

The Role of Language, Culture and Communication in Development

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the idea that culture starts at personal level and becomes a national culture and the idea that a new culture can develop from the mixing of people from different backgrounds. It explores the idea that even two people who were born and brought up together can belong to different cultures due to their different stations in life. The paper shows that the siblings who have travelled elsewhere tend to develop a different and positive culture from those who never leave home. It is about the people at the grassroots who make majority of the Kenyan population, and who make this nation and can also break it in a few hours or days. The data was collected from face to face interviews and observing people from two groups of ten respondents each in Ruiru and Ting'ang'a in Kiambu County and some of their siblings who leave away from Kiambu. The study used a control group of four siblings (who live away from Kiambu and travel to other parts of Kenya and abroad) of four of the respondents. Both random and purposive sampling were used to get the respondents. The discussion concludes that culture, just like its medium, language, can be dynamic and that culture starts at personal level and then permeates to groups of people and the community. The paper also concludes that whatever development we achieve as Kenyans can be lost in a few days if we lack a culture of appreciating each other as Kenyans and communicating the same. That a negative culture can be detrimental to the development of a nation and actually cause its downfall.

Key words: communication, culture, development, language, inclusiveness.

Introduction

According to O'Neil (2009), the human communication process is more complex than it initially seems. Much, if not most, of our messages in face to face contact are transmitted through paralanguage. Communication is not just about speaking and writing there are paralanguage aspects of communication that are embodied in our day to day communication and in our culture. This is the auxiliary communication that is brought out in facial contact and make it hard to hide our emotions and that which cannot come out in telephone or written medium. **The Communication that begins at individual level is what leads to communication at group, community and national level. These levels mean; merry go round groups, political parties and government, both county and national are capable of** developing and communicating cultures that can prosper or impede national prosperity. People's verbal and non-verbal communication becomes a culture which is again communicated back to the individual and as such, the various levels; this, and the ripple effects becomes cyclic. Sharing a culture and a language does not necessarily mean that you must come from the same community. And culture can naturally arise from things that are different from coming from the same geographical locality. People can also share the same culture even if they speak different languages. For example, people living in Nairobi share the same culture of the city but speak different languages, hence, Nairobians. English is spoken all over the world by people who have come from different cultures. Culture and language are intertwined; and according to Sachs (2007), culture has a direct impact on development. The argument in this paper is that; countries, and indeed, Kenyans can

develop one positive language, one culture and communicate the same at all levels for the sake of development.

Literature review

Humanity, through different levels of society, develops a para-language that permeates into its culture and inadvertently affects its development. Language and culture are intertwined. The culture of a people is about their way of life- how people think, speak, their beliefs, customs, values, behavior; these are shared and communicated from generation to generation using language. People value certain things and do them in a certain way and so they use language in a way that reflects that; they use language to communicate their culture because it is what displays and communicates a people's heritage and history. Different cultures communicate a variety of things through the mode of dressing can communicate about one's status, intentions, its a Kenyan culture that when people of higher status arrive late for functions no one should complain but clap for them. This is the Kenyan language that communicates a love for peace. Culture of fencing your land- communicates that its yours and nobody should trespass. In most African societies, boys/men are allowed to come home late, Brazil, and among the French, women cannot go out alone and in Arab countries, women cannot go out in public places or drive (Axtell, 2007).

Uniforms and colours communicate and this may also depend on the culture; for example In Netherlands, there is the red district where prostitution is allowed. **In Kenya drivers these days look for green which is the colour for the National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA) and to them, it means trouble. People who come from the same background can develop different cultures. This means that** two people born together can belong to different cultures- which is partly influenced by different churches, work places and status among other factors. This is why we talk about, for example; the culture of police, doctors, school, and transport industry, even mad people have a culture- picking things, walking naked or dressing in rags. Culture communicates and its development may start early or later in life.

According to Williams (2007), racial, tribal and caste discrimination is one of the social and cultural factors that affect development. He argues that a country's overall productivity suffers if certain people are discriminated against. Daily auxiliary communication can become a culture of discrimination. Examples of lack of inclusiveness and serious discrimination includes the apartheid regime in South Africa, or the Asian communities driven out of Uganda under Idi Amin, which was disastrous for Uganda's economy. Sachs (2006) posits that cultural discrimination can make half of the population of a country fail to contribute to development. Ethnocentric reactions which become a culture impede development as this has far-reaching negative effects. For instance, Europe and Indonesia tried the idea of reserving jobs to natives in the 1930s and 1997 respectively but realized it doesn't work (Landes, 1999). This situation can be likened to what some county governments in Kenya are advocating and communicating the same; how sustainable is this?

In many countries, cultural history determines the development that happens or the lack of it, and sometimes even pseudo-development. Landes (1999) is of the view that culture is what makes the

difference in the history of economic development. The language people use can communicate a culture of certain information that brings forth several clusters in society, information about jobs, money, business as belonging to one cluster; a cluster of smarter, better organized and hardworking people while another cluster consists of lazy, arrogant and superstitious people. This means that the people in the second cluster will not strive to do things that are done by those in the cluster to which they do not belong, hence inequity in wealth distribution. It is better to have a culture of unity for so as to foster a sense of nationhood and development. This is in accordance to Sachs (2006) who argues that cultures that believe in the greater good and the rule of law are optimistic, hopeful, ambitious and ready to pull together while other than being paranoid and fragmented. Similarly, Landes (1999) argues that there is need to help the poor become wealthy so that they do not think of seeking to possess what they have not made. The opposite is a sure recipe for future chaos in any society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that the following factors can either slow down or hinder development altogether:

Speech community vis a vis development- from the study, it was observed that all the respondents believe that their economic development is tied to their speech community and outsiders cannot hinder it. There are outsiders in the location who do manual jobs but still the respondents think that their contribution to development does not matter. Speech communities may be primary or secondary. Primary speech community is composed of people who live in the same neighbourhood and speak the same language, for example, rural communities while a secondary speech community consists of people who come from different regions and have been brought together for different reasons, such as social, economic and education.

Different stations in life- we found that it is possible to acquire a new culture that is focused on development. This is due to our observation that even siblings who grew up together and spoke the same language since childhood become different in their later life. This is seen in, for instance; dressing, style of speaking/accent and even the types of food and way of cooking. Those who have never left the village do these things differently. However, both groups do not say that their cultures have become different because, according to them, people of the same speech community cannot have different cultures. We observed that the difference in culture is realized in their complaints about each other- that “so and so is not good these days”. This observation shows that if can change and acquire a new culture, so can the entire society acquire a culture of inclusiveness for the sake of development. This view is similar to that by Frie & Coburn (2011) that culture is not a monolithic entity but is something that is continually evolving and can be supported by different modes of thinking and acting

Travel and intercultural mingling- We found out that 4 in 5 respondents from the research location have not gone beyond Nairobi. They only hear stories about other parts of Kenya and the people from there. Non-travelled people have developed a culture of negativity for people from other parts of Kenya. This means that people who travel to different places of Kenya have

developed a culture of appreciating others and are not discriminative. The one person in 5 who has an authentic experience by mixing in the day to day activities and also doing what the locals do appreciate the dress, food and language of other people. That the visited people also appreciate the visitor because of your genuine interest in them.

Culture of suspicion- Culture has a direct impact on development. Development suffers when people communicate a culture of “ you don’t belong to my school of thought”- When people are suspicious of and refuse to deal with those who do not subscribe to their school of thought or speech community. This can be equated to what William (2007) refers to as locking out development due to misplaced nationalism, suspicion, or radical philosophy in some countries which close outside involvement – e.g. communism in North Korea, or extremist Islam in Taliban Afghanistan

Normal language and day to day activities- The study found out that language that is used in every day conversations and the day to day activities unintentionally become a culture. For example bribing a policeman instead of waiting for the right process, using the title ‘Miss’ and yet you are married or your father’s name. We observed that 1 in every 3 female respondents maintain their father’s surnames names either for economic gain or being unsure of the ‘modern man’. Four in five respondents did not realize that dishonest behavior at personal level is a form of corruption that can hinder development. The argument in this paper is that the dishonest behaviour is what becomes magnified at the higher level when one gets into a position of authority and becomes corruption, hence an impediment to development. The fact that culture can also be passed on from an early age can be used to develop communities. This means that a society can start developing a positive culture that fosters inclusive development at its citizenry at early age.

From our observation of the control group consisting of four siblings, we also found out that some culture is acquired much later in people’s lives. This implies that any society can help inculcate the desired culture in its people at whatever age. For example, the tribal culture that is so rampant in Kenya now is something that has developed later. This view is similar to that by Frie & Coburn (2011) that culture is not a monolithic entity but is something that is continually evolving and can be supported by different modes of thinking and acting

The culture of self-reliance – four out of five respondents felt that outsiders cannot bring them any development or economic gain and that with the current county system in Kenya, outsiders would not be welcome with the current county system in Kenya, and outsiders would not be welcome. Indeed, one of the informants was from a different part of Kenya, who had been denied a room to do business because, according to the rest of the respondents, people from her place were not good at business. This, according to this paper translates into a culture of feeling self-contained and overconfidence which is a pseudo self-reliance that can lead to slow development in the long run. In this regard, William (2007) cites an example of China, which closed its borders due to the culture of pride and self-sufficiency that made it stagnate for a very long time. Fleischaker (2004) also quotes Adam Smith (1776) who argues that ‘country which neglects or despises foreign commerce cannot transact the same quantity of business which it might do with different laws and institutions’.

CONCLUSION

Both the spoken and para-language become a culture that starts at individual level and permeates to the entire society. Since individuals can acquire a new culture, it is possible for an entire society to acquire and communicate a positive culture since culture is not necessarily tied to a speech community. A language of inclusiveness and communicating the same can naturally become a culture of a society whose prosperity it can guarantee. Negative culture, for example corruption and negative ethnicity starts with the individual and is mostly clothed in the para-language of daily actions which are otherwise thought harmless and then manifests itself at national level.

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