intended objective.

Language is essentially a system of making meaning and expressing/communicating intentions and feelings. It is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols; it is primarily a system of phonetic symbol for the expression of a communicable thoughts and feelings (Sapir, 8 cited in Emezue, 2). In consonance with the foregoing, while John Carol sees language as a structural system of arbitrary vocal sound and sequence of sounds used in interpersonal communication, Dates views it as a tool “we use to do things” (Ike, 12). This entails that language is often at the centre stage of almost all activities embarked upon by individuals within the human society.

The importance of language is perhaps more evident in interpersonal communicative situations where its misuse could result in a face-off, bitter disagreement or even war. This explicates the need for caution and diplomacy in language use. However, individuals, in some occasions, advertently or otherwise use certain utterances that are quite provocative to the feelings and sensibilities of the addressee. Such a language use results in conflict situation in some occasions, and escalates already conflict situation in another occasion. Thus, what a language

user says is as crucial as the way he says it. Because language one uses is symptomatic of one's total mental stability, it reflects one's feelings and expresses the inner-workings of one's mind (Nwokocha, 214) on one hand and also precisely captures the exact disposition of a speaker as well as his behavioural characteristics and penchant for particular attitudes on the other hand. So, an offensive language use reveals the feelings of the speaker about his addressee, and this would only escalate altercation and promote conflict in the speaker's physical and social environment.

Conflict itself is an unavoidable part and parcel of human life so long as human beings coexist with one another. It most often arises due to differing views about things, situation, ideologies and desired expectations. Corser cited in Ogene (146) sees conflict as a struggle over values, claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aim of the conflicting party is to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. It is usually a serious disagreement, struggle or fight arising from or out of differing opinions, wishes, needs, values and interests between or among individuals or groups; it is equally an opponent-centred episode or series of episodes based upon incompatibility of goals, aims and values, and involves direct or personal interaction in which the opposing parties are perceived as controlling the desired goals, such actions introducing strain or stress in the relationship between the parties on the attainment of a set of interests or goals (Akpuru-Aja, 15; Nwaomah, 95 citing Magagula, 5; Alkali, 516). Because everyone or group wants the best part of everything available, there would be a clash of interest. It is this circumstance that breeds a conflict situation.

A conflict situation, therefore, is a situation where there is serious disagreement and contention as a result of struggle over power, possession and control of scarce resources or simply because of incompatibility of value system, ideology, goals and expectations over life and issues. Nwaomah posits that a conflict situation becomes prevalent where the goals, aspirations, interests and needs of social groups cannot be achieved simultaneously and where the value system of such groups are at variance (135). This can be found rife within or between social relations such as ethnic groups, social institutions and organizations, religious groups, political parties, states and between sovereign nations. Humanity is inevitably entangled with conflict, and so long as individuals engage in interpersonal interactions, there would be unavoidable clash of interest. Conflict is, therefore, a perennial feature of social life.

In a situation of conflict, irrespective of its kind or nature, language plays a significant role in its handling, management and resolution. This is because with the use of language, ideas that can inflame a society are widely propagated, accepted and acted upon. Such a provocative and unguarded language use is what we refer in this discourse to as language of altercation. Literature is not replete with a widely accepted definition (and explication) of the concept of language of altercation. Nevertheless, a probe into the denotative meaning of the term "altercation" would assist us to unravel (and arrive at) the meaning of language of altercation. To this end, we rely on Mckechnie's (52) definition of the concept in the Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, for it succinctly captures the perspective from which this discourse views and approaches the concept. According to him, the term "altercation" denotes "a warm contention in words; dispute carried on with heat or anger." It is a controversy (expressed in words) arising from divergence of opinion and incompatibility of views, expectations and ideologies. This contention in words is usually expressed in indecent, anger-filled and provocative utterances that depict unrestrained hate for one's perceived rivals. It connotes derogatory remarks that are socially offensive targeted at a person or group of persons by an angry addresser.

In consonance with the foregoing, language of altercation can be seen as a provocative language use that conveys the hatred, rancor, enmity and open disagreement or face-off between an addresser and the addressee. The motivating factor for the use of this kind of language, according to Nwokocha (215), are ego exhibition, intimidation and unbridled arrogance. Furthermore, similar causative or inspiring factors may include: power intoxication, disenchantment over a system, prolonged grievances on a person or group, uncontrolled covetousness and subjugation of the down-trodden, injustice, avarice and personal aggrandizement. In fact, the list is almost inexhaustible. The ultimate objective of the use of language of altercation is to subdue one's perceived enemy or enemies into perpetual apprehension and silence.

A juxtaposition of our definition of altercation as “a warm contention in words...”, and Kuper and Kupers' view of conflict as “a contentious relationship exemplified in words, revolutions and other struggles” reveals that language of altercation and conflict situation have something in common. This position is premised on the fact that a highly provocative or contentious utterance directed at one's perceived rival (individual or group) has the potential to instigate and trigger off acrimony, violent demonstration, revolutionary struggles and eventually a full blown war. This is even more dangerous in a situation of conflict where there is already precarious security conditions – where a single unguarded utterance could escalate violence and result in loss of lives and property of the citizenry. The implication of the above is that language has power – power to calm down tension and power to bring about conflict, insecurity, killing and maiming in any sociopolitical environment, with its far-reaching consequences.

### **Language of Altercation in Conflict Situation and Management: The Nigeria Experience**

Language use is a skillful activity which abhors levity in its handling, especially when it is used to address a sensitive matter in a pluralistic and ethno-cultural entity. This is imperative because its misuse has the capacity to jeopardize the corporate existence of the nation, especially in a conflict situation with all its uncertainties and volatility. Language is a powerful tool in the hands of the users. In its social function, language has the feature of a double-edged sword in a conflict situation– it can be used to fan the fire of crisis, or it can be used to solve delicate issues diplomatically (Nzeakor and Osundu, 356; Bivan and Byat, 9). In other words, language can be abused when it is used in negative ways to pull down rather than build up a society and its developmental efforts and achievements.

Language of altercation truncates peace and peaceful coexistence among a people. It is often used to sow a seed of discord among the citizenry, especially in a conflict situation where there is glaring clash of interest among diverse social groups. When conflict breeds insecurity, it reflects in the kind of language people adopt to express their feelings and experiences. To this end, Ojaide (5) states that the period of conflict/insecurity creates its own language because people who are frightened, anxious, or, traumatized seek the language to express their inner and outer fears. Indeed, there is a profound effect which a conflict situation has on the speech mannerisms or patterns of language users. Because people speak out of strong emotions in such a period, there is the tendency that language of altercation could feature quite prominently in the speaker's discourse.

In Nigerian, conflict situation has become a new normal, especially in recent times. From the menace of the Fulani herdsmen, Boko Haram, kidnappers, to disturbances from the recent agitation of the IPOB members, bandits and the current unknown gunmen, insecurity has

become a part and parcel of life in Nigeria. Unfortunately, most of these circumstances are brought into existence by those in the corridor of power through their selfish acts orchestrated by political, economic and religious reasons. Those who hold political powers exploit these situations to advance their selfish interests at the expense of the peace and social stability and progress of the vulnerable citizens. For instance, most of the religious crises in the country are locked in with politics; those who are fond of political power hide under the garb of religion to twist positions in their favour (Alokan, Ayodeji and Babalola, 169), mainly by engaging the dastardly services of some uninformed youths and fanatics to achieve their self-centered goals. Corroborating our position, Onyike (6) cited in Nzeakor and Osundu (370) insists that the constant witness of conflict in Nigeria is as a result of (i) inequitable access to power and resources (ii) denial of basic human rights (iii) non-democratic and exclusive governance (iv) discrimination on the bases of sex, religion, ethnic origin and socioeconomic status (v) total absence and abandonment of moral and ethical restraints in the use of power and management of public resources.

Regrettably, the use of language of altercation in addressing burning national issues has further contributed very significantly in instigating rancor, division and insecurity in Nigeria. Individuals at the helm of affair – in the governance of the country are, unfortunately, worst offenders in this circumstance. From the President, Senators, members of the judiciary, to the Governors and their political associates, evidences abound where these occupants of sensitive political positions abuse and misuse language as they talk about national issues from their various personal perspectives. Similarly, from the leaders of the Niger Delta groups, those of the Indigenous People of Biafra, Arewa Consultative Forum, Odua People's Congress, to those of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, and the various leaderships of the youth wings of these sociocultural and political organizations, language of altercation has features in their respective speeches at one time or the other on sensitive nation issues.

However, in spite of the far-reaching effects of such utterances (due to the social position of the speakers), highly placed individuals in Nigerian have continued to use certain language that depict hate, intimidation and insensitivity to the feelings of the addressees. The adoption of such unhealthy language has begun to attract the attention of concerned individuals and scholars in recent times; they are beginning to realize the tendency of such language use to further aggravate the already worsening crises and insecurity in the country. For instance, Nwosu laments:

If I say that the Independence Day broadcast is the second hate speech I have heard from the President in a space of 40 days, I would be incorrect, especially as the details of what constitutes a hate speech is increasingly looking like the proverbial Malawian constitution of Kamuzu Banda's. It is whatever they tell us that we accept as the law. So, I will only recall that, after being away for 103 days, PMB returned to deliver one angry-speech (where he berated us for behaving badly, especially on the Social Media), and about 40 days later, he delivered yet another one (where he took the Igbo elders to the cleaners, over IPOB) Yes, PMB makes "angry speech" and not "hate speech." What Nwosu prefers to call "angry speech" is what we refer to as language of altercation in this discourse. He went further to regale us with instances of this "angry speech." According to him,

In August (2017), he [President Muhammadu Buhari] not only addressed us as "my dear citizens" ( a reminder that we could well be subjects of an Imperial Majesty), he also accused us of crossing the "red line" – a line which we did not know who drew it or when it was drawn. Well, PMB then went ahead to draw

a new line; he called it “hate speech.” Till this day, we are still waiting for the DSS, the Defence Headquarters, the Ministry of Interior or the Attorney General to give us a breakdown of what does (and does not) constitute a “hate speech.”

Indisputably, utterances made by those who occupy leadership positions, especially in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nation such as Nigeria, “carry heavy weight,” and can influence people and situations in ways that might be beyond the imagination of the speakers. This accounts for why great caution is required in terms of linguistic choices to be made by those leaders as they air their views on any delicate and sensitive national issue.

It is, unfortunately, a sad commentary that many occupants of political positions in Nigeria are constant users of language of altercation. The use of this language manifests more prominently during sensitive periods in the country where there is usually a clash of interest among “powers that be.” In such situations, we witness fragrant abuse of language as they fight one another to pave way for themselves into one political position or the other. For example, According to Idris (244), the utterance credited to the former presidential flag bearer of All Progressive Congress in the 2011 electioneering campaign, Muhammadu Buhari, in which he said: “I will make Nigeria ungovernable if Jonathan wins in 2011” is a case in point. Also, he was quoted to have said in 2015 that “both monkey and baboon will be soaked in blood” if he failed the 2015 general election. Similarly, Elder Godsdai Orubebe’s comment (the former Minister of Niger Delta Affairs) on Channels Television in which he accused the then INEC chairman, Professor Ibrahim AttahiruJega, of being “tribalistic, selective and partial” (Idris, 259) in handling election matters under his watch indicates another instance of misuse of language on a critical national issue. It should be noted here that the mere fact that Professor Jega and Muhammadu Buhari share the same ethnic enclave makes the above utterance too sensitive during the period in which it was made. Such an allegation, whether true or false, has the capacity to provoke social unrest, demonstration and post-election violent conflict. These exemplified the use of language of altercation in a conflict situation, a very dangerous trend that has assumed an alarming dimension in contemporary Nigeria.

In order to ensure the maintenance of peace and avoidance of conflict through appropriate language use in the society, it is crucial for speakers to be exposed to language education. Language education, in this context, refers to the sensitization of the citizenry in polite language use for the maintenance of peace and conflict management and resolution through effective use of language. This orientations equally involves the media practitioners and all those who pass information through the media – both in verbal and written platforms -- because of possible varied interpretations their listeners and readers may give to an utterance (Toyin, 251). It is, therefore, imperative for language users to acquire relevant skills in language use that will help them maintain peace, prevent and resolve conflict that may arise in the course of human relations and verbal interactions. Such important skills include: (i) use of unambiguous words and expressions (ii) polite communication skill (iii) ability to clarify utterances that may be misunderstood by some listeners (iv) avoidance of unsubstantiated claims (v) tolerance of other people’ personal, divergent and opposing views on issues, etc.

Furthermore, strict adherence to the maxims of Grice (maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner) would assist language users immensely in ensuring the attainment and maintenance of peace through their use of language. Grice had advised language user to “make [their] conversational contributions such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the acceptable purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which [they] are engaged (Grice, 45 qtd in Ezeifeke, 80). Explicating his injunction further, speakers are enjoined to (i) try to make their

contribution one that is true, and not to say what is false or that for which they lack evidence (ii) to be relevant – by making appropriate linguistic choices that really address the issue at hand (iii) make their contributions as informative as required, and (iv) try to be perspicuous – by avoiding ambiguity, but being orderly, clear and brief in their utterances on any issue. This is, therefore, the need for a paradigm shift in the use of language in conflict situation (as evident in the contemporary conflict-stricken Nigeria) by all and sundry, especially among power brokers and those who control and influence a large number of ardent followers in the country.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

Data for this study are textual in nature. They were randomly culled as excerpts from some of the “important” speeches delivered at different occasions by the two principal actors in the contemporary political melodrama in Nigeria – President Muhammadu Buhari and Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the Nigerian President and the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra, respectively. The textual data were obtained from Daily Newspapers, live interviews and broadcast on television stations in Nigeria.

The work first presents isolated excerpts from some speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari, and subsequently those of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. The selected discourses are presented herein below:

1. “Recent calls on restructuring, quite proper and legitimate, has let in **highly irresponsible groups** to call for dismemberment of the country. We cannot allow such advocacy.”
  2. “As a young Army officer, I took part from the beginning to the end in our tragic civil war costing about two million lives, resulting in fearful destruction and untold suffering. **Those who are agitating for a rerun** were not born in 1967 and have no idea of the horrendous consequences of the civil conflict, which we went through.”
  3. “I am very disappointed that responsible leaders of those communities [Igbo communities] do not warn their **hot-headed youths** what the country went through. Those who were there should tell those who were not there the **consequences of such folly**.”
  4. “At all events, proper dialogue and any desired constitutional change should take place in a rational manner, at the National and state Assemblies. These are the proper and legal fora for national debate, not some **lopsided, undemocratic body with predetermined set of objectives**.”
  5. “Government is keeping up with the momentum of dialogue with stakeholders in the Niger Delta to keep the peace. **We intend to address genuine grievances** of those communities [**not the agitation from those in the South-east region**]. Government is grateful to the responsible leadership of those communities and will pursue lasting peace in the Niger Delta.”
- In a recent statement during his meeting with the new Service Chiefs over the agitations and social unrest in the South-east region of the country, President Muhammadu Buhari made the following statements (culled from the Guardian (online) of June 2, 2021):
6. “**We will treat them [the IPOB members] in the language they understand.**”
  7. “**They [the agitators] will soon have the shock of their lives.**”
  8. “**We are going to be very hard sooner or later.**”
- Furthermore, during his interview on a television station on June 10, 2021 as captured in Punch Newspaper, President Buhari said:
9. “**That IPOB is just like a dot in a circle. Even if they want to exit [through secession], they will have no access to anywhere.**” (Square brackets, mine)
- Similarly, in another interview on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) on June 11, 2021, President Buhari said these (to the secessionists – IPOB and Oduduwa members):
10. “**I will arrest, try and jail those fomenting trouble in Nigeria.**”
  11. “**It is now fire for fire.**”

In the same vein, while defending his perceived accusation of President Muhammadu Buhari of indulging in a hate speech (language of altercation) in his reaction against the agitations by the Indigenous People of Biafra, Shehu Garba (the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Media and Publicity) quoted some “angry speeches” by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu (in Daily Sun Newspaper of October 11, 2017) “as being circulated on the social media” as followed:

12. “I will go to Abuja, and when I am coming back, **I will bring Buhari’s head.**”
13. “If they don’t give us Biafra, **therewill be nothing left breathing in that zoo called Nigeria.**”
14. “If they don’t give us a date for referendum, **there will be no election in Anambra or any partof Biafra land.**”
15. “It is clear that **the only language the zoo called Nigeria understands is war and death, and we are ready for war.**”
16. “From today forward,**I put the protection of Biafra land in the hands of the Biafra Security Service.**”
17. “If **the zoo Army** enters Biafra land, **they will die.**”
18. “**Buhari is a mad man.**”
19. “**It is either Biafra or death.**”
20. “I call on all Igbos who have the know-how to **manufacture bombs, arms and ammunitions tocome forward. We need to take this war to the zoo.**”

In a related development, the Media and Publicity Secretary of IPOB, in his response to the proscription of IPOB by the federal government of Nigeria and branding it a terrorist organization, according to Attah (45) made the following statements:

21. “I want to make it absolutely clear to all and sundry that IPOB does not condone and will never engage in any crime or violence, no matter the level of provocation by the **barbaric Buhariregime**. All spurious allegations sprouted by Lai Muhammad to justify **his barbarism** are nothing more than pure lies, fabricated to give IPOB a bad name....”
22. “...Recorded incidents of lawlessness normally happens when soldiers convey on the venue of such peaceful gathering and open fire on unarmed civilians. It is IPOB that are the victims of **statelawlessness**. We have at various times been visited with midnight abduction, torture, extra-judicial execution, humiliation and imprisonment without trial, all perpetrated by **Buhari’s police andsoldiers** made up of **Hausa-Fulani Islamic fundamentalists.**”

A cursory look at the words and expressions in bold prints in the isolated excerpts above indicate that they constitute language of altercation. These utterances made by the two leaders examined in this study respectively bring to the fore the fact that some occupants of leadership positions in Nigerian are highly deficient in terms of decent, polite and civil language use, particularly in the periods of conflicts when their emotions are quite high and strong.

## Discussion

A critical examination of the foregoing data (extracted exclusively for the purpose of this study from President Muhammadu Buhari and Mazi Nnamdi Kanu) obviously reveals an “overdose” of fragrant use of language of altercation. There is apparently a conflict situation existing between the two principal actors on the one hand and the millions of people whose interest they represent on the other hand. But unfortunately, both of them carelessly indulge in the use of provocative language as it is evident in this study. For instance, it is provocative for President Buhari to describe a group of people agitating for an interest (which is their constitutional right in a democratic nation) as an “irresponsible group” with “hot-headed youths,” and then accuse them of “agitating for a rerun” of the 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war. For this reason, he went further to threaten them recently by asserting that ‘they will have the shock of their lives’ after being “treated in a language they understand.” Again, President Buhari currently engaged in another use of language of altercation when he stated (in a violent period in the country) that

an entire geopolitical region in Nigeria is “like a dot in a circle” and that “even if they want to exit, they will have access to anywhere.” Such utterances directed at a section of a country by an incumbent President is unhealthy, provocative and insulting. Furthermore, it is an inappropriate use of language to say that “it is now fire for fire” against citizens of a nation simply because a group of people from those regions engaged in an agitation for self-determination in a democratic regime.

On the other hand, it is equally unhealthy, impolite and linguistically inappropriate for Mazi Nnamdi Kanu to use those provocative utterances and insulting words on the President and the Nigerian state irrespective of his feelings and personal perspectives and interests. For example, it is quite abusive to describe a president of a country as “a mad man,” and to call Nigerian “a zoo.” It is also inappropriate and threatening to assert that “it is either Biafra or death.” In the same vein, urging his supporters who have the skills to manufacture bombs and ammunitions to go into action and produce them because “[they] are ready for war” is absolutely dangerous in a situation of conflict. It also signals a threat to maintain that “nothing will be left breathing in that zoo if they don’t give [them] Biafra.”

Indeed, these unfortunate exemplifications of language of altercation are too sensitive, inciting and dangerous in a country that is highly bedeviled by insecurity. Because they come from “powers at the centre” and people who command large followership, the negative effects of such utterances are unimaginable. For example, describing the Nigerian Police and Army as ‘Buhari’s Police and Soldiers,’ and the present government as a “barbaric regime” can fuel hate, disenchantment, acrimony and violence, especially as they emanate from the “powers that be” and controllers and shapers of opinions, views and actions of a large audience.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Language is, incontrovertibly, a potent instrument of peace initiation, maintenance and strengthening; it can also serve as a weapon of disunity, disintegration and violent conflict promotion. Language of altercation as it has become evident in this study is an ill wind that blows no one any good, especially when it is used in a conflict situation. The position of this paper, therefore, is that language should be used cautiously, politely and diplomatically to maintain, manage and resolve conflict and not to be used provocatively to escalate it. For language to play its expected role in this circumstance, it must be a positive language that is polite, soothing, peaceful, factual and friendly – one that does not convey directly or indirectly a feeling of hatred, rancor and acrimony. Because emotions are usually high and strong during a period of conflict, deploying language of altercation in airing one’s views on sensitive issues would inevitably fan the fire of conflict rather than mitigate the situation. To this end, this paper recommends that:

- (i) Occupants of exalted public offices in Nigeria should, as a matter of necessity, desist from making unsubstantiated and provocative claims on sensitive national discourse.
- (ii) Leaders at all levels of governance should jettison the use of language of altercation/hate speech both in their utterances and in writing as they advance their views on any matter.
- (iii) The media professionals should not accept to publish any writeup with obvious or implied language of altercation.
- (iv) The Ministry of Information should organize public orientation programmes to educate the masses on the need to be civil and polite in their language use.
- (v) Individuals who occupy leadership positions and command large followership should be cautious in making linguistic choices while addressing burning national issues.

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