

Language, Woman Empowerment and Societal Security

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Abstract

The current study attempts to detect where and when language, women empowerment and societal security converge. The work is conducted with the aim of revealing the effect each of these concepts has on one another. Through providing an account of the principles and factors of security and its connection to society and culture, and by highlighting the significance of learning language and how it empowers women, the researchers revealed how the interplay between these two concepts influences societal security. The study adopts a deductive approach towards finding the relation between language and societal security. This is performed through connecting (societal) security to empowerment (as a factor) and then ascribes empowerment to language, among other factors, of course. This interaction reveals the role of language in societal security.

1 Societal Security

1.1 Security

In order to arrive at how empowering women through language bears on societal security, we need to first acquaint ourselves with what *security* is, since the concept, just like almost everything nowadays, is also being updated. The term 'security' classically evokes ideas such as threats and fear, and images of hunger, chaos, war and destruction on one hand, and the notion that the state, order, power, and weaponry are the equilibrium achievers on the other. Indeed, this attitude has been the core belief, for decades, and the incentive for many actions that merely reintroduced what people had already feared. Booth (1991: 318) explicates what it means to adopt this traditional security mindset; it means believing that there is considerable military threat, necessity for powerful counters, adherence to the status quo and idealization of the state. Though these factors do exist, it is illogical to consider them and ignore other, equally important, factors.

Seeing how fear of military threats had led to military action, which in turn led to more destruction and less safety, and urging for the consideration of different kinds of threat—those that come from within the state—some of which are economic, political, ethnic, environmental, criminal, medical, to name but a few, the concept of security had to be augmented to accommodate further notions. Apparently, the threat to people and their states could be internal; they could become each other's enemy. This verity seems unavoidable, as Buzan puts it, "There is no real option of going back, and the security of individuals is inseparably entangled with that of the state." (1983: 21). The regimes in some states are overthrown by their own people, not necessarily by external forces. In turn, depriving people of their rights, financial breakdown or ethnic strife, can lead to lack of stability and increase in tensions, and eventually violence and, to further worsen the situation, inter-state conflict. Booth postulates the dependency of cosmic stability on micro-level political and social justice leading to the consequential concept of emancipation. He concludes that there is interplay between democracy and freedom on the one side, and safety on the other (ibid: 319). Boulding labels the result of Booth's combination "*islands of stable peace*" (1978: 65).

1.2 Society

Tracing back the origin of the word *society* is essential since all the conceptions of society have a connection to what the word originally meant. The word *society* comes from middle French *société*, from Latin

societat-, *societas*, from *socius* companion (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Hence, any definition of society will necessarily refer to the interaction, bonds and shared concepts among its members. A society is but an aggregate with a lot to share. Members of a society share identity, culture, beliefs, territory, history and the same political system. This abundance of shared concepts is not an indication of friendliness or acceptance among individuals, for though the term has the meaning of friendship and alliance, members of a society are not necessarily friends; being civil and maintaining order will suffice (Briggs, 2000: 9).

The notion of society is expressed in different from ways different standpoints. the cultural relativist view defines a society relative to its own culture, regardless of the norms of other cultures (Prato, 2009: 5) and the political view classifies societies in terms of size and complexity (O'Neil, 2006) while sociology conceives of society as a creation of man which in turn shapes man (Berger, 1967: 3). Thus, the main elements that feature any society are people (i. e. the individuals), culture, economy, social institutions, and the interaction between them.

1.3 Societal Security

In line with the previous account which manifests the centrality of society in the modern concept of security, Buzan et al (1998: 22) consider societal security as one of the five sectors of security (the others being military, environmental, economic and political). They emphasize solidarity as a defining characteristic of societal security. Simultaneously, they point out that this integrated group of people should be functional without relying on the state. This clearly relates to the concept of emancipation called for earlier by Buzan (1993). The question that may be raised here is what urged such concerns of independence and security?

The early signs of the concern with societal security began formulating after the end of the Cold War when the idea of integration with the European Union seemed appealing. This integration stirred questions around the identity of Europe, unconstrained movement of citizens and borders. The processes of Internationalization and Europeanization and the increased impact of international institutions on local issues created a fear of threatened identity of communities. This was a situation the state could not resolve, since securing communities is not like securing states. State security is basically and ultimately a matter of sovereignty; societal security is a matter of identity (Buzan et al, 1998: 22). Societal security means that a society is able to safeguard itself against change and threat (Wæver, 1993: 23). Threats to society are threats to identity. For example,

if language and culture (as elements of society) are prohibited, then identity will not be transformed and, consequently, will not be preserved (Buzan et al, 1998:43).

Whether military, political, economic or environmental (from societal security point of view), or food, health, personal or community (according to human security view), the means by which society can defend itself is either by military action or by 'cultural' action buttressing solidarity and uniqueness (ibid: 191). But these are not the only ways of protecting a society, emancipation and empowerment are the tools a society can utilize to achieve a state of societal security. Empowerment, as Batliwala describes it, is a process whereby people are supplied with more power to take control over their lives and be able to make their own choices and become more autonomous (1994: 130). The ultimate purpose of societal security is comfort and perceiving the merit of the inclusive nature of the society, not serving the goals of the government, obliterating enemies or tackling threats facing the nation (Navidnia, 2009: 84).

2. Empowerment

2.1 Definition of Empowerment

Since the mid-1980s, the term empowerment has become popular in the field of development, especially in reference to women. In grassroots programs and policy debates alike, empowerment has virtually replaced terms such as welfare, upliftment, community participation, and poverty alleviation to describe the goal of development and intervention (Batliwala 1994: 127; Luttrell et.al 2009: 2). Over that period, empowerment has been a key concept in disciplines such as critical, liberation, and community psychology, multicultural and feminist counseling, and social work (e.g., Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009; Freire, 1970/2000; Gutie´rrez, 1990; Martı´n-Baro´, 1994; Rappaport, 1987; Solomon, 1987; Sue & Sue, 2007) as cited in (Cattaneo and Capman, 2010: 467).

The term, however, is still confusing, and some difficulties may accompany any attempt to define it, with a considerable range of definitions suggested for it. Some languages, like French, do not even have an exact equivalent for the English term (Esch 2009: 2). (Luttrell et.al) mentions a similar problem in Spanish, stating that an obsolete Spanish word with a rather vague meaning is used as equivalent, suggesting that the reason is to perpetuate an ambiguous discourse, permitting institutions with different ideologies to establish their own agendas (2009: 2). Having pointed out that many definitions for the

concept of empowerment exit, Pastor (1996: 5) argues that the best way to define empowerment is "to consider it as part of a process or an evolution – an evolution that goes on whenever you have two or more people in a relationship, personally or professionally."

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines empowerment as: the act or action of empowering someone or something: the granting of the power, right, or authority to perform various acts or duties; or, the state of being empowered to do something: the power, right, or authority to do something.

One of the most famous definitions of empowerment is offered by Stromquist: "Empowerment is a process to change the distribution of power, both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society" (1995, p. 15). An interesting definition of empowerment is that it is "the processes of change through which those who have been denied the capacity to exercise choice gain this capacity. (Kabeer 1999).

Irrespective of the variation in definitions, it seems that they all agree that empowerment is central to the work of improving human lives. It spotlights social, political, and material resources and inequities in the environment, the strengths of individuals and communities, and the enhancement of well-being through support of the natural inclination to strive for positive change (Zimmerman, 2000). It encompasses a sense of personal control, which has been linked clearly to greater health and well-being (Chandola, Kuper, Singh-Manoux, Bartley, & Marmot, 2004; Griffin, Fuhrer, Stansfeld, & Marmot, 2002; Rodin & Langer, 1977; Sue, 1978); it suggests a mechanism for righting power imbalances in society (Freire, 1970/2000; Goodman et al., 2004; Martí'n-Baro', 1994; Toporek & Liu, 2001); and it fits well with current dominant trends in the profession such as strengths-based psychology and consumer-oriented mental health care (Cattaneo and Chapman, 2010: 646).

Zimmerman (1995: 583) makes a distinction between empowering processes and empowered outcomes because the former refers to how people, organizations, and communities become empowered, whereas the latter refers to the consequences of those processes. Denmark (1993) highlights the relationship between leadership and empowerment, arguing that a leader has an obligation of empowering his followers, especially the least empowered ones: women and members of ethnic minority groups.

2.2 Women Empowerment

Men, over the course of history, and presently, have enjoyed and still enjoy a greater access to power. Power has always been gendered, with

men in particular having much more access to use of force, resources control, while having to observe fewer social obligations. In daily life, the reflection of this disparity can be seen in aspects such as access to education, job opportunities, and economic resources. (Huis et. al, 2017: 2). According to an ILO estimation, women, who constitute half of the world population, perform two thirds of the world works, receive one tenth of its income and own less of one hundredth of its property. This, evidently, shows a significant lack of gender equality (Panigraphy, 2006: 1).

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the issue of women's empowerment has gained importance among scholars of universities, and in national and international platforms. But the concept was not deeply ingrained into the governments' policies and programs until the declaration of the 'Women's Decade' in 1975 (Mandal, 2013: 17). That came in the wake of several important critiques and debates generated by the women's movement around the world in 1980s, when feminists, particularly in the third world, were increasingly discontent with the largely apolitical and economist WID, WAD, and GAD models in prevailing development interventions (Tandon, 2016: 6). In the past few decades, women's empowerment movements in South Asia, Africa and the Middle East have been actively involved in empowering women through consciousness raising including health education as well as skill training for economic empowerment (Haghighi, 2014: 8).

Longwe (1998, p. 19) defines women empowerment as "the process by which women collectively come to recognize and address the gender issues that stand in the way of their advancement. In a patriarchal society, these gender issues are the practices of gender discrimination which are entrenched in custom, law, and ideological belief".

In the field of development economics women's empowerment is defined as the process through which women acquire the ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them (Kabeer, 1999). Kabeer (1999) stresses that the ability to exercise individual choice is based on three interrelated elements – resources, agency, and achievements. Resources refer to material, human, and social expectations and allocations. Agency is the ability or sense of ability to define one's goals, act upon them, and decide on their own strategic life outcomes. Achievements include a variety of outcomes ranging from improved well-being to achieving equal representation of women in politics. In other words, the underlying assumption is that women's

empowerment is the process of having and using resources in an agentic manner to reach certain achievements (e.g., Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra et al., 2002; Bali Swain and Wallentin, 2009; Khan and Khan, 2016). Similarly, psychological research suggests that empowerment is a process that enables people to act on and improve issues that are important for their individual lives, their communities, and their society (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Page and Czuba, 1999; Maton, 2008; Cattaneo and Chapman, 2010).

In the last few years, there has been considerable emphasis on political participation as the most important vehicle for the empowerment of women in public-private meetings, seminars, discussions, debates among the academics on the one hand and the activists on the other. The Beijing Conference in 1995 reiterated this issue in its "Platform for Action" and urged the members from participating states to take up the issue of marginalization of women in political structures and processes in their own countries very seriously and devise ways and means to increase the "Visibility and Space" for women in the democratic processes of their respective countries. An agenda was drawn up especially for Political Parties to create 'space' for women in their party structures because in a democratic government parties are the main instrument for ensuring the entry of individuals in the Governmental bodies (Fadia, 2007: 10).

2.3 Types of women empowerment

Stromquist (1995) suggests four types of women empowerment. She believes these types should be integrated. a

1. Cognitive empowerment refers to women's access to knowledge to identify the conditions of subordination and understand patterns of behavior, including in the areas of 20 sexual and reproductive health, as well as in relation to women's legal rights, in order to re-imagine and act on alternative possibilities for gender relations.
2. Psychological empowerment refers to the development of feelings about the capability to act and the belief that by taking action, women's current circumstances can change. The psychological aspect of empowerment includes building women's skills, confidence, and self-esteem.
3. Economic empowerment refers to women's need for economic resources, both generating and controlling resources for change. This means supporting women to gain greater financial independence and leverage through, for example, increased opportunities for income-generation.

4. Political empowerment refers to women's participation in and mobilization of collective action aimed at transforming the broader social and political environment.

3 Education and empowerment

3.1 Education as a source of empowerment

In any culture, society or country. Women's empowerment is critical. In a child's fundamental life, it is a woman who performs a prominent role. Women are an essential part of every society. Women's empowerment via education can result in a good attitudinal change. As a result, it is critical for every country's social, economic, and political advancement (Bhata, 2015:189). Education, according to Sperling and Winthrop (2016:13), is the key to women's empowerment. It allows individuals to reach their greatest potential by giving them the skills and information they need to manage their own life. Girls who acquire an education marry later, develop the skills needed to enter the job market, appreciate the value of health care and seek it for themselves and their families, and most importantly, they become aware of their rights and have the confidence to demand them. Women who are educated not only contribute to establish stronger economies, but also enhance the quality of life for their families and communities, as well as participate in the national development process. Women's empowerment begins with education. It is a critical component of global growth and, without a question, the best investment in the world. (Bahat, 2015:188) supports the investment idea by stating that whereas educating a man educates an individual, educating a woman educates a family.

Numerous studies have shown the strong association between education and women's empowerment. Haq et al (2017) claim that education is linked to women's personality, decision-making capacity, and adaptability, and that it directly contributes to the socio-economic development of families, societies, and nations. Several studies have found that the status of education and employment has a substantial impact on women's empowerment (Nowak, Dahal, & Hossain, 2016). Six years prior to this study, Nikkhah et al. (2010) discovered that individuals with higher education were more empowered than those without higher education in terms of social and economic circumstances.

Marcus and Page (2016:) provided an overview of the benefit of girls' education, stating that, in addition to its impacts on economic growth and public health, education contributes to women's empowerment by: building skills and capacities such as critical thinking, literacy and

numeracy, and communication skills, which establish the groundwork for decent livelihoods and equitable relationships in adulthood; and boosting girls' self-confidence, agency, and capacity to make decisions about their own lives; enhancing women's chances of getting better-paying jobs; and establishing gender-equal attitudes among both girls and boys"

3.2 Privileges of Women Empowerment through Education

When one examines the extraordinarily large variety of key areas where educating girls and women has beneficial benefits, Sperling and Winthrop (2016:13) see educating girls as the best investment in developing nations. Although, as in developed countries, girls' education offers good returns in terms of income and economic growth, proof of strong returns in other critical areas has propelled girls' education to the top of developing countries' policy priorities. Evidence from a variety of circumstances and eras reveals that girls' education has great advantages, not just for the girls, but also for their children, families, communities, and countries.

It's one of the best investments a government can do, and it's a critical step toward ending intergenerational poverty. Exploring research on the economic, social, and political benefits of girls' education, the following points arrange the evidence to focus on the top 10 reasons why girls' education may be the best investment in the world:

1. It boosts economic growth since females' education boosts productivity.
2. It raises women's income and employment opportunities.
3. It saves the lives of moms and children. Adolescents and women with more education are better equipped to seek and negotiate life-saving medical treatment for themselves and their young children.
4. It results in smaller, more stable households. Women with high levels of education have fewer children and use appropriate reproductive health practices more frequently.
5. It leads to children that are healthier and more educated.
6. It lowers HIV/AIDS and malaria rates, since girls' education is sometimes referred to as the "social vaccination" against the disease due to the huge drop in the disease's occurrence among better-educated girls and women.
7. It lowers the number of child marriages since better educated females are less likely to be married off as minors and have more possibilities.
8. It empowers women since more educated women have greater authority.

9. It improves the political leadership of women.

10. It lessens the impact of natural calamities and climate change on families. Higher education typically aids in preparing families to deal with shocks.

3.3. The Significance of learning foreign languages

The importance of foreign language learning manifest in the fact that knowing two or more languages helps expand one's perspectives. Language learning can open up a whole new world of possibilities and professional paths. Speaking two or more languages can increase employment opportunities with multinational firms and offer globally-minded people with vital tools to maintain international business contacts in several nations across the world in an increasingly competitive work market. Learning foreign languages, on the other hand, is not simply a great method to enhance one's economic situation; multiple studies have shown that knowing more than one language improves brain functioning (Gonzi, 2004:43). Languages also have a significant social dimension: not only can they assist people in making cross-cultural connections, but they can also be used to change people's perceptions, as being fluent in multiple languages can assist people in overcoming biases and navigating different cultures in everyday life (Noah, 2016:37)

Knowing foreign languages, according to Lagarde (2014: 5), is an important instrument for women's economic emancipation. Women continue to be denied equal opportunity today: they make up half of the world's population, yet contribute less than half of its economic output. Women who can comprehend and speak not just their own language but also other languages have a greater possibility of economic empowerment. They can access additional work options and, most importantly, good-paying jobs that are steady, dignified, secure, and productive. Limited or nonexistent skill in a foreign language may be damaging to a business, and it can exacerbate women's vulnerabilities even more. Learning a foreign language, on the other hand, may be a huge benefit.

3.4. English as a language of empowerment

In today's culture, the English language plays a distinctive function. It is an official or semi-official language in over 60 countries, with around 400 million people using English as their first language (L1); at the same time, English is the most widely spoken second language (L2), with approximately 900 million people speaking it. English is the most widely spoken language in the world, with 1.5 billion speakers out of a total

population of 7.5 billion (Ethnologue, 2017). English's significance as a worldwide language is apparent in today's culture. On a worldwide scale, English as an international language (EIL) is a tool for educational and socio-economic empowerment. It has the potential to increase educational opportunities and create more opportunity for a brighter future, both locally and globally.

Women often encounter greater challenges in learning English than males from the same nation or socioeconomic category. Thinking about how language education might help people become more empowered. When English Language Education is viewed as a tool to increase one's options, Esch (2009: 6) claims that it can lead to empowerment. Women may be empowered by English language education by giving them the skills and information they need to govern their own lives and make purposeful economic and social decisions. One of the most important benefits of EIL is the expansion of socio-economic chances for women, in addition to all the material rewards and opportunities that the English language may provide. In a paper about the potentially life-changing role of English as a Second Language (ESL). Mohammadian (2014) discussed how "English language learning can be empowered by affecting women's imagined communities and bringing about new opportunities for them, especially for those who come from less privileged families in third world countries and the Middle East". Learning English can help Arabic women gain independence by allowing them to apply for university scholarships and get postgraduate degrees from English-speaking universities. This may help them qualify for better career prospects and university jobs when they graduate (Al- Essa & Abdulkareem, 2003; Alkarni, 2012 as cited in Mohammadian 2014:8)

The first example Mohammadian gave was from Saudi Arabia, where she stated that studying English allows Saudi women to acquire higher levels of education, which may lead to greater career prospects, and hence financial independence and so a sense of emancipation. This appears to be a kind of women's empowerment that has the ability to abolish gender subordination and male supremacy while also bridging the gap between men and women's social positions in Saudi Arabia. It should also be emphasized that gender segregation is on the rise in the Middle East, and it now pervades many industries, including educational institutions and medical facilities. As a result, the demand for educated women to give services to other women is growing. As a result of the flexibility of work hours in professions like teaching and medicine, women are more likely

to pursue them since they allow them to satisfy their family commitments (Alkarni, 2012 as cited in Mohammadian 2014:8).

The second example is the situation in Iran, according to Mohammadian (2014), English competence can also increase access to information and news sources. People are typically limited to just particular sorts of ideas and Islamic beliefs as a result of information restriction; only those with access to foreign media and news can legitimately be considered members of an international society. Those who are fluent in English have easier access to English media, literature, the Internet, and other resources. The value of English as a global language in today's culture cannot be overstated. English, being a worldwide language, is the ideal instrument for increasing learning opportunities and opening up new doors to a brighter future.

Conclusion

The account presented in the three parts of the paper builds on the idea of societal security that can be achieved through empowerment which, in turn, is achieved through education in general and language learning in particular. Hence, the whole work is an attempt at tracing the influence of this seemingly irrelevant detail of language learning in order to arrive at its impact on women's life. Evidently, through interactions between the concepts discussed in these three sections, language is the means or factor in achieving societal security through empowering women. Empowerment alleviates the constraints on people and, consequently, helps maintain societal and state securities alike.

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