

Language, Intercultural Communication and Development: A Psycholinguistics Analysis of Conflicting Paradigms in Sub-Saharan African Sustainable Development Dilemma

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Abstract

Concepts in relation to dynamics of global development remain conspicuously absent in the curriculum at all levels of education in Sub Saharan Africa. This situation has obscured the understanding of complex efforts on connecting intercultural communication to the increasing adoption of a widening range of educational services and mechanisms that would lead to more effective and adequate results. This paper sets to redefine language and intercultural communication as spirals of development while underscoring the pertinence of the implementation of a twin-track westernised and local community approaches to spur up the process of development in African countries south of the Sahara. In analysing these issues within a psycholinguistics perspective, the paper will be contributing to a better understanding of the fundamental conflicting paradigms in the nature and goals of global education for sustainable development.

Keywords: psycholinguistics, intercommunicate, sociological, globalization, transformation, sustainable development.

1. Introduction

The changing dynamics of long life learning obscures an understanding of how the requirements of community development are to be met under the new and increasing technological changes in education. Building on the works of Kapoor (2007) and others, we propose in this paper a path model of connecting educational objectives to the increasing adoption of a widening range of educational services and mechanisms that would lead to more effective results oriented objectives. The on-going process of globalization is thus a course for concern for countries with weak economic status like African countries south of the Sahara. While developed nations intercommunicate easily due to the limited linguistic and cultural barriers that influence intercultural communication, African states are still to come to agreement on the common basis of elaborating development programmes within the universal frames of African communicative patterns. The use of language and intercultural communication is capital in establishing the base of sustainable development in a multicultural African setting. The ineffective application of these tools has rendered the whole educational process a toothless dog insofar as the development objectives hitherto assigned to are still far from providing the expected results.

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In paying particular attention to the problems inherent to the application of intercultural communication as a veritable tool of economic development in sub Saharan Africa, this article further examines these difficulties within the sociological frame of African communities and demonstrates its importance in shaping development within the present context of globalisation.

1.1. The Sociology of Sub-Saharan African Community

The discussion of the internal causes of underdevelopment in the countries of the less developed world could be lengthened by many more pages, especially with regards to the inadequate social structures that arrest the dynamism required to establish a society in the modern sense.

In Africa, tribalism creates divisions within the countries and appears in politics where parties have a tribal basis and minority tribes are oppressed. No doubt, in his address to the Cameroon nation, on 1 January 2010, President Paul BIYA of the Republic of Cameroon went so far as to castigate tribal rivalry as “the cancer of our country.” In almost all the countries of black Africa, “unity” is a magic word like “Africanization,” simply because it expresses a deeply felt need, but the reality is blowing in the winds. Encapsulated in this entanglement is the diversity in language, rites, traditions, mentality, and in some cases, religions has developed within ethnic communities strange customs and believes that at moment pose real challenges to the course of African unity. This situation has been identified as a tremendous obstacle to the economic progress of Africa south of the Sahara. Equally, not so long ago, and in some places even today, as is the case with The Central African Republic , there are conflicts over leadership, land, water, and the like, that make for further divisions among African communities. As per Western nations, there is a gradual and persistent move towards establishing a unifying language, and the relocation of people for reasons of work has gradually lead to the disappearance of ethnic differences thus, enhancing the formation of united cultures as opposed to Sub- Saharan African nations that are still divided entities without any sense of Africanization.

The consequence of this “incomplete formation” of spirit and national identity is playing heavily on the economic development of African states; a situation that has been aggravated by contrasting ethnic traditions that have even made their ways into politics and are more divisive than are the political parties and social classes. It is therefore easy to understand why a representative of a given tribe in an administrative position on any level means the advancement of the members of that tribe and of no other.

For instance, it is common in Cameroon to observe that if a member of a certain tribe were to be entrusted with the entrepreneurial duties in a local project; very soon the majority of workers on that project would be members of the entrepreneur’s tribe. Therefore, the advancement of one tribe or community at the expense of the oppression of the others cannot trigger sustained development. For this reason, there cannot be social justice nor the social cohesion needed for sustainable development. The role of civic education and intercultural communication in this light is to strive at eliminating such tribal practices and other ills linked to tribalism and favoritism because they promote the cult of mediocrity and kill development efforts at birth.

Another course for the stagnated development in Africa is the limited motivation for real change. It has been observed that many Sub Saharan African countries have not advanced any further than the early days of independence some fifty years ago. Though the levels of global awareness have increased, they have remained on the spot without any real development objectives. Unlike the countries of the West, African countries possess no social groups able to initiate their own transformation and to destroy their internal chains of colonization or neo-colonization. This is not due to any external causes or to any technical backwardness, but essentially to internal structural causes. The internal impulses to modernization have been largely lacking since the days of independence and due to the fact that the tribal societies of sub-Saharan Africa, have all, in one way or another, been stirred up from outside by the new bounding, uncontrollable energies of westernization and latter globalization, doubled the speed of technological advancements to the detriment of almost all black African states.

1.2 Language, Culture and Sustainable Development

Within the present context of globalization, African countries with a high standard of literacy will likely make major breakthroughs in the solutions to the economic problems they are currently facing.

While it is true that a population with a high standard of literacy is positively correlated with employment and, by extension, with levels of wellbeing, this does not mean that it would always be so in all cases if the fruits of literacy are not directed towards enhancing collective sustainable development. In recent years and for reasons independent of standards of literacy, hundreds of thousands of Sub Saharan African people have lost their jobs.

Many of these new unemployed are situated on the highest ranks of the literacy ladder and have lost their jobs not because they are unable to adapt to change but because in fact change in most cases is unpredictable. This unpredictability makes us aware of the level of risk we live with. In this risk society, life becomes insecure amongst other reasons because of the crises affecting tradition, the resurgence of fundamentalisms and the limited ability of the political authorities to control social and economic transformations. Another reason could be linked to the ecological challenges we have to face. Thus, it does not appear very reasonable to restrict learning to a catalogue of instrumental skills defined on the basis of decontextualized situations. Considering the fact that African economic development problems cannot be tackled in isolation, we have to use multiple perspectives, incorporating cultural traditions and the institutionalisation of intercultural education schemes through Adult Education and learning that can help understand and bridge African reality, and arrive at decisions that take account of the complexity of the diverse cultural situations. If the problem we are dealing with is literacy and development, it appears reasonable and necessary to tackle it by starting from what people do in their lives and from there go on to build new knowledge that will help us not only to understand it better, but more importantly to find new ways of resolving it. That is what we are referring to as contextual sustainable development. These new methods will have to take account inevitably of all objective features as well as subjective and inter subjective socio cultural features of given communities.

The fifth International Conference on Adult Education established clearly that while productivity and economic development are important, they are not exclusively so. Thus, literacy and adult education must also develop a sense of responsibility among individual and communities; they must promote coexistence, tolerance and the creative and informed participation of the population in the community development, whether at local or at global level. In Cameroon, the notion of adult education is still to be linked to competitiveness, and above all – to such notions as social justice, community development, new technologies, social integration, mutual respect, democracy, risk management, and equality of rights – regardless of the religion, class, gender or ethnic group to which an individual belongs. These are key pillars on which the concept of education for sustainable development must be built if Sub Saharan Africa in general and Cameroon in particular want to make a meaningful step forward in the direction of economic and technological development.

The positivist paradigm considers people as isolated subjects: they only need to be able to cope with any given type of situation. This assumption is derived from a cultural attitude whereby doing things alone is better than doing them collectively. Development scholars who defend this paradigm are not interested in comprehending the world of social interaction or the dynamism that emanates from inter-subjective relations. For this reason the measures they propose to overcome the problem of illiteracy invariably concentrate on the individual and on the need to improve his functional competencies, which are related almost exclusively to productivity at work and to consumption. These measures cannot really work within the African context due to the lack of financial resources to carry out effective qualitative literacy programs, as well as the technological backwardness that has kept African countries south of the Sahara at the tail end of global development initiatives.

2.0. The Persistent Causes of Sub-Saharan Africa Underdevelopment

Today, many Sub-Saharan African countries strongly depend on more economically advanced countries of the North. Although these countries have gained political independence, they find themselves still subjected to “the law of the stronger,” that is, they are victims of economic neocolonialism. This seemingly justifies why Africa is poor today. Whether the statement is true or not, what we know is that, each country understands itself in the light of its past history and present economic situation. Here it will suffice to examine the complexity of the forces of globalization on the development of the countries of the sub region, in order to see the responsibility of the present global economic trends in relation to poor nations on the one hand, and on the other, to show that the underdevelopment of Africa is not due solely to causes external to itself. This analysis will enable us to trace the lines of our commitment as social scholars to the struggle against hunger and want.

The debate on why Africa has not developed that much always ends up in the pretext that Africa was denied the right to its destiny by the advent of colonialism that led to rupture in the balance of economic subsistence and especially rupture in the psychological-social and cultural balance which initially accounted for the, stability, and psychological tranquility they gave up to embrace the violent contact with the Western world. A culture for which they were not prepared was imposed on them, the old culture and social systems were imperiled, and nothing of greater value was introduced. This situation - the crumbling of the psychological balance has created in "an inferiority complex," more or less pronounced (in accordance with the positions and the degree of culture or the characteristics of various persons) toward Western culture; and this fact hampers the ordered development of local cultures. This inferiority complex increased by racism and "Slavism" stems from the fact that Africans found themselves suddenly facing other people who were technologically more developed, richer, more powerful and whose ways of life had been proven more effective than theirs. It is true that Africa or Europe could not have evolved as in a vacuum, that is, the hypothesis of development in a vacuum is absurd for no people known to history have developed in isolation, free from foreign contacts. But if this Western impact had been made more gradually, with greater respect for African cultures, and by way of evolution and not rupture, Africa in the opinion of many scholars would not be experiencing now the present cultural and psychological instability that is inevitably reflected in the political, socio-economic and technological domains.

The difficulty in orienting intercultural studies to a specific domain is the vastness of its scope. Though the theme has been widely treated in many books on development, its concept articulates the training of human capital in skills required to identify development channels that cut across cultures to come up with lasting solutions to social problems. It has been considered as one of the building blocks of human development, and not just a basic right. It is essential therefore for any meaningful development in its cross-cutting nature within the global development landscape. It is equally very instrumental in familiarizing developing nations with the principle that they must further their own interests in the economic sphere by adapting economic practices that enhance cultural and social evolution.

2.1. Rethinking Intercultural Communication for Development

Our concept on intercultural studies for sustainable development entails looking back to the community levels to engage and renovate sensational community projects that cut across national boundaries. It would be important to create a holistic approach by involving Universities to validate the concepts created by communities while NGOs provide capacity building and journalists disseminate well packaged information so that policy makers should recognize community ventures as the nerve vein of the economy. As statistics hold, 85% of Cameroonians depend on agriculture for livelihood and 80% of their produce is exported, yet less than 4% of air time radio/television programs in agriculture. We hear of sports reporters, crime wave analysts, and political desk specialists but nothing on agriculture reporting, whereas demonstration techniques are easy to learn when they are screened and/or communicated as often to the people.

Developing an interconnected framework where institutions network with communities will enable NGOs and journalists via information technology to collectively participate in decision making wherein, a mechanism is built up using powerful tools to intensify the process of emancipator education. This will stimulate and relocate new paradigms that language structures should explore if the ultimate objective of change must be achieved. The bilingual nature of Cameroon requires certain adjustments within such a frame work. Training in cross-cultural communication will open further channels of development towards well-being of people and ecosystems through endogenous development practices. Power balance in the sub region and in Cameroon is an impediment for effective development. In resorting to a participatory decision making approach, issues of gender imbalance, customs and tradition, often criticized in the management of human capital end up as community assets on which cross cultural learning can successfully build.

If development is a generic term, why rethink it? From our perception, development as it is conceived by the North is wrapped up in a generic concept of improving on the living conditions and building infrastructure in the less developed countries. Basing their experiences either consciously or unconsciously to what earlier happened to the West and the solutions applied to achieve successful results, Northern development leaders inadvertently created a form of neo-colonialism in their concept approach to the problems of the South.

It must have been in their thinking that the same approach will work in the South forgetting that approaches developed by European workers in the course of their history cannot just be imposed on a community with its own cultural specificity. There is every reason to think that such an approach will face a real dilemma which only the people of the South have the solution. The colonial legacy of the English or the French language keeps reminding communities of their cultural alienation. They perceive the imposition of colonial languages as cognitive imperialism with a damaging impact as it colonizes the entire thinking process, thus colonizing the mind and reducing them to a permanent state of mental slavery. This has further induced psychological struggles encapsulated in the process of development.

Consequently it will be illogical to think that communities will react in the same way as English and French colonists did under similar conditions because people come from different world views. Much has been done by the West in terms of development projects or programs in favour of the South, yet the results are amazingly catastrophic - The Mali Sud IFAD funded project, British aid to Bangladesh, and the World Bank road infrastructure project in Ethiopia-Madeley, (1991). We can also mention the PASSOC European Union program in Cameroon. What can account for such a situation? Has it ever occurred to the western NGOs and development activists to offer solidarity and support to forms of struggles that differ from those which have developed in the West?

Would it not be rational to acknowledge that perhaps other forms of opposition to injustice, alternative ways of envisaging and seeking liberation must be allowed to emerge from the cultural depths of Africa, from their way of thinking and from their way of protecting their future? There is no doubt in positing that the beginning of the solution is in giving the concept a second thought. That is, development programmes should be conceived in line with the local realities and needs of beneficiary communities because so far, the literature devoted to project development and implementation minimizes the importance of endogenous knowledge and culture. Verhelst (1990) asserts this on a complementary report compiled by a consortium of NGOs on the agricultural problem in Latin America, from which one South American researcher came up with the following reflection:

How long will the West continue to believe itself involved in an act of charity towards the third World?...Whilst the North got rid of its industrial surplus and got back three dollars for every dollar lent, and now, it is to "feed" it. (p. 79)

This statement from the first sight can be erroneously considered as the expression of the despondency of a broken heart but from another perspective, it is simply a call for the local populations to take active part in their development problems and to stop thinking that only the West has the solutions to the problems as has always been the case.

3.0. Indigenous Knowledge as a Concept of Sustainable Development

Indigenous cultures have within them knowledge accountable enough to give rise to communities which differ from the universal concepts claimed by western ideology. Boukema, E. & McIntyre, V. (2006) hold the opinion that innovative development approaches based on indigenous thinking have worked in many areas of the world. In Cameroon for example "Le Service d' Etude et d'Animation pour le Development" has brought to light new forms of self-management and experiments in alternative development. Its founders -Jean Marc Ela and Achille Mbemba, in close contact with villagers who master the indigenous forms of knowledge systems of classification, technologies and codes of social life have come up with a host of indigenous initiatives (micro projects) that are thriving well without any external funding. These are self-financing institutions responding to emergencies, yet are unknown to international NGO's. These new types of initiatives embedded in indigenous knowledge and the understanding of development from the lens of the communities they serve.

The utilization of local resources creates a new relationship between culture and development. This is an example to show that if Sub-Saharan Africa in general and indigenous communities in particular were given opportunities to carry out reflections and channel information at global level, they will prove their worth. Unfortunately, the lack of reflections and information through intercultural communication explains the drying up of creative thinking in Africa. Indigenous people have skills and values which are assets and constitute a force for community driven initiatives. In these initiatives, people see themselves as benefiting from the outcomes and strive to keep it sustainable. Community talks, which are multiple generation discussions in their own language, contain pedagogical insights of "how action affects realities."

Such ways of knowing as Kincheloe & Steinberg (2006, p.94) in *Indigenous knowledge in education* put it, “they contribute so much to the educational experiences” but because of the rules of evidence and the dominant epistemology of western knowledge production, “such understanding are deemed irrelevant by academic issues raised about the nature of our existence, consciousness, knowledge production and the globalized imperial future that brings all people of the planet today is a challenge to western claim of knowledge.”

3.1. Colonial Languages and Global Education

The cardinal role that language plays in development has already been assessed. Development takes place in a community; it starts from the level of conception before moving on to implementation.

The conception is first thought of at the virtual level in a particular language. The channel through which the thought process is carried out is very important in determining the successful implementation and management of the whole process. Specifically, colonial legacies are projected through the language we speak professionally as opposed to our local languages. In the case of Cameroon, the English/French which today are considered a colonial force is still being exercised to silence communities in all aspects. These languages are taught throughout the educational system in Cameroon; they serve as the official languages and are considered the language of the civilized elites. This situation makes it very difficult for the national languages to cope with the power and influence they have impacted on the communities. Whereas while some cultures (mostly Asians) have developed their local languages to the level of almost equal strength with the English/French languages, most African communities are still struggling under the yoke of colonial language forms. According to Medeley (1999), this situation is highly conflicting with the local language and culture through which peoples' life concepts are developed and passed over from generation to generation. By implication, the institutionalization and use of colonial languages create a kind of socio cultural imbalance and cultural alienation. This has devastating consequences and feelings of alienation on the development and implementation of cross-cultural communication schemes within the frames of global development strategies. This constant feeling of being culturally alienated creates psychosomatic trauma that are manifested in very unpredictable manners.

In the same light, Keyton (2005) argues that local religious concepts and traditional rites linked with spirituality are being greatly damaged by western concepts of Christianity. This situation is reflected in communities which still want to stick to their traditional forms of worships. The Bansoh community of the North West Region is an example of a community in Cameroon where traditional beliefs are in high conflict with the western religion. The return to a state of psychological balance requires that communities work in favour of their cultural heritage wherein the feeling of belonging and the sense of participating in the life of the community is heightened through the use of endogenous knowledge embedded in the local language. This is what is expected from global education programmes to develop strategies to liberate the people from the grip of colonial masters. The dramatic progress in development witnessed in China, Korea and India today is logically linked to the development of their languages and their indigenous knowledge. There appears to be in the minds of many people in “the Global South” a form of resistance to the process of development. This view is shared by Kapoor (2009) in this statement that emphasizes the centrality of culture to development: “Development is a seamless web whose fabric contains a multitude of interwoven strands. It is culture however, which provides the colour, the texture, the weave, the resilience, the strength of the fabric.” (p.49). In a related development, Verhellst (1990) equally points out clearly that development which is not culturally based and/or culturally responsive is not workable; “Only the cultural dimension can give coherence and finality to development...stressing the cultural dimension of development means placing human beings at the centre of all analyses and initiatives. (p. 160)

What we have observed and noticed is that the failure and limitations of development strategies such as westernization or governance and even grass roots organization which are central to piloting development processes cannot be entirely explained by the socioeconomic or political factors generally advanced in numerous examples around the world. In our opinion, there are other obstacles to development and resistance to the spread of social awareness which are far beyond the tools of analysis of the economists, political scientists and even social activists like NGOs. The origin of this resistance lies in the cultural uniqueness of each community and in the need to safeguard their identity. For this reason, colonial languages can only be perceived as deterrents to development in that they alienate the natives through the relegation of their world as expressed in oral tradition to the lowest level of life.

In contrast, the written colonial languages are elevated to levels where they become the reference of dignity, authenticity and development. This has created an identity crisis that has overtaken the consciousness of the indigenous communities as in the case with the Bansoh community in Cameroon.

The underdevelopment or even the de-development effects that this domination is having on diverged indigenous populations are immense and enduring. In this era of globalization, the loss of culture as a life management centre, the disruption of locally maintained ecological and spiritual systems are having devastating effects on the holistic approach to development in Cameroon and is at the origin of Sub-Saharan Africa institutional stagnation and inaptness. Other people may differ with our views and argue to the advantage in using global languages since they cut across all borders. The reality is that issues on culture from our own lens are not just problems on communication to be resolved, here, we are inferring rather to African human mysteries to be explored and riches to be discovered. Besides, different people have different frames and every community has a system of behaviour, customs, social structures and systems of knowledge on which their life concepts are bonded.

Therefore, development as it goes can only really make sense to a people if their cultural values are given due considerations that constitute part of their development process. It is for this reason that language systems and intercultural communication for sustainable development entail harmonizing foreign and national strategies to harness compounded programmes that reflect the local colours and match the aspirations of the masses. This can only be achieved through resorting to the language of the community because it is in the local language that these values are embedded and expressed through culture.

3.2. Inclusion Model for Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

In pursue of these objectives of inclusion of language and intercultural communication in mainstream development, it would be interesting to look at converging linguistics strategies emanating from an intrinsic desire to contribute to social and collective well-being with little financial engagement. This approach is a practical tool and method that can be used to speed up development in less developed countries in general and Cameroon in particular. By resorting to socio cultural linkages that cut across communities we are asserting and recognizing the power of endogenous knowledge as self-realization and fulfilment resulting from the effective use of local knowledge and practices that are proper to a given community. This recognition naturally leads to a twin-track development concept which is a combination of local concepts of well-being and scholastic principles of social change in the pursuance of the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Obviously, this will necessitate cross-cultural communication in embracing concepts that are outlandish and at the same time adapting local beliefs for the attainment of a holistic approach to the understanding of the concepts of development. The outcome of such a system is an interconnected framework or laid down principles of technological and services exchanges between the countries of the North and those of the South within a win-win context.

Involving institutions of higher learning, media professionals and applying endogenous development practices to this concept of global education will not only be stimulating for less developed countries, but will equally sharpen our thoughts about people, the world, and ourselves bearing in mind that where there is this kind of common energy dynamics and excitement, communities merge and development takes place.

This approach is not only resource centred, but equally community driven and has the advantage of focusing on assets capabilities with a logical consequence to rapidly stimulate growth. As an internal mechanism to establish linkage, the approach bridges cultural split through contextualized inbuilt communication channels that highlight cross-cultural values.

4.0 Conclusion

The way we see the world is related to our location, background, how we are socialized to seeing it and on our own personal intrinsic concepts. It is only through language and cross cultural communication that we can infuse diverged interests. Only mutual understanding can bring a world of diverged concepts of life to acting together, live together and work together. Only then can we strive for sustainable development. The goal of language and intercultural communication today within the African context, more than ever before, should aim at the recognition that language and culture influence each community in a number of important ways, and account for different perceptions on global issues. To achieve development objectives within the present context of globalization, these concepts must be merged in the process of change for the good of humanity.

Language and cross-cultural communication beyond this development mission should aim at bringing people and communities to recognize that where concept approaches intertwine with community sustainable development objectives, they serve egalitarian development missions with a more human and democratic appeal. This is what language and intercultural communication within the context of developing countries should strive to achieve while being conscious of adapting its goals to the rapidly changing conditions of globalization.

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