

Language Learning: Interrelationship between Language and Culture

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ABSTRACT

This paper, explores that for learning a language, interrelationship between language and culture must be needed. Language is more than culture and culture is more than language. The paper discusses especially the relationship between the language used for schooling and the content of the learning material and of school culture itself. Often textbooks for children in developing countries are written and published abroad in a foreign language and are adopted for use without any modification. Sometimes one may find learning material in local languages which is just direct translations of curriculum material made abroad, normally in excolonizing countries and with content from a foreign culture. The paper also discusses the model whereby the content of curriculum material is local but the language used is the excolonial language. There are e.g. also well-known authors who write from Africa and describing African culture but in the ex-colonial languages. The best model would be to have learning content and texts taken from the local culture written in the local language. This model is, however, seldom found.

Keywords: Language, Culture, Sound, Children, Education, Behaviour, Community.

1. Introduction

There is interrelationship between language and Culture. Some authors claim that language is culture. Though cultures partly exist through language, culture is more than language. Language is also more than culture. We who are working in another culture, particularly in an African culture, need to reflect on the interrelationship between language and culture. We may learn the language of the people we deal with. This will help us to grasp more of their culture, but it is not synonymous with knowing the culture. If we teach in any secondary school or institution of higher learning in Africa, we shall have to use a foreign language coming out of a different culture as a teaching tool.

2. Culture Expressing Itself In Sound

Folklorist Crates Williams defines language as "culture expressing itself in sound" (quoted in Ovando 1990:341). It gives individuals and groups their identity. There is a powerful connection between language and sociocultural identity. The language you learnt your first words in, the language your mother and father talked to you, the language which was used in your nearest surroundings and the language you use with your closest family and friends will always be a part of your identity as a person. When the language one uses in daily communication is denigrated, for instance not deemed fit as a language of instruction at higher levels of schooling, the child may feel that a part of her/him is also being denigrated. When you learn a new language, you also learn much about a new culture [1]. That can be an enriching experience provided that experience does not teach you to look down on your own mother tongue and thus at part of your own identity (Gaarder 1972, Brock-Utne 1994). The concepts which have been developed in a language tell us much about the culture in which a particular language is used. It is difficult to talk about the different types of snow in English. The Norwegian language has many more words for different types of snow. The language used by the Eskimos has even more words for snow than the Norwegian language has. In the areas in the north the various conditions of the snow are important. Some conditions are good for skiing, others not, some are good for building an igloo or snow-hut, others not. We need to differentiate between the different types of snow. But the Norwegian language, like English, has only one word for banana. In Kiswahili there are about twenty words for different types of bananas in some of the other Tanzanian languages like Kichagga there are even more word for different types of bananas. When a language dies, concepts belonging to that culture die with it.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) claims that during colonial times the African child learnt to associate his own language with low status, humiliation, corporal punishment, slow-footed intelligence or downright stupidity. Because any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded through prizes³, and through the prospects of climbing up the educational ladder, knowledge of English came to be associated with intelligence and prospects for success. In the *World Declaration on Education for All* education through the mother tongue is mentioned just once and in the following

sentence: "Literacy in the mother tongue strengthens cultural identity and heritage."(WDEFA 1990: Article 5) In this sentence it looks like the main reason why children should learn to read their mother tongue is to maintain culture.

Enabling children to use their mother tongue to obtain literacy does not only have to do with retaining cultural identity. It also has to do with facilitating the process of learning to read and write. Language is more than culture. And culture is also more than language. Many African educationists have for many years been concerned about the fact that using African languages in education makes children learn better. In 1980 Pai Obanya, who was then the Director of the UNESCO office in West-Africa, BREDA, in Senegal noted that, It has always been felt by African educationists that the African child's major learning problem is linguistic. Instruction is given in a language that is not normally used in his immediate environment, a language which neither the learner nor the teacher understands and uses well enough. (Obanya 1980: 88) Obanya is here not primarily using the cultural argument as an argument for retaining the African languages. He is using an educational argument. He is concerned with facilitating learning, with communication between teacher and pupils. If the African child's major learning problem is linguistic, and I tend to agree with Obanya that it is, then all the attention of African policy-makers and aid from Western donors should be devoted to a strengthening of the African languages as languages of instruction, In Tanzania the English language support project used more luring incentives like flying to the prizing centre and back home not only the successful students but also their teachers and the Head of the school. There was no such incentive for being an outstanding student of Kiswahili especially in basic education.

3. The Concept "Education For All"

The concept "education for all" becomes a completely empty concept if the linguistic environment of the basic learners is not taken into account. In 1982 the Ministers of Education in Africa met in Harare in Zimbabwe to discuss the use of African languages as languages of education. They stressed that: there is an urgent and pressing need for the use of African languages as languages of education. The urgency arises when one considers the total commitment of the states to development. Development in this respect consists of the development of national unity; cultural development: and economic and social development. Cultural development is basic to the other two....Language is a living instrument of culture, so that, from this point of view, language development is paramount [2]. But language is also an instrument of communication, in fact the only complete and the most important instrument as such. Language usage therefore is of paramount importance also for social and economic development (ED-82: Ill). As we see here the Ministers are not only concerned about retaining African languages in order to preserve culture but they are also using educational arguments.

4. Language and Culture

Language is more than culture. When the most important educational question is overlooked there is little doubt that the systematic but frequently ignored differences between the language and culture of the school and the language and culture of the learner's community have often resulted in educational programmes with only marginal success at teaching anything except self-depreciation (Okonkwo, 1983: 377). The Nigerian socio-linguist Okonkwo (1983) is concerned about the fact that both the language and the culture of the school are foreign to the African child. He is concerned with the simultaneous learning going on in such a class-room where the pupils do not understand what the teacher is trying to teach them. One always learns something in an educational situation but it may not be what the teacher had planned as intended learning outcomes. In a class-room where children do not understand what the teacher is saying they learn that they are stupid, that school learning is nothing for them, that they should stop dreaming of higher education but be satisfied with their place in life. The "education for all" strategy formulated at the important educational conference in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 was meant to target the poor 5 (Brock-Utne 2000, Brock-Utne 2005a, Brock-Utne 2005b). In an article on education for all: policy lessons from high-achieving countries Santosh Mehrotra (1998:479) draws our attention to what he sees as the most important characteristic of those developing countries that really target the poor and have the highest percentage of the population with a completed basic education: The experience of the high-achievers has been unequivocal: the mother tongue was used as the medium of instruction at the primary level in all cases Yet in the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar there was, according to Dutcher(2004) no mention of the language issue in the plenary sessions of the conference. There is also little consideration of the language issue in the resulting documents from the Forum. There is limited reference in official documents to the fact that millions of children are entering school without knowing the language of instruction. Many of these children are in Africa. The only type of formal schooling available to these children is in a language they neither speak nor understand.

Nadine Dutcher (2004:8) holds: It is shocking that the international dialogue on Education for All has not confronted the problems children face when they enter school not understanding the medium of instruction, when they are expected to learn a new language at the same time as they are learning in and through the new language. The basic problem is that children cannot understand what the teacher is saying! We believe that if international planners had faced these issues on a global scale, there would have been progress to report. However, instead of making changes that would lead to real advancement, the international community has simply repledged itself to the same goals, merely moving the target ahead

from the year 2000 to 2015. With the help of ex-partite consultants teacher guides are being worked out and teacher training courses given to have African teachers become more “learner centered”, to help them activate their students and engage them in critical thinking and dialogue. Teachers are asked to abandon a teacher style where students just copy notes from the blackboard, learn their notes by heart and repeat them at tests. Little thought has been given to the fact that this teaching style might be the only one possible when neither the teacher nor the students command the language of instruction. Africa is called Anglophone, francophone or lusophone according to the languages introduced by the colonial masters and still used as official languages. These languages are, however, not the languages spoken in Africa. They are 6 comfortably mastered only by 5 to 10% of the people. The great majority of Africans use African languages for daily communication. Africa is afro phone. From a socio-political aspect, the use of African national languages in the educational process represents, for those African states making the option, a sign of political sovereignty with regard to the old colonial power, as well as an assertion of their cultural identity, denied in the past by the colonialists through the harsh relegation of African languages to the inferior status of "vernaculars." Even though educational arguments may be even stronger for using the mother tongue as the language of instruction social cultural arguments are also strong.

Will the use of an indigenous language as a language of instruction in school be a guarantee for survival of threatened cultures? Foreign thoughts from foreign cultures in an artificially created environment can be conveyed through local languages. Local culture and curricular content can likewise be conveyed through foreign languages. In an article on the impact of formal education on the Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador Laura Rival (1993) argues against those who think that the cultural heritage of children will be preserved solely by providing literacy in the mother tongue. “No culture can be reduced to its linguistic expression”, she claims (Rival 1993:131). I have argued that languages should be preserved not only to retain culture. Language is more than culture. But likewise culture is not only language. Rival shows what the norms deeply enshrined in the institution of western schooling do to forest life when a school is introduced among a hunter and gatherer group like the Huaorani in the middle of the tropical forest. The institution of schooling itself separates children from their parents, reduces the time they have to learn from the older community members, learn what is necessary and valuable in the kind of society they live. It breaks up the day in a hitherto unknown way and forces a community into a more sedentary life than what they have normally led.

English language plays a key role in our educational system and national life. The British introduced English in our education system in order to produce cheap clerk for the colonial administration and to produce, what Lord Macaulay called; “a class of people, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect.” British came here as traders and their first attention was on trade. At first they did not concentrate their attention on teaching of English. English helped the growth of nationalism which ultimately freed India from foreign fetters.

English is rich in literature and culture [3]. It is a link language. It has greatly contributed to the advent of learning and language of global village. As we have already seen, India has a history of imperialism wherein the roots of English in the nation can be traced. Indian English has been constructed as a product of post colonialism has the status of an associate official language. In India linguistic, social, and political and pedagogical problems are there in learning English language. The way of teaching first language is different from the way of teaching second language. The way teaching of first language in teaching English, one cannot teach English. In pedagogical problem the teacher is not only responsible but those are also responsible who are engaged in language teaching at whatever level. Problems are-

- It is not in our culture and behavior
- Little knowledge of linguistic
- There lack of good English teachers
- Lack of knowledge of how language are acquired and learned
- No good methods are practiced
- Objective should be based on psychomotor domain
- The language teaching should be task based
- It should be communicative
- Teacher must have liberty of deciding language activities about material

- The grammar teaching should be moderate and language oriented

The different languages are spoken in the world. There are many varieties within the language. Edward Spair quotes: “language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.” Language has some characteristics-

- Language is culture based
- Language is social behave
- Language is medium of instruction
- Language is made up habit

5. Marginalization

Marginalization is the subject of much debate. There is a voluminous literature on how to measure it and how to differentiate the concept from broader ideas about inequality, poverty and social exclusion. Many important issues have been raised. However, debate over definitions can sometimes obscure the political and ethical imperative to combat marginalization. Writing on the idea of justice, Amartya Sen argues that there are limits to the value of perfecting definitions. ‘What moves us,’ he writes, ‘is not the realization that the world falls short of being completely just but that there are clearly remediable injustices around us which we want to eliminate’ (Sen, 2009, p. vii). The starting point in this Report is that marginalization in education is a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities. It represents a stark example of ‘clearly remediable injustice’. Removing that injustice should be at the centre of the national and international Education for All agendas. While marginalization typically starts long before children enter school and continues into adult life, schools are in a pivotal position. They can play a vital role in counteracting early childhood disadvantage and help break the transmission of illiteracy across generations. But schools can also reinforce disadvantage and perpetuate marginalization. The experience of marginalization in education today is seldom a consequence of formal discrimination. Legal restrictions on opportunity, such as those that characterized apartheid South Africa, are rare. Yet informal discrimination is widespread. It is embedded in social, economic and political processes that restrict life chances for some groups and individuals.

Marginalization is not random. It is the product of institutionalized disadvantage and of policies and processes that perpetuate such disadvantage. Millions of children are denied their human right to education for the simple reason that their parents cannot afford to keep them in school. Social and cultural barriers to education form another formidable obstacle. In many countries, the education of girls is widely perceived as being of less value than that of boys, with traditional practices such as early marriage adding another layer of disadvantage. Members of ethnic minorities often face deeply entrenched obstacles to equal opportunity. Denied an opportunity to learn in their own language and faced with social stigmatization, they are set on an early pathway to disadvantage. Millions of children with disabilities across the world also face far more restricted opportunities than their peers, as do children living in regions affected by conflict. None of these disadvantages operates in isolation [4]. Poverty, gender, ethnicity and other characteristics interact to create overlapping and self-reinforcing layers of disadvantage that limit opportunity and hamper social mobility.

The interaction between marginalization in education and wider patterns of marginalization operates in both directions. Being educated is a vital human capability that enables people to make choices in areas that matter. The lack of an education restricts choices. It limits the scope people have for influencing decisions that affect their lives. People lacking literacy and numeracy skills face a heightened risk of poverty, insecure employment and ill health. Poverty and ill health, in turn, contribute to marginalization in education. So does the fact that the marginalized have only a weak voice in shaping political decisions affecting their lives. Reaching marginalized children requires political commitment backed by practical policies. When governments met in 1990 at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, they recognized the need to overcome extreme inequalities holding back progress in education. They declared that ‘consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities’ and called for active commitment to reach ‘underserved groups’, including the poor, remote rural populations, ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities, refugees and migrants, and those affected by conflict (UNESCO, 1990, Article 3). The Dakar Framework for Action reaffirmed the commitment to ‘explicitly identify, target and respond flexibly to the needs and circumstances of the poorest and the most marginalized’ (UNESCO, 2000, IV, Para. 52). While some countries have made impressive efforts to back up such words by extending educational opportunities to their most marginalized populations, action has generally fallen far short of the commitments made at Jomtien and Dakar.

Marginalization has remained a peripheral concern. The assumption has been that national progress in education would eventually trickle down to the most disadvantaged. After a decade of steady but uneven national progress, it is time to abandon that assumption. In many countries, large swathes of society are being left behind as a result of inherited disadvantages. Breaking down these disadvantages will require a far stronger focus on the hard to reach. Tackling marginalization is a matter of urgency on several counts. The targets for 2015 adopted in the Dakar Framework for Action – including universal primary education – will not be achieved unless governments step up their efforts to reach the marginalized. Sustaining progress in basic education and creating the foundations for advances in secondary education will require a renewed drive to extend opportunity to individuals and groups facing the most deeply entrenched disadvantages. Extreme and persistent deprivation in education carries a high price for societies as well as for individuals. In the increasingly knowledge-based and competitive global economy, depriving people of opportunities for education is a prescription for wastage of skills, talent and opportunities for innovation and economic growth. It is also a recipe for social division [5]. Marginalization in education is an important factor in the widening of social and economic inequalities. Working towards more inclusive education is a condition for the development of more inclusive societies. In all countries, whatever their level of development, some individuals and groups experience extreme and persistent disadvantage in education that sets them apart from the rest of society. They are less likely to enter school, to start school at the correct age or to complete a full cycle of education, and they are more likely to leave school with lower levels of achievement. As well as being a sign of social deprivation in its own right, disadvantage in education is a cause and an effect of marginalization in other areas and a powerful transmitter of deprivation across generations.

Defining who is marginalized is problematic because there is seldom an agreed definition of the term within any one country, let alone across countries. Establishing what marginalization entails in education presents another set of problems. Most people would accept that it encompasses quantitative deprivation, as measured by years in school or the level of education attained. But it also incorporates a qualitative dimension. The marginalized typically demonstrate lower levels of educational achievement. The Convention on the Rights of the Child calls on governments to provide an education that leads to the ‘development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential’ (United Nations, 1989, Article 29). For many children, though, the experience undermines learning potential, disembowels and stigmatizes them (Klasen, 2001). This section identifies some of the characteristics that predispose individuals and groups to extreme and persistent disadvantage in education. While all countries endorse the principles of equal opportunity and universal rights, the evidence shows that, when it comes to opportunities for education, some people are more equal than others – the marginalized being the least equal of all. Inequalities linked to parental income, gender, ethnicity, race and other factors continue to restrict life chances and fuel marginalization. Understanding marginalization is one of the conditions for overcoming it. Too often, governments express commitment to equal opportunity in education but fail to monitor what is happening to the individuals and groups being left behind [6].

Using a quantitative analysis of marginalization in low-income developing countries identify individuals and groups facing heightened risk of marginalization, with respect both to absolute deprivation, defined in terms of years in school, and to disadvantage relative to the rest of society. The description also at individual and group based disadvantage with respect to learning achievement [7]. While the dimensions and characteristics of marginalization differ between developed and developing countries, rich countries are also characterized by extreme and persistent patterns of deprivation. Measuring marginalization in education is not straightforward. Household surveys and other data provide insights into the relationship between poverty, ethnicity, health, parental literacy and other characteristics on the one side and education on the other. But while these are all characteristics associated with marginalization, they do not operate in isolation. The marginalized in education are often poor and female, and from an ethnic minority living in a remote rural area. Understanding how different layers of disadvantage interact is a first step towards breaking the cycles of disadvantage that push people into marginalization. Invisibility adds to measurement problems. Concentrated in slums or remote rural regions, the marginalized are often hidden from view and government agencies sometimes have limited access to detailed data for monitoring their condition. All too often the same agencies demonstrate a marked indifference to the social circumstances of the marginalized, reflecting the indifference of political elites. Marginalized individuals and groups do not just accumulate fewer years of education. When they are in school they often receive a poor-quality education, leading in turn to low levels of learning achievement. Many of the world’s poorest countries have been more successful in expanding access than raising quality.

6. Conclusion

Average learning achievement is often shockingly low even for children who complete a full primary education cycle. The achievement deficit is widely spread across the population, but is typically concentrated among individuals and groups facing wider disadvantages in access to education. Factors such as household wealth, parental education and home language exercise a pervasive influence on learning achievement. That influence has been extensively documented in

developed countries but less widely explored in the world's poorest countries. The results are striking. Poverty is a barrier that perpetuates disadvantages in education, partly by pushing children into work.

The creation of a bond between language and culture at the same time implies a responsibility. All know how the young imitate, consciously and unconsciously.

7. Reference

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