

*Received 4 February 2019.*

*Accepted 20 May 2019.*

## THE DIALECT OPTION IN ADDRESSING HERDERS-FARMERS CLASHES IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

Nigeria has witnessed a lot of conflicts and ethnic tensions. The objective of the study is to ascertain the possibility of using dialect to salvage the despicable situations arising from herders-farmers clashes in Nigeria. The study adopts the image schemas as the theoretical framework. Data are drawn from textbooks, journal articles, and online versions of national dailies. The research discovers that an attack on the goals of herders and farmers, which are to provide food for their cattle and harvesting their yam produce respectively, is the root of the tensions between herders and farmers. The paper also reveals that before dialect will serve as an enablement in addressing the herders-farmers clash, the federal character of Nigeria as enshrined in the constitution must be fully implemented. This paper concludes that dialect can be used in addressing farmers-herders clash in Nigeria as a medium of sensitization and as a means of inclusion.

### Keywords

Dialect, herders, farmers, image schemas, Nigeria

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## EL USO DEL DIALECTO PARA ABORDAR LOS ENFRENTAMIENTOS ENTRE PASTORES Y AGRICULTORES EN NIGERIA

### Resumen

Nigeria ha sido testigo de muchos conflictos y tensiones étnicas. El objetivo de este estudio es comprobar la posibilidad de utilizar el dialecto para salvar las situaciones conflictivas derivadas de los enfrentamientos entre pastores y agricultores en Nigeria. El estudio adopta los esquemas de imagen como marco teórico. Los datos se extraen de libros de texto, artículos de revistas y versiones en línea de diarios nacionales. La investigación muestra que un ataque a los objetivos de los pastores y de los agricultores, que son proporcionar alimento para el ganado y cosechar las batatas, respectivamente, es la raíz de las tensiones entre ellos. El artículo también revela que antes de que el dialecto sirva como una habilitación para abordar el enfrentamiento entre ganaderos y agricultores, el carácter federal de Nigeria consagrado en la constitución debería implementarse totalmente. El trabajo concluye que el dialecto puede utilizarse para abordar el enfrentamiento entre agricultores y pastores en Nigeria como un medio de sensibilización y de inclusión.

### Palabras clave

dialecto, ganaderos, agricultores, esquemas de imágenes, Nigeria

### 1. Introduction

Wars and conflicts have characterised the world from past to present. Man has witnessed quite a number of wars and conflicts situations. The World War I and World War II, the Holocaust, the Rwanda genocide, 9/11 bombing in the United State of America are examples of war and conflict situations in the international scene. Nigeria, as a country, has witnessed a war and different conflicts. In Nigeria, the Nigeria-Biafra war, Boko Haram terrorist acts, activities of the separatist group: Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Northern Arewa groups, inter-communal clashes between Tiv and Berom in Benue State, Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra State, as well as herders-farmers clash in Benue, Plateau, Taraba and Enugu States of the Federation have been witnessed (cf. Isioma 2017). These conflicts in Nigeria mutilate Nigeria's unity, create ethnic tensions and dampen the economic growth of Nigeria. Funds that should be channelled towards infrastructural development are used

in maintaining the camps of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and the security sector (Adisa & Adekunle 2010). As a result of the series of conflicts present in Nigeria, Nigeria is ranked third in the global terrorism index behind Iraq and Afghanistan (WorldAtlas 2017).

Amidst these conflict situations, the herders-farmers clash in Nigeria is the major preoccupation of this research. The herders-farmers clash is a conflict situation between nomads who seek food and water for their livestock and farmers whose farmlands are trespassed by the herders and their cattle. Reports reveal that the herders in Nigeria are Fulani (Iro 1994; Adetula 2016). According to Adetula (2016), Fulani herdsmen are nomads who move alongside their cattle to different parts of Nigeria. He further avers that people of Fulani tribe rarely use artificial birth control methods, and as a result of this, the tribe has their vast population and their presence in almost every state across the country. The remote cause of herders-farmers clash, notes Adetula (2016), is rooted in the government's negligence in addressing the issue of cattle rustling. As such, these herders' resort to carrying arms wherever they go.

The International Crisis Group (2017) opines that some factors have been discovered to be the reasons behind herders-farmers clash. They purport that three factors have aggravated this decade-long conflict arising from environmental degradation in the far north and encroachment upon grazing grounds in the Middle Belt: militia attacks; the poor government response to distress calls and failure to punish past perpetrators; and new laws banning open grazing in Benue and Taraba states (cf. Bada 2018). In addition, as they move, they frequently trespass farmland owned by indigenes of a community, efforts by the farmers to reprimand these herders often result in maiming, killings, and massacre. Statistics provided by the Institute for Economics and Peace recorded that 1,229 people were killed in 2014 and Benue State seems to be the most affected state in contemporary times. In Plateau state, Fulani invaded 11 communities in Barkin-Ladi and Riyom Local Government Areas and killed 150 persons (Bere 2018). Similarly, the International Crisis Group (2017) reports that from January 2015 to February 2017; about 62,000 people were displaced in Kaduna, Benue and Plateau states. The Nimbo massacre on 25th April 2016 took the lives of 40 persons (Abiodun 2016).

In an attempt to curb herders-farmers clash, a Nigerian lawmaker, Zainab Kure, sponsored a bill in the Senate. The bill is regarded as the 'Land Grazing Bill', which offers herders a particular land in all the states of the Federation so that they will not have to trespass farms of their host community. The bill was received with mixed feelings. The Nigeria's Minister of Agriculture, Audu Ogbeh has said that many northern states have donated several pieces of land for the project. In other words, northerners accept the bill. On the other hand, states in the southern part of the country rebutted the idea, noting that they cannot be forced to give out their land for this purpose (Adetula 2016). As reported by *Vanguard* (2016), Ohanaeze Ndigbo, while opposing the creation of grazing routes and reserves, said that cattle grazing is a private business, and therefore should not be done in such a way that individual's or community's rights are infringed upon. It appears, however, that the reason people from the southern part of the country do not want to give their consent to the bill is because it is one of the plans of infiltrating Muslims in every part of the country, which is one of the techniques of Islamising Nigeria.

The Nimbo massacre is one of the reasons people from the South East refused to give consent to the 'Land Grazing Bill.' This could be seen in the quit notice given to Fulani herdsmen by a group known as Voice from the East (VEAST) (Ebuzor 2018). Nimbo is a town in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State, which suffered in the hands of Fulani herdsmen on 25th April 2018 (Abiodun 2016). As reported by Falayi (2016), one of the suspects of the massacre, Zurai, told the police that at least 100 Fulani herdsmen from seven states (Benue, Kaduna, Kastina, Kogi, Nassarawa, and Niger) took part in the attack. As recounted by Zurai, the attack came because of the killing of six Fulani herdsmen in the community in the past without repercussion.

Researchers have recommended possible ways through which herders-farmers clash can be resolved: social work policy intervention (Ajibo et al. 2018), government intervention (Ndubuisi 2018), adoption of ranching instead of grazing bill (Idowu 2017), establishment of grazing lands (Imo 2017), indigenous media (Isioma 2017), language planning (Agbedo 2011). Amidst these recommendations, Agbedo (2011) emphasises the importance of addressing the language problems in Nigeria, which will in turn salvage the ethno-religious crises in Nigeria as well as tackle the problems that bedevil a typical multilingual and multicultural society such as Nigeria. Ugwuona (2016) observes that language is at the heart of protest in the sense that groups or organisations communicate

their grievances through language and that these grievances are also addressed through language. The appropriate use of language, especially by the chairman of an Electoral Management Body (EMB), has aided in minimising electoral violence (Aboh 2016).

The present research charts a new course as it examines the dialect option in addressing herders-farmers clash in Nigeria. This is necessitated owing to the fact that this area is less explored by researchers. In x-raying the herders-farmers clash, the scope of the study is limited to the herders-farmers clash that occurred in Nimbo, Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu state, on the 25th day of April 2016, which claimed the lives of 40 people. The purpose of this study therefore is to investigate how dialect can be used to address the herders-farmers clash in Nigeria. Dialect, in the words of Chambers & Trudgill (2004: 5), refers to "...varieties which are grammatically (and perhaps lexically) as well as phonologically different from other varieties." The study of dialects is known as dialectology. The Uzo-Uwani dialect of Igbo belongs to the Northern Group of dialects (Nwaozuzu 2008).

In this study, a cognitive semantic approach will be adopted in testing the viability of dialect in curbing herders-farmers clash. Specifically, the image schema theory of cognitive semantics forms the theoretical framework for this research. Information and data for this research were obtained from journal articles, textbook, online versions of Nigerian Dailies, and other internet materials.

## **2. Literature review**

In this section, the image schemas theory will be reviewed. The related research works in literature will be highlighted followed by a summary of literature review.

### *2.1 Image schemas theory*

Image schemas theory is hinged on the notion that metaphors and metonymy proceed from human's bodily movements or behaviours. Saeed (2003) notes that these

bodily movements exert and experience force, which enable humans to arrange thought across a range of more abstract domains. The theory of image schemas appeared in Johnson's (1987) *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* and Lakoff's (1987) *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*. The fundamental principle of image schemas theory is that body and mind cooperate in the interpretation of meaning. This implies that the body alone is not sufficient to interpret meaning of utterance neither is the mind enough in the study of meaning. For meaning to be fully interpreted, the mind and the body must be involved.

An image schema, as a term, was primarily conceived to underline the bodily, sensory motor nature of various structures of human conceptualisation and reasoning. Johnson (2005) opines that sensory-motor experiences are used to structure abstract concepts and to carry out inferences about abstract domains of thought. In essence, image schemas conceptualisation is got from bodily movements either left or right, centre or periphery, front or back, near or far. More so, image schemas are a composition of both the body and the mind. The mind assists in assigning meaning to bodily experiences and the body substantiates the abstraction created by the mind. As observed by Johnson (2005: 23-24), "Failure to recognize the non-dualistic mental-bodily reality of image schemas would cause the collapse of the whole project of utilizing image-schematic logic to explain abstract thought."

Based on bodily movements and experiences, Johnson (1987) puts forward different image schemas: Source-Path-Goal, Force, Enablement, Scalarity, Verticality, and Center-Periphery image schemas. The Source-Path-Goal image schema is founded on human's movements from one place to another. The point of exodus is the source, the channel or route of passage is known as the path whereas the destination is the goal. Johnson (1987) purports that through human's movements, metaphorical concepts can be constructed. The starting point (the source), often marked with A, goes through a part to the endpoint (goal) often marked with B as illustrated in the diagram below:

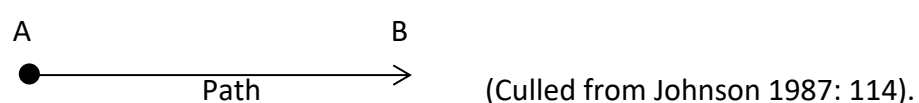


Figure 1. Path schema.

As such, it shows that the movement from point A to point B must pass through a path, which takes time. The 'Life is a journey' metaphor is a good example of the path schema where life is conceived as a journey from one point to another. This explains the reason the following statements surface: "When is the baby arriving? He could not make it. His journey has ended etc."

The force image schema is based on the obstacles human beings encounter in their day-to-day activities. The obstacles, notwithstanding, human beings are compelled to perform such actions. Obstacles serve as blockages and hinder the force (F) acted upon an entity. The force can be permanently blocked or a diversion might be created. In some cases, the force can pass through or over the blockage. In essence, three major elements in the force image schema are compulsion, blockage, and removal of blockage/restraint. These are illustrated in the diagrams below:

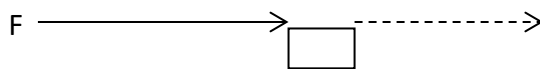


Figure 2. Compulsion.

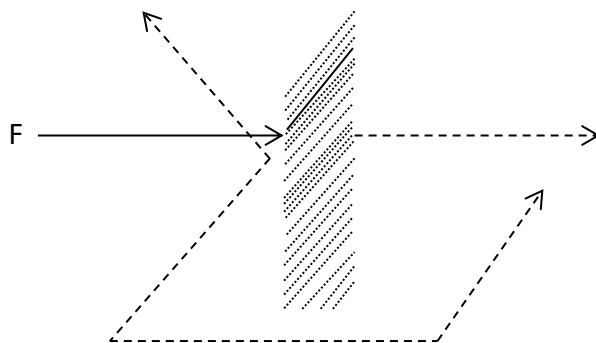
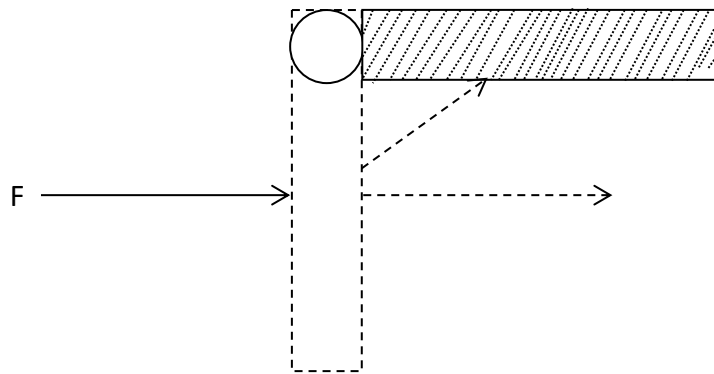


Figure 3. Blockage.



Diagrams adapted from Johnson (1987: 47).

Figure 4. Removal of restraint.

In Figure 2, when a force is acted upon an entity, the movement can pass through an entity or be hindered by it. Figure 3 signifies a typical blockage of a force by an entity. It is either the force passes through the entity or it is diverted. Figure 4 demonstrates a removal of a blockage so that the force can pass through the trajectory (cf. Johnson 1987: 47; Saeed 2003: 356-357).

The strength of image schemas theory lies in its introduction of scientific approach to the analysis of metaphorical concepts. The theory, as will be shown in this study, can also be used in x-raying social issues and how to manoeuvre them. The criticism of image schemas theory is that it not all bodily movements that can be conceptualised metaphorically.

## 2.2 Related works in literature

Idowu (2017) investigates the recurring conflicts that exist between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria. The purpose of the study is to highlight the historical trajectory, causes, dynamics and consequences of the conflict. The research work adopts frustration and aggression theory as the theoretical framework. Data were sourced from secondary sources such as newspapers, journal articles, and policy brief papers. The paper discovers that beyond environmental scarcity, expansive use of land for non-agricultural reasons, land ownership system, ethno-religious intolerance, quest for cost minimisation, unregulated transhumance, security threats from Boko Haram attacks, lack of effective



institutional mechanism of conflict mediation among others are some of the causes of nomads-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. It also argues in favour of ranching rather than the establishment of grazing reserves and routes across the states in Nigeria as the solution to this perennial conflict.

Isioma (2017) evaluates the effectiveness of using the indigenous media in curbing terrorism in Nigeria. The purpose of the paper is to educate the world at large and Nigerians in particular on how important indigenous media, which operates in three forms: verbal, non-verbal and esoteric modes which are familiar, available, ubiquitous and cheap to operate can be of help in saving the country, Nigeria from the mighty hands of terrorism. The theoretical framework of the research is source credibility theory. The paper discovers that Nigeria is an African country that still believes in communal living that is based on oral, close-knitted environs, which is fostered by the people's local dialect, superstitious beliefs, eating and dressing patterns and so on. The researcher therefore recommends that indigenous media should be used by the Government, religious bodies and the mass media in their programmes when it concerns peaceful dialogues and talk shows, and the media should report terrorists' acts with caution since terrorists acts are made known by the powerful influence of their reports whether on social media, television, print and radio.

Ajibo et al. (2018) examine the dynamics of farmers and herdsmen clashes in Nigeria. The paper adopts the descriptive research design and elicits data from newspapers and journal publications. The study adopts the tenets of conflict theory by Karl Marx as the analytical tool. The finding of the research reveals that the effects of herders-farmers clash in Nigeria are loss of lives and properties and economic depletion and traces the causes of this clash to land use, ethnic and religious differences. From a social work perspective, the researchers recommend the adoption of the system theory in addressing the issue at hand. System theory, according to Ajibo et al. (2018), stipulates that a system is a whole that is made up of component, the whole is not greater than the individual component and where there is a dysfunction in the individual component then the whole will inevitably malfunction.

Ndubuisi (2018) conducts a critical analysis of the causes and socio-religious effects of conflicts between herdsmen and farmers on national development. The objectives of this study are to discuss the causes, as well as the socio-economic, political and religious implications of these attacks for sustainable development. The study adopts qualitative and phenomenological approaches in its investigation and analysis of data, which were drawn from existing literature and oral interviews with selected individuals. The study observes that many people have lost their property and lives; that many people have been displaced from their homes; and that the peace, security and unity of the country as a federation are being seriously threatened. The researcher recommends the intervention of the Federal Government in tackling the major causes of these clashes.

### *2.3 Summary of literature review*

Under literature review, attempts have been made to discuss the image schemas theory and review related works in literature. The gap found out in the literature is that no known work, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has adopted the theory of image schemas to explore the dialect option in addressing herders-farmers clash in Nigeria especially in the case of Nimbo massacre. This gap is what this research intends to fill. For the purposes of this study, the force and enablement aspects of the image schemas theory will be used for the analysis. In other words, it is the theoretical framework of this research. The path and force components of image schemas are used because they suggest different ways in which a particular phenomenon can make headway amidst the blockages it encounters. Nigeria aims at ensuring peaceful coexistence and progress (goal), but ethnic, religious, and needs differences serve as forces that block the achievement of this goal. Therefore, in line with the purpose of this research, which is to evaluate the dialect option in addressing herders-farmers clash in Nigeria, the enablement aspect of image schemas will be applied to ascertain the extent to which dialect is a proper enablement in eliminating the forces highlighted above. This is the reason for the adoption of image schemas as the theoretical framework for this research.

### 3. Methods

This study adopts the descriptive survey research design. In this study, a cognitive semantic approach will be adopted in testing the viability of dialect in curbing herders-farmers clash. Specifically, the image schemas theory of cognitive semantics forms the theoretical framework for this research. Information and data for this research were obtained from journal articles, textbooks, online versions of Nigerian Dailies, and other internet materials.

### 4. Analysis

In the Source-Path-Goal image schema, the point of departure (source) of Fulani herders and their cattle can be anywhere within the country, but most especially from the northern part of the country. The path is where these herders and cattle pass through in order to reach their goal, which could be anywhere they find good pasture. On the other hand, farmers come from their houses, undergo different levels of cultivation from tilling the ground to cultivation, with the goal of harvesting their farm produce in due time. These descriptions form the Source-Path-Goal image schema of herders and farmers and they could be illustrated with the diagrams below:

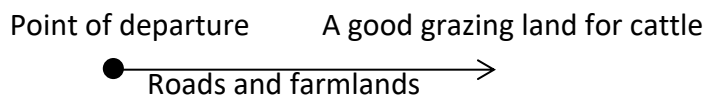


Figure 5. Source-Path-Goal image schema of herders.

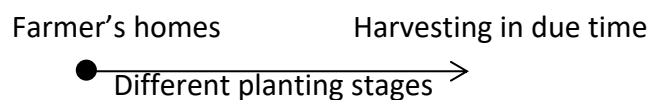


Figure 6. Source-Path-Goal Image schema of farmers.

As can be seen in Figure 5 and Figure 6, the goal of herders is to ensure that their herds of cattle are fed whereas the goal of the farmers is to ensure that they harvest their farm produce so as to be able to feed themselves and their families. The clashes that have been witnessed among herders and farmers have their roots in the obstruction of achieving the goals above. Farmers tend to engage in physical combat with herders because they claim that herders and their cattle destroy their crops in the farm, which thwarts their hopes of harvesting their farm produce. Herders engage in reprisal attacks because they construe the actions of the farmers as inhibiting their goal of feeding their herds of cattle. The causes of the clashes, therefore, are as a result to the blockages inhibiting farmers' bountiful harvest and herders' feeding of their livestock. As such, Muhammed, Ismaila & Bibi (2015) observe that past conflicts were solely due to overlap of farmlands with cattle routes, where farmers grow crops on the routes. In essence, the fear of failing to reach their (herders and farmers) goals stimulates these two groups to engage in war of words and subsequently, physical combat.

On the other hand, from the national perspective, the goal of the government is to ensure that different ethnic groups that constitute Nigeria live in peace and harmony. But due to marginalisation, inequitable distribution of wealth, different worldviews and ideologies, ethnic and religious differences, the goal of Nigerians living without clashes, conflicts and terrorist acts is continually met with bogus optimism. In addition, the failure of leadership in Nigeria continually fuels this divide (Achebe 1984). It will only take a suitable enablement to minimise herders-farmers clash to the barest minimum.

#### *4.1 Dialect as an enablement?*

"As we moved around Nimbo, I saw an Igbo man who used to give me food anytime I was in the state. I warned him to quickly leave town to avoid being killed" – Zurai, one of the persons that massacred 40 persons in Nimbo" (Falayi 2016).

"Ibrahim saved my life. He told me about the coup that morning. He was not directly involved, but most of them—the Northern officers—knew about it. He drove me to his cousin's house, but I didn't really understand until he asked his

cousin to take me to the backyard, where he kept his domestic animals” – Madu  
in Adichie’s (2006) *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

The above excerpts present instances where a northerner saved a southerner because of the close relationship that exists between them. Before dialect can be a worthy enablement in addressing herders-farmers clash in Nigeria, the remote cause of disunity should be addressed. Nigeria needs to be restructured so that no tribe or ethnic group will feel marginalised. The federal character, as enshrined in the constitution must be implemented. When these are done, then the role of language and dialect becomes inevitable.

Dialects can be used in addressing the issue of herders-farmers clash in different ways. Firstly, as observed by Nelson Mandela, when one speaks to a man in the language he understands, it goes to his head but if one speaks to a man in his language, it goes to his heart. The same thing is applicable to the issue of dialect. The dialect of a speech community can be used to sensitize the people on the need for peaceful co-existence and a good inter-ethnic relationship. This is in line with the observation made by Isioma (2017) that people’s dialect can be used to communicate to them on the importance of communal living. As it is with the case of Nimbo, the Nimbo dialect of Igbo can be used to admonish the people on the need of peaceful coexistence. And this act was portrayed by the Governor of Enugu State, Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, which made APC governors to commend him for “the show of maturity in handling the provocative incident, which they described as a criminal act that cannot be associated with tribe, religion or political party” (Idowu 2016). The dialects of the herders should be used as well to sensitize them on the need to live in harmony with their host community.

Secondly, the desire of a non-indigene of a particular community to learn the language or dialect of its host community also fosters harmonious living. This is important because an attack on people’s language is an attack on the people as could be seen between the French and English-speaking people of Canada (Agbedo 2011). As visitors in Nimbo, the herders need to be acculturated to the lifestyle of their host community and the process of acculturation involves developing interest in learning the dialect. From

observation, Igbo people are endeared to a stranger or foreigner who thrives to learn the Igbo language. As such, the Igbo people feel elated when they see Europeans or other tribes in Nigeria speak the Igbo language. This explains the reason behind the multiple sales of the life of Jesus dubbed in the Igbo language entitled *! ma na Jizos na-asu Igbo?* 'Did you know that Jesus speaks Igbo?' These are the possible ways through which dialect can serve as an enablement in solving the issue of herders-farmers clash in Nigeria and by so doing remove the blockages or restraints that stimulate tensions, conflicts and battles.

## 5. Summary and conclusion

This paper has highlighted the causes and effects of herders-farmers clash in Nigeria. The research work also reviewed related theories and different empirical researches that have been carried out in relation to the thrust of this paper. The paper observed that a cognitive semantic approach has not been adopted in examining the possibility of dialect in addressing the issue of herders-farmers clash in Nigeria. In an attempt to fill this gap in literature, the study adopted the path and force image schemas in its analysis. From the analysis, it was discovered that an attack on the goals of herders and farmers, which are to provide food for their cattle and harvesting their yam produce respectively, is the root of the tensions between herders and farmers. The effects of the clashes between herders and farmers serve as blockages to peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. The paper also revealed that before dialect will serve as an enablement in addressing the herders-farmers clash, the federal character of Nigeria as enshrined in the constitution must be abided by to the latter. When there is a fair treatment of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, then; community's dialect, as it is with the case of Nimbo, and other communities can be used to sensitize the people on the importance of unity in diversity and inter-ethnic relationship. In addition, the paper averred that visitors or strangers should develop interest in the language and dialect of their host community as this will make them to be endeared to their hosts. This paper concludes that dialect can be used in addressing farmers-herders clash in Nigeria as a medium of information dissemination and as a means of inclusion.

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