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EVOLUTION OF DEVELOPMENT SPEAK FROM THE 1940S UNTIL TODAY

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ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ ЯЗЫКА РАЗВИТИЯ С 1940-Х ГОДОВ ДО СЕГОДНЯШНЕГО ДНЯ

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Abstract. The paper briefs on the emergence of the UN and the Bretton-Woods institutions necessitated by the post-war reconstruction of countries and development assistance. The planning, discussion, and implementation of development interventions were carried out exclusively in the English language. Since the origination of the Northern development discourse some 70 years ago, a specialized variant of English, the so-called Development speak, has become widespread in the literature and the practice. Currently, it is used to implement most development programs. The article notes characteristics of Development speak, e. g. it is overloaded with terms and jargonized. The paper also gives examples of Development speak terms and expressions and discusses challenges related to their perception and understanding by countries-recipients of development assistance.

Аннотация. В статье кратко изложена предыстория появления ООН и Бреттон-Вудских учреждений, обусловленного необходимостью восстановления стран и содействия их развитию в послевоенный период. Планирование, обсуждение и внедрение деятельности в сфере развития осуществлялось исключительно на английском языке. С тех пор как около 70 лет назад появился северный дискурс о развитии, в литературе, а также и в практической деятельности распространился специализированный вариант английского языка, так называемый язык развития. В настоящее время с его помощью реализуется большинство программ в сфере развития. В статье отмечаются особенности языка развития, например, перегруженность терминами и жаргонизмами. Также приводятся примеры терминов и выражений языка развития и рассматриваются трудности, связанные с их восприятием и пониманием, с которыми сталкиваются представители стран-получателей содействия в целях развития.

Keywords: international organizations, United Nations Organization, development, development discourse, Development speak, jargon.

Ключевые слова: международные организации, Организация Объединенных Наций, развитие, дискурс о развитии, язык развития, жаргон.



In the 20th century, after World War II, some countries of the world began to help others; they have been doing it up until now. To this end, specialized international organizations were established. Starting the 1950s, the world has made extensive use of Developmentspeak, a special lexicon of international organizations. The scope of its application varies from the global level to international assistance programs in selected countries and regions. Below are the main stages of the evolution of Developmentspeak in chronological order and examples of its key lexicon.

The emergence of Developmentspeak. As noted by M. Williams, a development anthropologist, professor of English, Jiangnan University, China, in the mid-1940s, planning, discussion, and introduction of the post-war network of development organizations were carried out in English and using English philosophy. Main organizations in the area of reconstruction and development established in that period communicated their programs and goals almost exclusively in English and continue to do so now. For example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (IBRD), also known as Bretton Woods institutions (established as a result of the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, or the Bretton Woods Conference, held in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA, in July 1944). M. Williams also notes that to take advantage of the Bretton Woods institutions, a recipient country had to comply with several additional conditions, including communication in English [1].

In the 1940–50s, when the northern development discourse appeared, as well as the first international development assistance programs, a specialized version of the English language with its specific lexicon pervaded the literature [1], as well as development activities. This language was termed as “Developmentspeak, a peculiar dialect of English” [2]. It was used to develop concepts, programs, and plans to implement development projects. As shown below, the first signs of this language could be found in the founding documents of the United Nations (UN) and the Bretton Woods institutions.

It is well-known that the UN was founded in October 1945 in the United States. The UN Charter came into force on 24 October 1945; it is a unique, first-of-its-kind document stating the universal consensus of states aimed at peace and development with its distinctive lexical and grammatical features.

The Articles of Agreement of the Bretton Woods institutions were developed in 1944; this document became the basis for the Articles of Agreement of the IBRD, being its Charter at the same time, and the Articles of Agreement of the IMF; both documents entered into force in 1945 r. Of note, one of the purposes of the Bank stated in Article I (i) is “encouragement of the development of productive facilities and resources in less developed countries” [3].

After World War II, U.S. President Harry S. Truman indicated in his statement that “the American system (should) become a world system” [1]. Based on that, U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall addressed the 1947 class of Harvard University stating that the U.S. should assist in the reconstruction of war-devastated Europe because otherwise there would be no peace and political stability. Even 70 years later this highlights the rationale for the present-day northern development discourse. With the gratitude America and Britain felt for Europe’s fight against Nazi Germany, back then it was not difficult for the U.S. Congress to approve the Marshall Plan as well as other Bretton Woods interventions [1].

W. Sachs, a research director, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Germany, proposes to call the age of development the particular historical period which began on 20 January 1949 when Harry S. Truman in his inauguration speech for the first time declared the whole Southern hemisphere as underdeveloped areas [4]. G. Esteva, a writer and post-development theorist, Mexico, also notes that that very day, the day on which President Truman took office, a

new era was opened for the world — the era of development. So, underdevelopment began on 20 January 1949, and 2 billion people immediately became underdeveloped on that day [5].

G. Esteva notes, however, that Truman was not the first to use this word. Seemingly, W. Benson, a former member of the Secretariat of the International Labour Organization, was the person who coined it when he referred to the underdeveloped areas while writing on the economic basis for peace in 1942. However, neither the public nor the experts used this expression since then. During the decade, the term appeared occasionally in technical publications and United Nations documents. However, it became relevant only when Truman presented it as the symbol of his policy [5].

G. Esteva states that never before had a word been universally accepted on the very day of its invention. Since then, development had at least one meaning — to escape from the humiliating condition called underdevelopment [5].

As indicated by M. Williams, the northern development discourse relies on the concept that less developed countries (LDCs) are backward and need development assistance to catch up [1]. Also, W. Sachs states that from the very beginning, development's hidden agenda was nothing else than the Westernization of the world [4]. As noted by G. Esteva, back then the United States was at the center of the world and that fact was recognized by all the institutions created in those years: "even the United Nations Charter echoed the United States Constitution" [5]. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, under the northern development paradigm, democracy was contrasted to communism of the Soviet bloc. The less developed countries that chose the economic and political freedom of northern democracy would go for assistance from Bretton Woods institutions. These recipient countries received import substitution industrialization policies in the 1950s and 1960s, the export-led growth model of the 1970s, and, then, the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s [1].

From the 1950s to the 1980s, the concept of economic, social, and people-centered development became the focus of development agencies. However, initially, the word development focused only on the economic dimension. G. Esteva states that as a concept development suffered "the most dramatic and grotesque metamorphosis of its history in Truman's hands" and initially was diminished even more by those who reduced it only to economic growth. For them, development simply meant growth in the income per person in economically underdeveloped areas. That was the "goal insinuated by the United Nations Charter in 1947" [5].

In 1952, the first "Report on the World Social Situation" was published [5] and since then these reports were prepared periodically by the UN. These publications introduced the expression of social development, although without definition, as a vague counterpart to economic development. The idea of a "balance" between the two facets, the "social" and the "economic", was examined systematically. In 1962, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) recommended the integration of both aspects of development [5]. The period 1960-1970 was declared the First UN Development Decade.

Another ECOSOC resolution in 1966 recognized the interdependence of economic and social aspects and the need for harmonized economic and social planning. However, throughout the First UN Development Decade, development continued to be perceived as economic growth passing through several stages, and integration was the word linking the social and economic aspects [5].

While the First Decade considered the social and economic factors of development separately, the Second UN Development Decade (1971-1980) focused on merging the two. There was a need to shape a new paradigm of integration based on the interaction of physical resources, technical processes, economic aspects, and social change. The International Development Strategy proclaimed on 24 October 1970 called for the global, joint, and concentrated action in all areas of

economic and social life. Also, an almost simultaneous UN resolution aimed to identify a unified approach to development and planning to fully integrate the economic and social components when developing policies and programs. This unified approach to development analysis and planning had to look simultaneously for cross-sectoral and regional integration and participative development [5].

In 1974, the Declaration of Cocoyoc stressed that the purpose of development was to develop people rather than things and also emphasized the need for diversity, various paths to development, and self-reliance. In 1975, some of these ideas were elaborated in the proposals of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, which suggested another development and human-centered development [5].

As insisted by UNESCO, a man should have greater influence in the development process and this should be integrated development that includes “all aspects of the life of a collectivity”. In 1975, the Seventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly called for an approach that would be more effective than that of the International Development Strategy to achieve social objectives of development. The solution was offered in June 1976 by the Conference on Employment, Income Distribution and Social Progress, organized by the ILO: the basic needs approach aimed to achieve “a certain specific minimum standard of living before the end of the century” [5].

As noted by G. Esteva, some documents supporting this approach recognized that development would not eradicate poverty, quite the opposite, it would foster absolute poverty of a fifth, or two-fifths, of the population. The basic needs approach suggested dealing directly with the task of coping with those needs, instead of an expectation that those needs would be met as a result of development. For two or three years, the proposal was in fashion. The approach was promoted by the World Bank and many governments and experts because it offered universal applicability while being country-specific [5].

In contrast, the experts of UNESCO promoted the concept of endogenous development. It seemed “clearly heretical” because it rejected the need for or possibility of mechanical imitation of industrial societies. Instead, this concept proposed giving due consideration of the particularities of each nation [5]. The Third UN Development Decade was declared for the period 1981-1990. However, this period was called “the lost decade for development” because of prevailing pessimism as a result of the adjustment process, which for many countries meant abandoning most of the previous achievements “in the name of development” [5].

The Fourth UN Development Decade covered the period of 1991-2010, which, by contrast, gave birth to the new development concept, redevelopment – “that is, to develop again what was maldeveloped or is now obsolete”. Conceptually and politically, redevelopment was taking the shape of sustainable development for “our common future”, as stated by the Brundtland Commission, and was actively promoted as green and democratic. That decade also attempted to revive development. In 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published its first Human Development Report (HDR). As a result, human development represented a level of achievement and the internationally compared extent to which relevant human choices are attained in certain societies. The HDR also included analysis of social conditions in selected countries in 1960-1988 and presented viable social targets to be achieved by the year 2000 after collecting the data for many variables and a series of projections. The Report aimed to come up with a Human Development Index to demonstrate human development levels in 130 countries [5].

In 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted eight international Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were implemented under the leadership of the UN in 2000-2015.

MDGs were replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), officially known as “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The SDGs were adopted on 25 September 2015 for the period from 2015 to 2030. Publications on these goals are “classic” examples of Development speak.

Development speak today and tomorrow. As noted above, so far, most of the important northern development literature was published in the English language with a specialized vocabulary [1]. As for users of this language, Development speak emerged as a new social segment in the 1980s and was represented by development experts, international consultants, etc. They speak a jargonized, international variant of English, spend much time in planes or behind their computers, live in hotels, and share the same lifestyle [1].

Development discourse caught attention in the 1990s as part of development communication research. It refers to the process of communicating knowledge and power through which particular concepts, theories, and practices aimed at social change are formulated and disseminated. Analysis of development discourse explores the strategic communicative intervention of development agencies for social change in terms of constructed problems and solutions [1].

We believe that characteristics of Development speak were best explained by D. Eade in the famous collection of articles on the development language “Deconstructing Development Discourse: Buzzwords and Fuzzwords” edited by A. Cornwall and D. Eade: it became the lingua franca of the development industry and it is used by all the major institutions of global governance. The World Bank is a leading agency designing the lexicon: discarding outdated jargon, introducing new terms, and must-use buzzwords and catchphrases. To become qualified enough to enter the development industry, one has to adopt Development speak. She also notes that Development speak is extraordinary because it is “simultaneously descriptive and normative, concrete, and yet aspirational” [2].

Representatives of countries receiving development assistance often find it difficult to understand Development speak. One of the reasons for that is that it is “a hybrid”, not quite the language of science or ‘living’ language with a depersonalized and limited vocabulary. Its main purpose is to make possible the existence of several hidden agendas [2]. Also, there is semantic confusion associated with the very concept of development as it can mean almost everything, “from putting up skyscrapers to putting in latrines” and “from setting up software industries to set up tree nurseries”. It is a concept of emptiness with a vaguely positive connotation [4].

For this reason, there could be conflicting perspectives. On the one hand, as mentioned above, some identify development with economic growth, calling for more relative equity in GDP. On the other hand, some people identify development with more rights and resources for the poor and powerless and greater autonomy of communities [4]. G. Esteva even states that the word development is so overloaded that most people using it are saying the opposite of what they want to convey, and “everyone gets confused” [5]. This confusion is primarily caused by the fact that the development discourse consists of a web of key concepts. It is impossible to discuss development without referring to notions such as poverty, production, state, or equality [4]. Its semantic network also includes the concepts of growth, evolution, maturation, modernization, and development that cannot detach itself from these words [5].

In the introduction to the first edition of his famous “Development Dictionary” W. Sachs writes that four decades after Truman’s coinage of underdevelopment the development became an “amoebalike concept, shapeless but ineradicable”. The word is ambiguous, with its blurred contours it denotes nothing, and it is widespread because it implies the best of intentions. This term is used

by the IMF and the Vatican, by revolutionaries with their guns as well as field experts with their Samsonite. The development has no particular content and makes any intervention possible in the name of a higher goal [4].

Given this confusion and ambiguity of Developmentspeak, how its use promotes or hinders the development discourse and its understanding on both sides [1], the donors and the recipients, the developed and the developing countries? A demonstrative example of how development terminology is interpreted by these two sides is the word sustainability and the related two-word expression sustainable development. According to R. Chambers, a Research Associate at the Institute of Development Studies, UK, this word is part of the Developmentspeak lexicon in the development discourse [6]. It is interesting to note that some experts consider the term sustainable development as an oxymoron because it combines the qualitatively unchanged (sustainable) with the qualitative change (development) [7] and because they wonder if the present-day development is sustainable? [1]. So, donors and Bretton Woods institutions might seem “schizophrenic” to the recipient countries [1] because, as noted by J. Drexhage and D. Murphy, International Institute for Sustainable Development, the original agenda of developing countries was aimed at trade liberalization, debt relief, poverty reduction with the focus on development. The developed countries’ agenda focused on the environment: climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, etc. The economy was always the main concern. The controversial expression of sustainable development implies two competing agendas, and the concept underlying it is too amorphous to be well-worded and implemented [8].

Other examples of Developmentspeak lexicon include accountability, capabilities, civil society, consumer, decentralization, democracy, deprivation, diversity, empowerment, entitlement, environment, gender, globalization, governance, human rights, livelihood, market, ownership, participation, partnership, process, stakeholder, sustainability, transparency, vulnerability, well-being [6], needs, population, planning, capacity building, results-based [1] and many others.

The popularity of these terms varies over time. Some retain it longer, while others are likely to go out of “fashion” sooner. Occasionally, “fresh” terms are added to them when new important documents are coordinated and approved at the global level.

In 1992, W. Sachs made a premature statement that the age of development was coming to its end. “The time is ripe to write its obituary”. About the development lexicon, he even urged those engaged in development initiatives to discard the “crippling” development talk [4]. As we can see, that has not happened so far.

On the contrary, today the jargonized English, with its Developmentspeak lexicon, that was used in the planning and implementation of development programs and projects over the last 70 years, has become ubiquitous [1]. As for the future of Developmentspeak, we agree with the statement by I. Scoones, a Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, about sustainability and if this buzzword could be reinvented: it is “here to stay” [9]. We think that it is equally applicable to development in general, its major concepts and lexicon italicized throughout this paper. Further studies of Developmentspeak and its translation into other languages seem promising and might contribute to its better understanding and perception in the countries receiving development assistance.

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