

**LANGUAGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT AS VERITABLE TOOLS IN THE
ACHIEVEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs): AN
EXAMINATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE AND JULIUS CAESAR**

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Abstract

The World Health Organization with the Worlds' country leaders has intensified efforts towards the transformation of the lives of people, to sound health, quality education and healthy environment through first, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to later, Education For All (EFA), and presently, the sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the target of fulfilling the mapped proposal by 2030. The Sustainable Development Goals are seventeen in number. Although language is paramount to the achievement of these goals, its role was not overtly spelt out. This paper is directed towards the pertinent roles of language especially in the achievement of selected two goals namely: The promotion of justice, peaceful and inclusive societies and gender equality. The effect of good use of language has been exemplified with the two selected texts of William Shakespeare namely: The Merchant of Venice and Julius Caesar. The Sapir-Whorfian theory of language with Leech's five characteristics of language namely: informative, expressive, directive, aesthetic, and phatic was explored. It was discovered from the texts that without a skillful and wise use of language, by the actors, in their utterances, the precarious situations would have resulted in grave and terribly worse states. With these studies, it has been shown that good use of language can promote and sustain a just, peaceful and inclusive societies as well as enthrone gender equality.

Key words: gender equality, language, goals, sustainable development goals.

Introduction

It is pertinent to us to situate the word environment in general context. Environment automatically pushes our minds to think of physical natural endowment such as physical feature, climate, vegetation flora and fauna, in fact all the living things, including man. Environment is also extended to energy resources and that jackets us into considering expressions as environmental damage, protecting the environment, conserving and saving energy and resources. In the centre of all these, is man and his psychological environment.

Another meaning of environment worthy of highlighting is the definition of environment by Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary. It gives the first definition as the condition that affects the behaviour and development of somebody or something, the physical condition that somebody or something exists in e.g pleasant working or learning environment', Just in the same way fauna and flora, ecosystem, hills and valleys can constitute a condition and affect the living conditions of creatures.

Language in a psychological condition, can affect the life of man. Man is as old as language and language makes a man. Without language man cannot function in any environment. Man and language are central to the sustainable development goals and the thoughts and utterances of man are constructed in the mind and released through language. According to the philosophy expressed in the myths and religions of many peoples, it is language which is the source of human life and power' (Franklin & Rodman:1974). In fact for some people of Africa e.g Malians a new born child is a Kuntu, a 'thing' not yet a muntu, a 'person'. Only by act of learning language does the child become a "human being" Diabate, Massa-Makan in Fromkin & Rodman (1983).

Chomsky, (1965) asserts that, when we study human language, we approach what some might call the “human essence”, the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to man. Let us look at the functions of language: It is expedient that the functions a language can perform, be made clear. There are such functions of language as emotive, expressive/directive etc.

A speaker employs the language to achieve whatever purpose and to create inducement for man’s development. One of such functions as Jacobson defines it, is emotive function whereby the speaker expresses his emotions of anger, happiness or sadness e.t.c, anyone of which can either create and sustain development or staunt development and result in war and crises. There is no development in an unhealthy environment and that is why the WHO has given a thought to the promotion of just, peaceful and inclusive societies. By promoting justice, it is an act of declaring truth upholding it as well as condemning in its totality, what is bad. It is through language that this performance is done and the aggrieved parties feel justified. Even in the court of law, when justice is not upheld, the aggrieved person may take the case higher to an Appeal court in order to have justice. Other people may resort to war for justice withheld. Therefore the good use of language will promote peace which will sustain development in the globe. Some countries of the world are presently under siege because their opponents used language to make policies that are oppressive to their neighbouring countries (e.g Russia & Ukraine). It is the trust that people have in the judiciary that makes them resort to court, hoping that the courts would use good language to make pronouncement of justice, in order to avoid war and make peace prevail.

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs)

The linguistic angle of environment is not that of physical elements of fauna and flora but a psychological one which can give man a healthy mind in order to develop both himself and the

natural endowment around him. In the relationship between men, a peaceful and happy environment will enhance man's thinking of creating, inventing and utilizing available resources for the development of his environment and attempting to sustain what has been developed.

An example is cited from the Bible when King Solomon asked God for the gift of wisdom over and above all human needs. He said:

So give me the wisdom I need to rule your people with justice and to know the difference between good and evil.... (1king 3:9).

God answered King Solomon's prayer and granted him wisdom. A precarious situation faced King Solomon where he needed to make a judgment as to the rightful owner of a live baby in dispute, between two women laying claims on the same child. One had accidentally rolled over on her baby and smothered it. It was actually a difficult case to judge but Solomon had applied his God-given wisdom and did not yield to the reckless demand of one of the mothers, for the baby to be shared into two halves and each half given to each mother. The woman who suggested this of course was selfish and the division of the baby into two automatically spelt death of the child and a wasted life. With Solomon's wisdom, he was able to infer that the woman who made such a suggestion had nothing to lose. The other woman could not bear to lose her child in such a circumstance and environment and she cried to the King to allow the other woman to take the child and that the child when he grew up would know his mother.

This environment that the women and King Solomon found themselves was not an environment of climate change or flora and fauna but an environment where life could hardly continue to exist if justice and peace had not prevailed. Solomon therefore applied his God-Given wisdom to make a judgment full of justice and truth. He gave the baby to the woman who said the

baby would know his mother when he grew up. When the people of Israel heard of Solomon's decision, 'they were all filled with deep respect for him'.. (1 Kings 3:28). This particular example supports the fact that language can play a leading part in heightening or ameliorating a charged environment or condition which can affect a person's behaviour and development of somebody for either good or bad result. An unhappy home environment could have affected the behaviour of either of the two women if a misjudgement had occurred and that would affect the development and sustenance of peace.

Gender Equality SDGs

Similarly, the good use of language can bridge wide gender discrimination and consequently accord respect to the female gender. By so doing, justice, peace inclusive societies and gender equality can be established and sustained. These goals are expressly included in the sustainable development goals. There is no gain saying the fact that there are mind/sets which control societal behaviours and which need to be addressed, so as to bring about a healthy environment for sustainable development. In a patriarchal society for example, women are marginalized and discriminated against and put in a subservient position. The SDGs quest for equality of gender is very pertinent in the social development of the individual. Gender equality would put to an end to domestic violence which breathes family disintegration. The fashion of language that men employ to address women is likened to addressing pieces of materials. The youths copy the behaviours of their fathers in making far reaching decisions either in the homes or in the communities. The Jews in the bible never counted on women for any serious statistical records. In Mark's account of the miracle of feeding Mark 6:4 states: 'The number of men who were fed was five thousand'. Here the population of women was not mentioned. Mathew's account

states, the number of men who ate was four thousand, not counting the women and children'.
(Mathew 15³⁸).

This paper therefore strives to underscore the centrality of language in the achievement of two sustainable development goals (SDGs) namely, promotion of gender equality and just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

Although, when female partners are infuriated they can bash their male partner with abusive words. That, I agree does not make for peaceful healthy environment. Vissing, Straus, Gelles, and Harrop in Women, Men and Gender (1997) affirms that 'Verbal aggression may be even more damaging than physical attacks'

The effect of good and wise use of language in promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies. The case of the Merchant of Venice and Julius Caesar?

The environments in the two plays are such that the actors' use of words and contrived language use to make an otherwise precarious situation become less disastrous, such that people could co-habit.

The Merchant of Venice

The issue of good and manipulative language comes up in Act 4. In the court of Justice, Antonio has before this time, pleaded with Shylock to pay Shylock twice the amount of money he borrowed from him. Bassanio has also offered to pay six thousand ducats in the place of three thousands loaned by Shylock.

Shylock replies:

If every ducat in six thousand ducats were in six parts and every part a part, a ducat, I would not draw then. I would have my bond.

The Duke pleads with Shylock for mercy and each time, he becomes resolute. The duke wishes a learned doctor named Bellario whom he has sent for, to determine the case. Dr. Bellario apologizes for his inability to join him but rather sends a brilliant young doctor by name Balthazar (Portia disguised) to fill up the Dukes request, in Bellario state. The messenger who brings the letter sent by Dr. Bellario is (Nerrisa disguised).

In the course of cross examination of Shylock, by Portia, disguised as Balthazar, she builds up a measure of confidence in Shylock which makes him very happy. Portia reiterates Shylock's demands of the bond. Nevertheless, she pleads for mercy from Shylock by saying.

Portia: The quality of mercy is not strained

It dropped like a gentle rain from heaven (Act 4 sc 1)

Despite this, Bassario even opts to pay more to Shylock. That, Portia rejects, by saying

Portia: It must not be, there is no power in Venice can alter a decree established...

Shylock shouts in happiness. A Daniel come to judgment! Yea a Daniel!

O wise young Judge, how I do however thee!

Language has put suspense in the minds of the audience by this, Shylock now builds unflinching confidence in the young lawyer (Portia in disguise). Once more Portia pleads with Shylock to take the offer of thrice the money.

Shylock continues: An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven. Shall I lay perjury upon my soul?

Portia (disguised) says: Why then, thus it is, you must prepare your bosom for his knife.

Shylock says: O noble judge! O! Excellent young man!

Confidence in the uprightness mounts here as Shylock repeats the terms of the bond 'Ay his breast, so says the bond, nearest his heart. Portia agrees but throws the bombs.

Portia: It is so. Are there balance here to weigh the flesh? Shylock agrees he has them ready, Portia asks if he has some surgeons on his charge, to stop his wounds, lest he does bleed to death. At this time wisdom rules because Shylock asks:

Is it so nominated in the bond?

I cannot find it, it is not in the bond.

The wise application of language is beginning to upturn the state of affair.

Portia speaks further: Tarry a little; there is something else. This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood. The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh'. Takes thou your bond, take this your pound of flesh; But in cutting it, if thou dost shed one drop of Christian blood, the lands and goods are by the laws of Venice confiscate (Act 4 sc 1) unto the state of Venice.

Gratiano taunts Shylock: O upright judge! MarkJew, O! learned judge.

Shylock asks: Is that the law? I take this offer then pay the bond thrice and let the Christian go.

This is the climax of the application of wisdom in speaking. As Bassanio rushes to present the money, Portia halts him and insists, that the Jew should have all justice and he would have nothing but penalty.

Another bomb shell falls on Shylock as Portia pronounces:

Portia: Therefore prepare thee to cut off the flesh, shed no blood, nor cut thou less or more. But just a pound of flesh; if thou takest more or less than a just pound be it but so much, as makes it light or heavy in the substance or the division of the twentieth part of one poor scruple, hay if the scale do turn but in the estimation of a hair, thou diest and all thy goods confiscate

Act 4 se 1.

Gratiano taunts him again by shouting

A second Daniel, a Daniel, Jew

Now infidel, I have you on the hip

Shylock now pleads to be given the principal money and to let him go. As Bassanio rushes to present it to him, Portia asks the Jew to tarry, that another law holds on him and she says:

It is enacted in the laws of Venice

If it be proved against an alien

That by direct or indirect attempts

He seek the life of any citizen

The party against the which he doth contrive

Shall seize one half his goods.

The other comes to the privy coffer of the state

And the offender's life lies in the mercy of the duke only.

Against all other voice in which predicament I say thou stand'st

For if appear by manifest proceeding.

That indirectly and directly too, thou has contrived

Against the very life of the defendant

And thou hast incurred danger formerly by me rehearsed.

Down therefore, and beg mercy of the duke.

The Duke does not hesitate to pardon him as a Christian so as to show him the Christian's way of life. Shylock pleads that his property be left for him because they prop his life. Antonio is asked whether he approves of the mercy; he acquies but adds that he quits one half of his goods and the other half he would keep for Lorenzo who elopes with Shylock's daughter.

Antonio further gives Shylock as a condition that he becomes a Christian for the favour given to him. Portia presses upon Shylock to do all that, otherwise she would withdraw the pardon given to him. To this Shylock says, 'I am content, and pleads that they should give him a leave to go from there.

In conclusion, many dividends have accrued from this perfect application of language and wisdom by the characters, otherwise the application of the bond would have deepened the age-long feud between the Jews and the Christians in Venice and would have led to the death of Antonio. But now, justice has been restored.

Julius Caesar

Antony has envisaged danger and a precarious situation, after the shocking murder of great Julius Caesar, who incidentally is his close friend. If he does not apply caution and wisdom he may also be mobbed. It is so frightful that Brutus, Caesar' friend, participates in the planning and execution of his very close friend's murder and Antony does not know who to trust. At this point he is between the devil and the deep sea and any mistake is capable of igniting the commoner's pent-up emotions, looking for an outlet. People are also watching his reactions, as to whether he would protest against the murder of his friend Caesar. He throws his weight on wisdom with which one can escape an impending danger if well manipulated. His speech is well articulated, making sure he does not at any stage aggravate the already emotionally charged Romans. In Act 3 sc. 11 he gives his oration. He starts by calling them 'friends', 'Romans' 'country men' and requires them to give him audience. The next step is to debunk their expectation of his reaction by saying,

“I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones, so let it be with Caesar”.

Little do the plebians know who the evil refers to or whom good refers to. The message is still hanging in the air; he continue ‘The noble Brutus hath told you Caesar was ambitious. If it were so, it was a grievous fault. In these sentences, the pendulum appears to be weighting against Caesar because based on Brutus’ information to them, on which Antony does not state his position (if it were so), he condemns such an act and rationally states that Caesar has ‘answered it’. In other words, the murder of Caesar is right by the noble men. He puns and repeats the word grievously, to show them how apt the punishment of death given to Caesar is.

The next is that he asserts that Brutus is an honourable man and so are they all. By stressing the word honourable, he has not condemned anybody so far but rather attaches honour to them.

He moves indirectly to enumerate the activities of Caesar, for the people to judge who among Caesar, Brutus and his cohorts, are honourable, He reminds his audience once again that he has come to speak, in Caesar’s funeral. It is customary to speak or read orations at people’s funeral, how much more a close friend whom all are aware of.

Antony declares, ‘He was my friend, faithful and just to me, but Brutus says he was ambitious. These two characteristics of Caesar’s, namely faithfulness and justice, are not commonly found in one person.. . Antony reiterates that Brutus is an honourable man. Another feather on the cap of Caesar according to Antony is that ‘Caesar hath brought many captives home to Rome, whose ransoms did fill the general coffers. He asks then “Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?” It is a question for the plebians to answer and judge their actions whether what is done to Caesar is fair. He continues pumping creditable statements in favour of Caesar. He says “when that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept’. Ambition should be made of sterner stuff, yet Brutus says, he was ambitious”. His oratorical gift makes Antony juxtapose Brutus’ actions and behaviours with

Caesar's and leaves the hearers to judge the two. Each time he does this, he garnishes it with the claim 'Yet Brutus says he was ambitious and Brutus is an honourable man.' Antony practically shows Caesar's character to be devoid of ambition, by citing an example thus: 'You all did see that, on the Lupercal, I presented him a kindly crown, which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition? Yet Brutus says he was ambitious: And sure, he is an honourable man'. This has more or less become a refrain, which must accompany each point.

Antony cleverly insists that he doesn't intend to doubt Brutus' statements by saying, 'I speak not to disapprove what Brutus spoke, but here I am to speak what I do know'. He reminds the plebians their earlier cordial relationship with Caesar thus, 'You all did love him once, not without cause, what cause withholds you then to mourn for him?

He bursts into emotional feeling of injustice', "O judgement! Thou art fled to brutish beasts and men have lost their reasons!

This is a direct curse on the plebians and, he follows it up with mini drama with which he represents what the people should do for Caesar if they are reasonable. He practicalises it by making a pause and saying, 'bear with me, my heart is in the coffin there with Caesar, And I must pause, till it come back to me.'

This is a rhetorical strategy to feel the pulse of his listeners as to the success of his speech.

The success of his speech is now yielding dividend as some of the plebians argue and examine the truth of his speech. The first plebian says 'me thinks there is much reason in his sayings'. While they discuss Antony's speech, there seems to be agreement between them at least three out of four plebians, such that there are comments like 'Poor soul, his eyes are red as fire with weeping; and the others watch him as he alights to continue his speech and pleads that they

should give him attention and they show more interest to listen to him. Confidence is gathering momentum. He talks them into remembering the personality of Caesar just a short while ago. He speaks: 'But yesterday the word of Caesar might have stood against the world; now lies he there, and none so poor to do him reverence'.

He is making an inroad into their feelings and he cries out. 'O masters, if I were disposed to stir your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage, I should do Brutus wrong and Cassius wrong, who you all know, are honourable men'. These actions he wants to achieve by his speech and which he does cleverly and is in his way to success.

Instead of wronging Brutus and Cassius who are honourable men, he claims he would rather wrong the dead, himself and his listeners. He now plays his trump card thus 'But here's a parchment, with the seal of Caesar: I found it in his closet; it is his will. Let but the commons hear this statement, which, pardon me, I do not mean to read, and they would go and kiss dead Caesar's wounds, and dip their napkins in his sacred blood, yea, beg hair of him for memory, and dying, mention it within their wills, bequeathing it as a rich legacy unto their issue'. Antony does not expect his listeners to do all that, but to rage for the denials which Brutus and Cassius have caused them and so, go into mutiny. He has set this trap and obviously the plebians have been trapped. They now demand for the will to be read. This is the tension- rising point and Antony uses a delay tactics to make sure that as many as all of them are anxious to have the will read . He says, 'have patience gentle friends; I must not read it. It is not meet you know how Caesar loved you. He weeps their sentiment and emotions by saying:

'You are not wood, you are not stones, but men;
And being men, hearing the will of Caesar
It will inflame you, it will make you mad.

The insistent shout of ‘Read the will! We’ll hear it’ continues. Antony asks their permission for every step he takes, because they are fully charged to either a positive or negative action. To be cautious he says, ‘Nay press not so upon me, stand far off!’ Tactically, Antony wants to make a way for himself in case there is any danger from them. They have now made a ring round the hearse when Antony had come down from the pulpit. Anthony attempts once more to cajole the people by saying:

‘I Fear I wrong the honourable men
Whose daggers have stabbed Caesar
I do fear it.

At this juncture he has set the scene ready for their action for they retort:

They are traitors. Honourahie men!

They were villains, murderers! The will, read the will

It is obvious that Antony uses ‘the will’ as a bait to draw the citizens to see the mangled body of Caesar; the forming of a ring round the hearse helps him to make the following points against Brutus and Cassius before the crowd:

Look in this place ran Cassius dagger through
Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed
Mark how the blood of Caesar followed it
for Brutus as you know, was Caesar’s angel this was the most unkindest cut
of all ingratitude more strong than traitor’s arms quite vanquished him, then
burst his mighty heart.

Here is himself, marred, as you see, with traitors.

The climax of the event is the statement of the plebians- ‘O piteous spectacle, O noble Caesar; O woeful day!, O traitors.

Villains! O most bloody sight, we will be revenged! Revenge, about seek, born them, kill, slay: Let not a traitor live'. Although Antony tries to withhold the mob action. one can visualise their action, uncontrollable, irretrievable and that is exactly what Antony has prayed for to come about. All say, 'we'll mutiny. The plebians continue we'll burn Brutus. Away then, come, seek the conspirators. !'

To put more flames in the blazing fire, Antony reminds them of the unread will and he reads as they have demanded.

To every Roman citizen he gives

To every several man, seventy-five drachnas

He has left you all, his walks, his Private arbours and new-planted orchards on the side of Tiber. And to you and your heirs, for ever common pleasures to walk abroad and recreate yourselves'. It is interesting to note Antony's comment as they mutiny. He says, 'Now let it work. Mischief thou art a fool. Take thou what course thy will.

Conclusion

The skillful use of language in the Merchant of Venice has helped to avert the impending crises which would have arisen between the Christians and the Jews in Venice. The situation if not very well handled, through the contrivance and wisdom of language use, would have deepened the gulf of enmity and would likely have caused a breach of peace. In other words, good use of language promotes justice, peaceful and inclusive societies for global development.

Similarly, in the play Julius Caesar, it is obvious that the death of Caesar which would have equally included the death of his friend Mark Antony, has been prevented and through Mark Antony's contrivance and wisdom of language use, he has, not only been able to revenge the death

of Caesar using the commoners but has at the same time wriggled out of a precarious environment, thereby maintaining justice, and sustaining peaceful environment and inclusive societies.

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