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## **THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE STUDIES IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

**AMINI Jean de Dieu NGABONZIZA**

### **0. GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

After the genocide perpetuated against Tutsi, the government of Rwanda took on the path to rebuild the country. Education became Rwanda's priority in order to recover the lost human resource capacity. The government also focused on unity and reconciliation to create harmony among Rwandans. Science and technology has been advanced as one of the key solutions to Rwanda's development needs. This promotion of science and technology has led to a lack of appreciation of language studies, arts, and humanities in general. As a result, the importance of language studies in the country's growth and its role in conflict resolution has been undermined. Right from secondary school to university level, options of language studies have been reduced with some departments being canceled. It is the case of African language department in National University of Rwanda in 2008.

However, the history of Rwanda proves the importance of language consideration in conflict transformation and peace building. The language use drives the conflicts from the colonialism to the independence, from dictatorship regime to the genocide perpetuated against Tutsi in 1994. It is improbable to resolve or change those conflicts without language means as stated by Tom Ndahiro (2004:54), "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. It is only through the analysis of the usage of the words and their connotative meanings that their insinuation can be meaningful".

This paper attempts to outline the consideration of language studies in conflict resolution in Rwanda. The genocide perpetuated against Tutsi as result of Rwandan conflict engendered in language semantic distortion and change in colonial period. Genocide ideology has been developed by leaders in independent period and later on used to disseminate hatred among Rwandans through language means.

### **1.1 LANGUAGE USE AS GENESIS OF RWANDAN CONFLICT.**

The conflict between Rwandans has been confused so long time to the ethnicity antagonism. But several researches have confirmed the language use as genesis of Rwandan conflict. Father Bigirumwami A. recommended first of all the definition of used terminologies

to Rwandan conflict. “What is *Umuhutu*? What is *Umututsi*? What is *Umutwa*? What is *ubwoko*?” The change of semantic of those terms is the origin of all Rwandan conflict and Genocide. Sebagabo Simon (2004:21) affirms that the semantic change of Rwandan terminologies to create ethnic concept in Rwanda is a root cause of genocide genesis. These terms have undergone different meaning change according to periods. In pre-colonial period, the term “*Ubwoko*” means clannish identity, which is a group of families who originate from the same family and have a common ancestor. Rwanda has 20 clans referred to as *ubwoko* in Kinyarwanda, namely *Abanyiginya*, *Abagesera*, *Abega*, *Ababanda*, *Abacyaba*, *Abasinga*, *Abashambo*, *Abahinda*, *Abazigaba*, *Abungura*, *Abashingwe*, *Abenengwe*, *Abasita*, *Abatsobe*, *Abakono*, *Abanyakarama*, *Abarihira*, *Abahondogo*, *Abashambo*, and *Abongera*. These clans were mainly used as Rwandan identity. When you ask an old man or woman in Kinyarwanda language to mention their identity, he or she replies by naming the different clans such as *Umugesera*, *Umunyiginya*, *Umushambo* and so on. This is different from western concept of *Umutwa*, *Umuhutu* and *Umututsi* confused to ethnic group.

Indeed, Rwanda is composed by Hutu, Tutsi, Twa but not in an ethnic context.

In the early period the terms “*Umututsi*, *Umuhutu*, and *Umutwa*” were used to indicate socio-economic status. The possession of cattle is an important symbol to explain the pre-colonial Rwanda status. Through their possession of cattle, the Tutsi gained ownership of the majority of the land and obliged the Hutu to provide labor for them in exchange for cattle. The Tutsi cattle owners became an aristocratic elite, while the Hutu were seen as commoners and farmers held in low regard by the Tutsi (Kressel, 2002). The Hutu who were able to accumulate cattle and rise through the socioeconomic hierarchy achieved status of a Tutsi. Equally the loss of cattle led to a loss of status. Individual men, who became successful, regardless of origin, were adopted into Tutsi lineages while the poor or politically un-influential men, tended to become Hutu (Fujii, 2009; Jones, 2006; Kressel, 2002; Totten & Ubaldo, 2011) quoted by Ibuka 2011: 22.

The three groups of the Rwandan people, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, were aware of their identity as belonging to one country. These three groups shared clans which marked their identity. The chart below shows us the percentage of clans in Rwanda (Nyagahene Antoine 1997:231)

NAME OF CLANS	HUTU%	TUTSI%	TWA%
ABANYIGINYA	53.50	41.50	
ABASINDI	88.16	11.52	0.32
ABEGA	74.38	25.07	0.54
ABASINGA	93.48	6.25	0.26
ABASHAMBO	63.07	36.70	0.21
ABAGESERA	93.57	5.87	0.54
ABAKONO	32.57	67.43	
ABATSOBE	54.96	43.40	1.63
ABAHA	19.90	78.15	1.94
ABABANDA	94.12	4.98	0.88
ABAZIGABA	93.92	5.53	0.53
ABACYABA	87.14	12.76	0.08
ABUNGURA	95.94	3.69	0.48

**Table 1: Distribution of clans per social classes**

When colonialists arrived in Rwanda, they started to learn the Rwandan culture from political, social, and religious perspectives. On the religious aspect, they decided to bring a new religion, Christianity. However, because of poor knowledge of Kinyarwanda, the local language, the colonialists failed to understand some concepts related to culture.

As far as ethnic conflict is concerned, colonization changed semantic meanings of Rwandan identity “*Ubwoko, Umuhutu, Umututsi, Umutwa*”. As explained above those terms have nothing with “Race or Ethnic” concept according to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) definition: “Ethnic group refers to a group whose members share a common language and culture” (see Akayezu, TC, para 513)

## 1.2 LANGUAGE USE AS DEVELOPMENT OF GENOCIDE IDEOLOGY.

Several words have been used to demonstrate the necessity of the murder of a whole group of Tutsi. Negative expressions, sentences, and words such as “*Inzoka*” which means snake; “*abantu*” which stands for human beings: “*abanyamahanga*”, which means foreigners; “*abakoloni*”, meaning colonizers; “*ba gashakabuhake*”, which stands for imperialist; “*inyangarwanda*”, meaning enemy of Rwanda; and “*Inyenzi*”, which means cockroaches have been used to build an anti-Tutsi concept. These words operate as transmitting agents of ideas and thoughts. (Rwigamba, B. 2010:15).

Ethnic ideology justification originated from myths created by the colonizers. Colonizers with the objective to divide and rule pointed out different origins of Rwandans using two myths: Hamitic myth and Bantu myth. The Hamitic myth portrays the Tutsi as foreigners who migrated to Rwanda. Names such as the Hamites, Hima, Nilotes, Couichit, have been used to describe them. The Bantu myth states that the Hutu, are natives of Rwanda, belonging to Bantu people. Based on the myths, the Tutsi are believed to be dominant race, which know how to command, are intelligent, cunning and share nothing with Africans. Hutu are believed to be docile people, innocent, less intelligent, hard workers, submissive, and a representation of true Africans (Harroy JP 1984: 26)

These distinctions have been a source of hatred, violence, massacres and genocide between Rwandans. They raise popular concept against Tutsi considered as foreigners at all levels: education, political, administration. They were foreigners “*abanyamahanga*” who come to colonize Rwandan people “*Ba gashakabuhake*” therefore they are Rwandans’ enemy “*Inyangarwanda*” that merit being exterminated, “*gutsemba*”. Furthermore, Tutsi are symbolized as enemies of human beings.

The ideology attracted political high personality’s speech such as Leon Mugesera words in November 1992 when he incited people to exterminate all Tutsi (Ndahiro 2004: 49) People further integrated the ideology in their daily conversations. The following two phrases are examples of the later: (1) “*Uwica imbeba ntababarira n’ihaka.*” This phrase is used to imply that when one is killing dangerous mouse, one does not spare the pregnant mouse. This is used to mention that all Tutsi have to be killed without distinction whether young, old or unborn; (2) “*Inivo ni ugutwi,*” means you have to target near ears, sensible place where some will die surely. These expressions have been elimination strategies in genocide perpetuated against Tutsi in 1994.

## 1.3 LANGUAGE USE AS CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE BUILDING

Language use has contributed in peace rebuilding in Rwanda post genocide. Unity and Reconciliation Commission in Rwanda has used language not only as a tool of communication but also by the means of distortion of genocide ideology. This is obvious in solidarity camp, *Ingando*, organized for students, youth, leaders, and teachers and in “*Itorero*

ry'igihugu" to recreate Rwandan culture. Leaders also has used several terms to change people's minds. For instance, Rucagu Boniface, former governor of north provinces' reached his target of demobilizing against people's genocide support by using slogans. Lexical analysis proves terms such as unity, reconciliation, peace, work, integrity have been used to the rate of 85% in H.E Paul Kagame speeches in 2003.

Language analysis is a prominent tool in major approaches of conflict management which includes conflict prevention, conflict transformation, and conflict resolution; and in modern conflict mechanisms, arbitration, negotiation, and mediation. Discourse analysis has been used by researchers such as Semujanga, Evariste Ntakirutimana, and Laurent Nkusi in order to understand development of Genocide ideology.

### **Conclusion**

Rwandan policy makers and researchers should take into account that language studies are important as a means of conflict management and country development. Faculties and options regarding languages and humanities in general should be reestablished and support few available. It is important also to mention that the mastering of a language is necessary to accomplish different task which are necessary in country building and sustainable peace. For instance, lawyers know legal language, doctors know medical terms, teachers know classroom language and factory workers know the right terms to describe the products they make and the processes used to make them. Such job-related language not only has special purposes, it also identifies the user as somebody who knows the job. Someone who cannot use legal language convincingly is probably not a lawyer.

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