

The Language Needs of Refugees Resilience at Maheba camp in Zambia.

(Conference ID: CFP/373/2017)

Vitah Hanchoko

vitchnda@gmail.com

Kwame Nkrumah University, Zambia

ABSTRACT

This academic paper tries to dig deeper into finding information that leads into a discussion of the need for refugees to learn a language for resilience at Maheba camp in Zambia. Language learning is an essential process that can enhance effective communication. This kind of learning tends to focus on how one can acquire a language. In this regard, refugees, being people who have been forced to leave their country (ies) or home(s) for political or religious reasons or because there is war or shortage of food etc need to be assisted in terms of what language to use in order to adjust easily. Discourse practices fall within the heart of this concern because it entails various kinds of interaction. This paper ascertains to what extent refugees at Maheba Refugee camp have been affected in terms of what language to use where they are as they interact with others (from other countries), market place(s), at school in terms of those who attend school while in these camps. More specifically, issues of formality and informality and terms of address, drawing from naturally occurring data and research findings will be drawn. Such evidence may offer indications as to the kinds of changes that refugees encounter as they try to adopt languages they find in these camps. Without denying the fact that there is need for refugees in camps to learn language for various communication purposes, it is argued that refugee resilience does not just come but rather change arising out of various sources.

Key words: language, Refugee, resilience, language need and learning.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of communication used in a particular locality or domain. It is believed that nobody is born with such a system. This being case, everyone needs to learn a language in order to communicate effectively. Language therefore, must be acquired by every individual in order to communicate effectively.

Having realized the importance of language during interaction, it is equally significant to find out why then people need to learn a language in any given society. Language learning does not exclude the vulnerable, the handicap, the displaced and the so called normal people. Emanating from such a concern, this study will specifically dwell much on whether refugees in refugee camps, specifically in Maheba camp of North-Western province of Zambia need to learn a language for resilience.

Language can be complex in that it constitutes behavior patterns common to members of a given community. These behavior patterns can be observed, recorded, classified, compared, analyzed and their general rules formulated. Conventions agreed upon by members of a speech community solve problems of expression and communication differently. Such awareness evokes concern on what happens to displaced people, refugees become victims of fate as they encounter new languages and new situation. Block and Triger (1942:5) assert that language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. This assertion works well to host residents. As for refugees, they need to settle down, learn a language in order for them to understand the speech acts performed by the utterances made by the speaker. It is cardinal, therefore, for refugees to learn a language of host communities where they flee to in order for them to adjust and fit easily in communities that are new to them. This paper therefore, attempts to discuss language need for refugees' resilience with special focus on refugees at Maheba camp in North-western province of Zambia.

Literature Review

Evidence on what refugees undergo as they flee from their countries or homes is quite numerous. Refugee migrations from original home countries to countries of resettlement for safety and security purposes are not a new trend. Armed conflicts and civil wars have been rampant across different continents due to a variety of reasons. An armed conflict is defined as "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related

deaths in one calendar year” (Themner & Wallensteen, 2012, p. 572). Prime examples of armed conflicts, as recent as 2011, include the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Yemen. Currently, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR; 2015) estimates indicate a global refugee population of 20.2 million. Over the years, trends have shown that refugees migrating from the African continent come from countries such as Somalia, (*Ideas and Research You Can Use: VISTAS 2016*) Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi (Ellis, Lincoln, et al., 2010; UNHCR, 2008, 2011). For African refugees from Somalia and Sudan, armed conflicts have been ongoing experiences that date as far back as the 1980s (Themner & Wallensteen, 2012). Research has indicated that among the refugee population, children, adolescents, and the elderly are considered the most vulnerable groups (Bemak, Chung, & Pedersen, 2002). Among these vulnerable groups, statistics have indicated that over half of the refugee populations are children and adolescents under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2011). Notably, migration during adolescence has been found to be riskier than any other period in an individual’s life (Beiser, Dion, Gotowiec, Hyman, & Vu, 1995) because of the dual transitions adolescents have to negotiate: first, coping as new arrivals in unfamiliar environments and, second, dealing with normative developmental processes, including identity formation (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Tingvold, Middlethorpe, Allen, & Hauff, 2012).

GLOBAL SITUATION

Because of movement of refugees from one country to the other since 1956, there has been a shift in the countries of origin of refugees’ population with more than half coming from Europe and the Soviet Union.

As political, ethnic, and religious conflicts explode in the Balkans and in certain parts of Asia and Africa, the refugee population becomes even more diversified. To help such a population, certain services are cardinal and must definitely be put in place. It is said for instance, that the US service providers from 1995, almost all refugees from Southeast Asia passed through one of the overseas processing centre in the Philippines, Thailand or Indonesia where they received four or six months of English as a Second Language (ESL) and work orientation classes as well as US orientation instruction in their native language.

In addition to that, primary and secondary schools were also set up in refugee camps in response to the concerns of the twelve schools in USA (Pleges and Ranard 1995). By the time these refugees arrived in the US, most if not all had received purposeful exposure to English and to the US workplace and culture. This is no longer the case. However, since the mid-1990s, ESL and workplace training have not been separate components of the refugee funded overseas programs

that operate in more than twenty countries worldwide (for example, Cuba, Australia, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Turkey, Russia, Kenya, Egypt, Senegal, Ghana).

Training has been significantly reduced to focus on processing the refugees for resettlement as quickly as possible. As refugees prepare for departure with immigration security, and medical screening checks, each family receives a copy of welcome to the US (A Guidebook for Refugees).

The situations elaborated above seem not include Zambia. This is why efforts have to be made in establishing what prevails in Zambia. It is interesting to note that something is being done in accommodating displaced individuals in Zambia. What is not categorically, clear is what measure(s) has been put in place for each group of refugees accommodated at Maheba camp to help them communicate effectively.

How Language Can Support the Resilience of Refugees and Host Communities

The **Language for Resilience** report examines the impact of language on refugees and host communities affected by the different levels of crisis, identifying the different ways that language skills enhance resilience and providing suggestions for programme responses that address key needs.

This paper is offered as a contribution to the understanding of how language learning builds resilience, whether it is giving a voice to young people and adults, building social cohesion in host communities or providing individuals with the skills they need to access work, services, education and information.

The report shows that for children and young people attending schools or post-school education, and for educators in host communities handling influxes of refugee students, quality language learning improves attainment and attendance and builds safer and more inclusive classrooms. It also illustrates how creative approaches to language education can support the development of life skills and help meet psycho-social needs. (<https://www.britishcouncil.org/education>)

Understanding Language Need and Resilience

Language need simply means a need that arises as a result of may be communication breakdown from one person being unable to understand certain systems of sounds and words used by individuals of a particular locality. This is therefore, a need for an individual to learn a language in order to express thoughts, ideas and feelings. Resilience on the other hand is the ability of an individual to successfully adapt to life, tasks in the face of social hardships (disadvantage) or

highly adverse conditions. That is, to anticipate, with stand, recover and transform from shocks and crisis.

Resilience through Language Learning

Austin, John (1962) in his book *The Speech Act Theory* talks of how meaning of utterances can be spread out. During interaction, whatever is said out must be understood as performing acts. It is these acts that both the listener and the speaker must bear in mind. The meaning of what has been said cannot be understood unless the interlocutors know the language very well. It is for this reason that refugees need to learn language(s) of host community in order to understand and interpret meaning. Therefore, refugees under discussion need to learn language(s) Kikaonde and English at Maheba refugee camp in order to communicate effectively.

As the case was in Syria, households, communities and societies that are resilient are able to with stand shocks and stresses, recover from such stresses and to work with national and local administrative institutions to achieve transformational changes. Similarly, refugees at Maheba can achieve such changes to better their livelihoods if they are encouraged to learn languages used in Solwezi or host communities. If such interventions are given headway, stigma of host cultures will be the talk of the past in the minds of refugees at Maheba (researcher's view). Moreover, language teaching and learning is essential for increasing the resilience of refugees.

In addition, through Zambia Initiative supported by the government of Zambia, UNHCR and donors to help the local region develop, efforts by other stakeholders should be jointly put in place in terms of language teaching to refugees in Maheba as a way of integrating them into host communities.

Similarly, employment action 18 – 21 of immigration Act, employment act is provided. Nevertheless, employment is accessed by fulfilling certain conditions. Language cannot be ignored in this aspect bearing in mind some kinds of employment might call for interviews whether oral or written. There is need to be conversant in language of host community

Needs of Language from Data Collected

Acculturation is one factor that was prominently mentioned to be an aspect that can false one to learn a language. This is an adoption of a new culture. Refugees in this respect need to learn a host language in order to understand symbols, patterns and gestures used by the local people during interaction.

There is social integration which has to do with mingling easily into new communities. All that demands knowledge, efficiency and sometimes fluency in articulation of language. The situation of refugees is well known to be people who had run away from home countries, child soldiers, incurring terrible atrocities or becoming sex slaves, carrying with them scars of experiences and that there is a possibility of disrupting programs such as employment, businesses, and schooling. These experiences suggest that a group of people like students may experience greater difficulties adjusting to and integrating into a new society and may be slower in learning academic concepts, skills and a new language [PCEII] and Population 2001, Mac Kay & Tavares 2005. If refugees at Maheba camp are taught languages spoken within and around the camp, fear of being despised associating it with violence and terrorism (Asali 2003) will be minimized. Language learnt or acquired will also provide them (refugees) with opportunities for education, social engagement and access to services.

Other definitions of language are given by Summers et al (2003), Fromkin and Rodman (1993) and Grace (2007). It is from such definitions that a realization of the significance knowing language even by refugees at Maheba. Once language is mastered by an individual, it will be easy to speak it, understand others when they speak, produce sounds that signify meanings and interpret the sounds produced by others as well as being able to have ability to demonstrate knowledge of language in question.

Key Findings

All languages refugees use help them adjust after a misfortune at individual, family and community levels (resilience). Proficiency in additional languages provides opportunities for education and employment. Language learning can bolster social cohesion and intercultural understanding. Language learning activities can be supportive interventions to address of loss, displacement and trauma. Other interlocutors emphasized that such people need language to withstand and recover from shock. Acquiring language in this case a second language can offer vocational training and meaningful employment, self expression, fresh social opportunities. Once a new comer (a refugee) is equipped with new language in the area (Maheba) will have chance to move forward to the future of opportunities and hope. Acquiring language will also help refugees at Maheba break out dependency and helplessness by developing real resilience. It is strongly felt that language can be taught and learnt in any form. It can be in word form, phrase or sentence to help them express their feelings, ask for direction, describe their illnesses, do transactions and many other benefits. By so doing, distance will be reduced and emotions described without feeling vulnerable.

Fowler (1974) explains language as an intrinsic aspect of our human inheritance. In this regard, even refugees just like other humans are entitled to this natural gift, language. Every human is identified by it. As earlier alluded, for communication to take place, one must speak and understand it. Refugees from Ruanda for instance have to learn host language, Kikaonde as a local language spoken in Solwezi so that they are not completely lost and feel accepted by the locals.

Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing remarks that it is essential for refugees at refugee camps particularly at Maheba camp to learn a language in order to adjust from experienced hardships encountered during movement and during settlement. Refugees are significantly proficient in main stream languages of host communities. Friday, 22nd July, 2016 British Council report asserts that there is need for governments, donors, human-tarian agencies to consider improving the nature, quality and scale of language teaching and learning as it is a key response to working with refugees and host communities. Youngest refugee age groups can learn the language in home (literacy). It is advisable that English is taught for formal use, Kikaonde for communication purposes at health centres, market places, church and during social interaction. Refugees need a language for support and to help them build their lives as the case was with the Syrians. Language is an equalizer. If learnt, it creates confidence and self assurance. This means that a child can speak and write in the language of host country. As for adults, language skills are fundamental in order to contribute to their host communities while language instruction also provides a bridge between countries. Ultimately, language is about communication and without communication there can be no understanding.

REFERENCES

- [1] Baruah, T.C. (2006) *The English Teacher's Handbook*. New Delhi – 110020: Sterling Publishers, Pvt.Ltd.
- [2] Bemak, F., Chung, R. C-Y., & Pedersen, P. (2002). *Counseling refugees: A psychosocial approach to innovative multicultural interventions*. Westport, CT: Greenwood
- [3] Cruse, A (2011) *Meaning in Language*. United Kingdom: MPG Books Group Ltd.
- [4] Ellis, B. H., Lincoln, A. K., Charney, M. E., Ford-Paz, R., Benson, M., & Strunin, L. (2010). Mental health service utilization of Somali adolescents: religion, community, and school as gateways to healing. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 47, 789–811.
- [5] UNHCR, (2008, 2011).
- [6] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2015). *Mid-year trends 2015*. Geneva, Switzerland: Author.
- [7] Fromkin and Rodman (1993) *Language*. New York: Holt, Richard and Winston, Inc.
- [8] Fowler, R. (1974) *Understanding Language. An Introduction to Linguistics*. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul.
- [9] Grace, E. W. (2007) *Understanding Language. A Basic Course in Linguistics*. London: Continuum International and Publishing Group Ltd.
- [10] Growther, J. (Editor) 1997 *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford Press.
- [11] Matthews, P.H. (2005) *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [12] Lobner, S. (2002) *Understanding Semantics*. London: CPL Group (UK) Ltd.
- [13] Themner, L., & Wallenstein, P. (2012). Armed conflicts: 1946–2011. *Journal of Peace Research*, 49, 565–575.
- [14] Yule, G (2014) *The Study of Language* (Fifth Edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.