

## **Teaching Languages and Its Affects on Sustainable Development: A New Idea; Language for Specific Purposes (LSP)**

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## Abstract

*Language has a paramount role in the quest for development on human, social, political, technological and any other form of development. A paramount role because knowledge, which is the life wire of any development effort, is acquired through information. Information comes through communication powered by language. So, teaching language has a great importance on future sustainable development. Speaking and understanding the same language is vital for transferring the information which is necessary for building a sustainable development in the world. But not only teaching the foreign language but also teaching the foreign language for specific purposes has just come out as an idea in every field of development. The paper begins by defining the methods of effective language teaching methods and goes on defining the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and goes further to critically analyze the affects of language teaching on sustainable development. All ideas are supported by appropriate examples.*

**Key Words:** Foreign Language, Foreign Language Teaching, Language for Specific Purposes, Sustainable Development.

## Introduction

Language is one of the most important areas of human development. Human communication skills constitute the major characteristic that distinguishes him from other living things. More importantly, these skills are also what bring human beings together. Human development can only be sustained when people, individually and collectively, are exposed to new and greater opportunities that result in human potential realization. However, new opportunities arise only when human beings communicate with each other. For any meaningful and sustainable development, therefore, access to information is paramount. Meanwhile the main channel of information flow is communication thereby making communication a preeminent factor in developmental efforts. If effective communication is the taproot of development, then language related issues could not be toyed with since language enjoys the *sine qua non*<sup>5</sup> position in communication (Tuesday, 2011). Furthermore, language proficiency is considered to be a human capital and one can not ignore the fact that human capital development is a current need among all world citizens today. It is on the foregoing that we think any serious discourse on sustainable human development in the world should take into account the linguistic paradigm. In this paper, we will be discussing a dimension of Lingua Franca<sup>6</sup> learning known as language for Specific Purposes (henceforth LSP). Our focus will be on English which have acquired the status of official language in the world.

This paper begins by defining the concept of LSP, goes further to discuss the relation between sustainable development and LSP and also looks at the benefits of the latter to sustainable human development in the world. The paper ends with recommendations on the issue.

### *Sustainable Development*

The concept of sustainable development has come to dominate the debate regarding economic development (Edwards-Jones et al., 2000). It has its origins in the Commission on Environment and Development which was formed by the UN in 1983 to investigate

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<sup>5</sup> *Sine qua non* or *condicio sine qua non* refers to an indispensable and essential action, condition, or ingredient.

<sup>6</sup> A lingua franca is a language systematically used to make communication possible between people not sharing a mother tongue, in particular when it is a third language, distinct from both mother tongues.

environmental issues regarding economic development. In 1987, the Commission published *Our Common Future* (also known as the Brundtland Report). This report is now acknowledged as a landmark publication in the development of environmental awareness and particularly the need for environmental concerns to be integrated into all aspects of successful development. The report defines sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. The Earth Summit in 1992 reinforced the concept of sustainable development which has since become widely embraced and integrated into policies and procedures. There is a growing, global consensus that attempts to acknowledge the interests of future generations and other species. Central to sustainable development is how we use the Earth's natural resources and the processes by which they are transformed. This can be described in terms of capital.

Sustainable development is a new issue which has been being studied since 1990s. Because since late 80s technology is governing the world but on the other hand, sometimes technology damages the environment. So clean technology term has been gaining importance throughout the years. There are a lot of different definitions for sustainable development.

According to Hopwood (Hopwood, 2005), sustainable development, although a widely used phrase and idea, has many different meanings and therefore provokes many different responses. In broad terms, the concept of sustainable development is an attempt to combine growing concerns about a range of environmental issues with socio-economic issues.

O'Brein define the term like; the widespread rise of interest in, and support for, the concept of sustainable development is potentially an important shift in understanding relationships of humanity with nature and between people. (O'Brein, 2005).

Additionally, Jeffrey D. Sachs and Walter V. Reid wrote a definition on sustainable development on Policy Forum magazine in 2009 and they say; sustainable development means that economic growth that is environmentally sound. (Sachs and Reid, 2009).

### *Why does Sustainable Development encompass?*

It is necessary to understand what sustainable development encompasses to form a relation between sustainable development and other issues.

Sustainable development encompasses a vast array of projects. The thing they all have in common is that they are designed to help the local and global community for the long term but still meet the needs of our present generation.

When planning a sustainable development project, in order to bring things back on track environmentally, we need to rely more on renewable energy sources like wind power and solar power. They are considered renewable because they are unlimited and don't pollute, unlike fossil fuels, wood, etc. However, sustainable development isn't just about the environment. It also provides steps for action that will create a better future for those of us who live on this planet aside from environmental issues. When you take a look at the bigger picture, sustainable development objectives include three interdependent components:

- Social issues
- Economic issues
- Environmental issues

At first you may wonder how these three categories are linked when it comes to sustainable living, but think about it. Let's take one issue - waste management. This includes both solid waste and sewage but for now we'll narrow it to solid waste. The Environmental

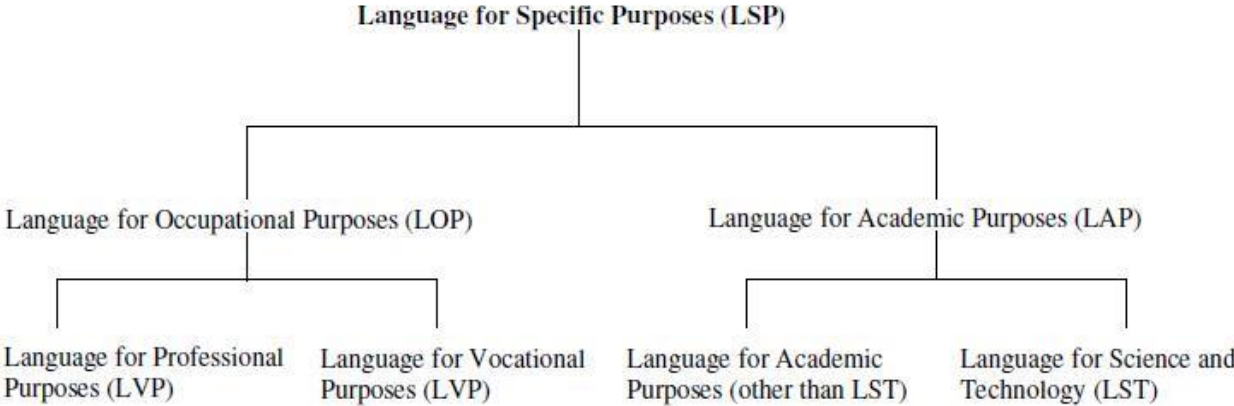
Protection Agency (EPA) states that the average American creates approximately 4.4 pounds of household garbage everyday. That translates to about 1,600 pounds per person, per year, and doesn't even take into account any waste you may generate at work. The question is, "What happens to that garbage?"

In most cases, it is picked up at your home and hauled away by a local waste management company. In some cases the garbage is sorted to see what can be recycled, but eventually, most of the waste ends up in a landfill or what is commonly referred to as a garbage dump. The problem is that our reliance on landfills for waste disposal does not look to the future. What will we do socially when we run out of room in the landfills? How will we afford to deal with it? It doesn't offer a solution socially, economically or environmentally. It is not a sustainable solution.

*Definition of LSP Concept*

The concept began and was limited to English language for several years before experts and theorists in other languages began to look at that direction. In fact, ESP dominates the available literature on LSP. The reason for this scenario might not be unconnected to the hegemonic status of English as the most widely distributed language of the world.

The term LSP is actually an umbrella term that applies to several different categories of language learning and teaching, which differ according to the learner's needs. The categorization of ESP provided by Robinson (1991) is adopted here to serve as a model for the categorization of LSP:



The above schema encompasses two types of instruction: Language for Occupational Purposes (LOP) and Language for Academic Purposes (LAP). While teaching Language for Occupational Purposes is targeted at individuals, such as pilots, hotel personnel, immigration officers, etc., who need particular languages to perform on the job, Language for Academic Purposes, on the other hand, is taught to students with the germane objective of equipping them with the common study skills, such as academic writing, listening to lectures, note-taking, making oral presentations in specific languages, in order that they may succeed in academic settings where languages different from their mother tongue or official languages are used for academic instructions. Specifically, LOP branches off into Language for Professional Purposes (LPP) and Language for Vocational Purposes (LVP). LAP, on its own part, is subdivided into Language for Science and Technology (LST) and LAP other than LST. This model, which can be applied to any language, clearly underscores the need for language teaching, which is aimed at satisfying specific needs of the learner (Tuesday, 2011).

Writing specifically about ESP, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identify two key historical periods that gave birth to the teaching of LSP. According to them, the end of the Second World War heralded an era of unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activities on an international scale and as a result of the economic power of the United States; English became an invincible international language of science and economy. The second key period, as suggested by Hutchinson and Waters, has to do with the linguistic revolution in the late 1960s and the early 1970s.

During this period, a lot of researches were conducted on the ways in which language is used in real communication settings. With various and significant discoveries in the variables of English usage, the need to teach the specific 'Englishes' along side the traditional general English arose. If language in different situations varies, then structuring language instruction to meet the needs of learners in specific contexts is plausibly desirable. Consequently, English for Science and Technology (EST), the oldest form of LSP, came to life in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Looking at it from the foregoing, one could clearly see why English has to dominate the other languages in the learning of LSP right from inception till date. Having illuminated the circumstances that gave birth to this paradigm of language teaching and learning there is need to discuss the basic characteristics that make it different from the teaching and learning of Language for General Purposes (Henceforth LGP).

In attempts to distinguish between LSP and LGP, Experts in the field of ESP which include Strevens (1988), Anthony (1997) and Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) have commonly identified four absolute and seven variable characteristics of ESP which we shall adopt here as the basic characteristics of LSP:

#### *I. Absolute characteristics of LSP*

1. Designed to meet specified needs of the learner.
2. Relates in content (i.e. in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities.
3. Centers on the language (grammar, lexis, and register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.
4. Makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves; (Strevens, 1988)

#### *II. Variable Characteristics*

1. Restricted as to the language skills to be learned (e.g. reading only).
2. Not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology.
3. May be related to or designed for specific disciplines.
4. May use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general language.
5. Likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level.
6. Generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.
7. Most courses assume some basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners. (Dudley-Evans & St. John 1998)

Drawing from the source, which is ESP, several languages of the world are now having their own version of LSP. Thus, we now have French for Specific Purposes (FSP), German for specific Purposes (GSP), Arabic for Specific Purposes (ASP), Spanish for Specific Purposes (SSP), and Portuguese for Specific Purposes (PSP) etc. Since our study is aimed at sustainable human development in the world through a systematic approach to the teaching and learning of the languages of research and instructions, our focus will henceforth be on the foreign languages that affect the status in the world.

### *LSP and Sustainable Development*

When we consider about our world it presents us huge variety of nature. Especially the continents like Africa, America there are a lot of natural beauty we can say. The sun shines everyday which is the biggest energy source for the world. While the world is very rich and full of natural resources, people resume the nature very rapidly. We think that that's biggest reason is human capital. And even where the human capital is discussed, as noted by Prah (1993) and Bodomo (1996b), the linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions are often marginalized. If human capital development is critical to sustainable development in the world, it goes without saying that language issues must be taken into considerations (Tuesday, 2011). The recognition of the potency of language as a human capital per excellence has led to the development of an interdisciplinary field known as Language Economics bringing together in a common platform economists and linguists (Schultz, 1962). Chiswick (2008:2) defines it as "*the study of the determinants and consequences of language proficiency using the methodology and tools of economics.*" Since the advent of this emerging field of study, many theoretical and empirical works have been carried out to authenticate the noble place of language skills and proficiency in the microeconomic status of individuals (Marschak, 1965; Carliner, 1981; McManus; Trainer, 1988; Grin, 1996, 2003 Bruthiaux, 2003, Chiswick, 2008). Language proficiency is a human capital because it is characterized by the three indicators of human capital: it is productive, costly to produce, and embodied in the person (Tuesday). Having established the status of language proficiency as a human capital, suffice is to say that the learning of relevant foreign languages by the people who are living in different countries will not only boost the quality of their human capital but will equally help in the sustainable human development that is dearly needed in the continent in this 21st century.

As we understand that human being is the centre of any development. So, sustainable development is all about human and human communication. Because conveying information to human, to nations to the world citizens is a major subject. To communicate one another, to get information about any subject a common language is essential.

For sustainable development people should be informed about how they can use natural resources, how they can produce something by using nature, how they can avoid unconscious consuming the natural resources, etc... At the same time there should be only one research and science language for common communication. For mutual understanding, which is an important ingredient of sustainable human development, a country is supposed to have a language that is acceptable to every section constituting it (Tuesday, 2011).

This is where the foreign languages imposed by colonialism come in. These languages – English, French and Spanish – are today the major official languages spoken in the world. These are the languages that have abundance of literature which contain information relevant to development and capacity building. These are the languages serving as working languages for world's international organizations. English and French rank high in the ladder of the internationally most relevant languages of the world.

Beside this, these languages should be taught at school and should be in the education programs in the countries that English or French is not a mother tongue.

Frantz (1996) enumerates 17 benefits the knowledge of a foreign language can bring to a person. We have modified the seventeen benefits here by condensing it to 15 having knocked out 2 which we consider repetitive. The acquisition of a foreign language, according to him,

- (1) broadens one's experiences and expands someone's view of the world.
- (2) encourages critical reflection on the relation of language and culture, language and thought.
- (3) fosters an understanding of the interrelation of language and human nature.
- (4) develops one's intellect and teaches him how to learn.
- (5) teaches and encourages respect for other peoples.
- (6) contributes to cultural awareness and literacy, such as knowledge of original texts.
- (7) builds practical skills (for travel or commerce or as a tool for other disciplines).
- (8) improves the knowledge of one's own language through comparison and contrast with the foreign language.
- (9) exposes someone to modes of thought outside of one's native language.
- (10) fosters a sense of relevant past, both cultural and linguistic.
- (11) balances content and skill (rather than content versus skill).
- (12) expands opportunities for meaningful leisure activity (travel, reading, viewing foreign language films).
- (13) contributes to achievement of national goals, such as economic development or national security.
- (14) contributes to the creation of someone's personality.
- (15) enables the transfer of training (such as learning a second foreign language).

Taking a critical look at the benefits listed above, one could suggest that somebody with the knowledge of an additional international foreign language is better positioned to succeed at work and in life than another person who is just internationally monolingual. An internationally bilingual person appears to have more access to information than someone who is competent only in one international language. Learning a foreign language, like travel, is a veritable avenue to broaden one's horizons. It lubricates opportunities not only in one's vocation or profession but also in one's intellectual potential and ability to share and work with others. With the gale of globalization becoming the order of the day, people are increasingly realizing the need to be in touch with realities expressed in the languages and cultures of other people in the world. There is, today, an increased awareness of global interdependence and multilateral needs and most people cannot afford to be disintegrated from these global human realities.

Apart from the above-mentioned dividends accruable to the learner of a foreign language, many investigations in bilingual education and cognitive psychology also suggest that foreign language study stimulates the cognitive development of the brain (Peal and Lambert, 1962; Diaz, 1983; Commins, 1984; McLaughlin, 1984; Weatherford (1986). Peal and Lambert (1962:20), for instance, found out that a person with experiences in two cultures has an advantage over another person with a monolingual experience. According to them:

Intellectually his experience with two language systems seems to have left him with a mental flexibility, superiority in concept formation, a more diversified set of mental abilities... In contrast, the monolingual appears to have a more unitary structure of intelligence which he must use for all types of intellectual tasks.

This singular discovery has led some researchers to speculate that bilinguals may have acquired some language abilities inherent in their bilingualism that enables them to possess higher mental flexibility. Coupled with the fact that people who understand more than one language and culture can communicate and relate more conveniently with people of other nationalities and cultures, it is presumably possible that through the learning of another language and culture, people become more effective solution-providers especially in the area of pressing social problems. This is made possible because learners of other international languages will automatically be exposed to a wider variety of solution-providing mechanisms.

## **Conclusion**

It is our belief that the major challenge facing the world in this 21st century is that of human development. Countries that are regarded as developed today were able to attain that status because they have qualitative human capacity base. In our candid opinion, foreign language learning for specific purposes is an area that needs to be explored in all countries' educational programs.

As far as we understand, English, French and Spanish are the most common languages in the world. So for any researches, any type of communication or any kind of development including sustainable development, learning these languages is so important.

## **Resources**

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