Spring 3-1-2016

Peace, Conflict, and Language: Coping with Linguistic Intolerance and Violence

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Peace, Conflict, and Language:

Coping with Linguistic Intolerance and Violence

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March 2016

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The Master of Arts in TESOL degree at

SIT Graduate Institute, Brattleboro, Vermont.

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Acknowledgement

Foremost, I am thankful to Almighty Allah (God) for his grace, blessing, and mercy that enabled me complete this thesis as a step to serve peace and humanity through equipping individuals to cope with linguistic violence and to promote peace.

I am also grateful to my unschooled parents for their kindness, prayers, determination, support, and strong belief in education without which I would have never been able to obtain an education.

I would like to present my heartfelt and sincere gratitude to my academic advisor and thesis supervisor Dr. Leslie Turpin for her timely guidance, continuous support, constructive feedback, and knowledgeable insights that assisted me to complete this thesis in the best possible manner.

For their gracious teaching, instruction, and guidance, my special full of respect gratitude goes to all my honorable professors at SIT namely Prof. Alex Silerman, Prof. Elizabeth Tannenbaum, Prof. Steve Iams, Dr. Elka Todeva, Dr. Marti Anderson, Dr. Susan Barduhn, Dr. Paula Green, Dr. Bruce Dayton, Dr. Tatsushi Arai, Prof. Rylan White, Susie Belleci, and Mehlaqa Samdani.

Last but not least, my exceptional, full of love appreciation goes to my wife for her unconditional support throughout my educational and professional career that encourages and empowers me accomplish what at times seem impossible.
Abstract

Language is not simply a medium of communication but also a carrier of meaning, culture, and values between generations. This thesis examines the power of language, its relation to identity, social status, conflict, violence, and peace. The thesis also discusses linguistic discrimination and intolerance in the light of historical facts, the role of media in violence promotion, and the psychological and physiological impacts of violence on individuals and for that reason on communities. In addition, the thesis raises awareness about nonviolent communication to empower individuals to cope with linguistic intolerance and violence. With nonviolent communication, individuals will be able to maintain their personal, interpersonal, inter-group, and intra-group relationships through peaceful communication. Nonviolence will lead them to compassion and so to retaining meaningful lives.
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors

Language and Power
Language and Identity
Language and Conflict Transformation
Language and Peacebuilding
Language and Trauma Healing
Language and Violence
Linguistic Intolerance
Nonviolent Communication
Language and Media
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Introduction

Listen with ears of tolerance! See through the eyes of compassion! Speak with the language of love!

Maulana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi (Rumi)

While participating in the Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation Across Cultures (CONTACT) program at School for International Training (SIT), I realized that in every aspect of peacebuilding and conflict transformation, communication and for that reason language plays the central role; for instance, from conflict to conflict transformation, conflict analysis to conflict intervention, from trauma to trauma-healing, from hurting to comforting, from despair to hope, from violence to nonviolence, from mediation to negotiation, from active listening to active sharing, from isolating to integrating, from alienating to humanizing, from protesting to singing, from blaming to taking responsibility, from reacting to reflecting, from discouraging to encouraging, from war to peace, from peacebuilding to peace-culture. In every aspect, it is the language that facilitates the communication that bridges one to the other.

However, the basic enthusiasm of coming into the field of peacebuilding and choosing the topic for this thesis actually stems from my personal background. I got exposed to violence from an early age of 13 when the 1992 civil war broke out in Afghanistan. Eventually, the tragedy of 9/11 opened a new series of conflicts in Afghanistan and the region. The on-going violence, since 1979, and lack of coordination and cooperation among the leading agents have escalated all sorts of violence –among them linguistic violence. Language has a mutual relationship with peace and conflict. For nearly four decades now, the untransformed conflicts in Afghanistan have been the main factor behind the on-going violence.
Violence traumatizes people and influences their linguistic competence and performance which may generate hate speech. In many cases of physical violence among individuals, hate speech has been the triggering factor. The presence of hate speech promotes violence and hatred in all walks of life. Depending on the nature of a situation, linguistic violence can be either the result of a former violence or the factor for a new one to emerge, thus, creating a cycle.

Moreover, the commercially and politically influenced mass media propagation of polarized ideologies of “Us or Them, Good or Bad” has manipulated the minds of common man. This manipulation has resulted today in bias, discrimination, prejudice, and intolerance replacing empathy, compassion, coexistence, and the critical thinking abilities of the population in the academic and non-academic settings. The technological big-bang followed by access to the internet and the rapid growth of social media (besides positive aspects) provided fuel to the flames. Any linguistic regulatory attempt contradicts the freedom-of-expression norms. And lack of such regulations has facilitated an unleashed increase in the production/broadcasting of violent programs and exposure to linguistic violence and continuous cycles of hate speech.

To the best of my present understanding of the facts, I believe, to address the dilemma on a sustainable basis, cultivating and inculcating notions of peace in education (peace education) is the most effective, efficient, and long lasting way to bring the necessary social change at a grass-root level to institute and strengthen a culture of peace. Culture of peace necessitates a peaceful communication that respectively necessitates a language of peace. Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is what I consider the language of peace that facilitates peaceful communication.

In addition to nonviolent communication, prevention and cultivation strategy is what I suggest as an immediate course of action for parents. For the prevention part, applying some regulations, limitations, and observations on the access to mass media can be an effective way to
control the input of linguistic violence on the media. These regulations, limitations, and observations should be practiced with responsibility within the circles of families and communities based on their social and cultural values. This will probably help reduce children’s exposure to violent media and the violent language present in the media. Reduced presence of violent media will increase the opportunity for interpersonal communications within the family. It will then be possible that children’s attention be diverted towards the use of nonviolent communication starting within the family. Once a linguistically nonviolent environment is available, peace culture can be cultivated through peace fostering parenting.

In this thesis, I intend to raise awareness about the power of language, its relation to peace, conflict and violence, linguistic discrimination and intolerance, role of media in violence promotion, factors of violence, and the psychological and physiological impacts of violence on individuals and for that reason on communities. I will spot some light on some of the experiments conducted (or narrated) by different practitioners from different fields of studies that elaborate the impacts of media violence on the physique and psychology of the audience. In an attempt towards empowering individuals to cope with linguistic violence, I will present a concise introduction to nonviolent communication (NVC). This can assist individuals acquire the necessary skills to inhibit themselves from the generation of linguistic violence with the help of nonviolent communication skills.

Rumi says,

“Know that a word suddenly shot from the tongue is like an arrow shot from the bow. Son, that arrow won’t turn back on its way; you must damn the torrent at its source.”
Language and Identity

Language is a part of identity on a personal, communal, societal, regional, national, and international level. Language, on one hand, can bring people together; on the other, splits them into several divisions. In other words, language can unite or divide people. Language has the power to draw boundaries as well as omit them on the world map. Thus, language has the power to bring peace and harmony among individuals, communities and societies. Likewise, it has the power to create conflicts within and/or between communities.

In 1947 the Indian partition took place and a new country, Pakistan, emerged on the world map. Apparently, this partition was grounded on the basis of the religious identity of the people of India –in this case Hindus and Muslims. The 1947 Pakistan included two provinces, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan (present Pakistan). The separation movement of Bengal from Pakistan in 1971 basically stems from the 1948 Urdu-Bengali languages controversy. Harris Khalique (2007), in his article on the Urdu-English relationship touches upon the historical Urdu-Bengali languages controversy.

Khalique (2007) states:

1947 to 1973: I would like to begin with the speech of Pakistan’s founding father, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, made at the convocation of Dhaka University in 1948. He stated that in that province it was to be the will of people living there that would determine the official language of the province. However, it could only be Urdu that would serve as a bridge between the peoples of different provinces and be the official language of the Pakistani State (1989, 183). (p. 100)
Though, the 1948 language controversy did not directly jump into a separation movement, it definitely exposed a point of difference between the people of the two provinces of the newly born country. Area-wise, East Pakistan consisted around 20% of the total land of Pakistan, but with a 55% of the population, Bengalis were the majority ("The Separation of East Pakistan | Great setback to Pakistan in year 1970," n.d.). Resistance towards Bengalis’ demand for recognizing their language as an official language of the country led to Bengali Language Movement. The language movement gradually took the form of identity. Lack of will on the part of the administration urged Bengalis to launch demonstrations on all possible stages.

The government chose to use force to suppress the demonstrations which resulted in the killing of some students. Afterwards, a civil unrest replaced the movement which continued until 1956. In February 1956, an amendment and rewording of the Pakistan Constitution’s article on languages recognized Bengali as the second official language of the country. As a result of the civic movement, apparently, the language conflict was resolved in a period of 8 years, but the conflict had drawn psychological boundaries between the people of the two provinces. The government opted to impose all sorts of structural violence against the Bengalis. The government adapted strategies to make sure that the Bengalis are under-represented in all civil and military services.

This was an identity example of the power of language that actually started with a language controversy, but ended in the form of a new country, Bangladesh, on the face of the earth. Bangladesh announced its independence after a series of atrocities such as civil disobedience, target killing, genocide, and external interference. This way, a nation that was once united and got its freedom under the title of religion in 1947, got separated under the title of language in 1971.
When a language rises to the national identity level, then it has the power to unite people or to divide them. Language has the power to create new boundaries both psychological and geographical.

Harris Khalique (2007) further continues:

You will hear the latter part of this speech quoted and stressed by both quarters –those who criticize his support for Urdu as the sole national language as well as those who emphasize that only Urdu should be promoted in Pakistan, whether or not at the cost of other languages. Jinnah called it the “State Language of Pakistan,” neither national nor official. (p. 100)

Several authors and scholars –from a variety of fields- have analyzed the discourse of what Pakistan’s founding father actually meant in his 1948 speech. But no analysis of his speech can refute the fact that it was democratically baseless to announce a language as national or official or lingua franca that was, then, spoken by less than 5% of the population. Presently too, Urdu is the second language of the vast majority of present Pakistan. However, this historical fact should be considered a lesson; and strategies should be developed to prevent any similar incidents in the future. The importance of language identity is so prominent that the students killed on February 21st, 1952, demonstrating for their language rights, is a manifest of the power of language. Nonetheless, there are always peaceful means to transform any conflicts and the best one I believe is nonviolent movements.

There are several other examples where people have been united on the basis of their language. Language controversies are not something new or rare. They are natural phenomena that add to the diversity of humanity. Linguistic diversity can be an asset or liability depending
on how people and authorities look upon them. To preserve the linguistic diversity, linguistic tolerance must be promoted. That is why in 1999, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared 21st February as the International Mother Language Day. UNESCO selected the date “21st February” to honor the students killed in the struggle for their language rights in the 1952 Bengali Language Movement, Dhaka. This declaration is a tribute to the diversity of languages in the world and the importance of mother languages.

**The Power of Language**

*Each of you possesses the most powerful, dangerous and subversive trait that natural selection has ever devised. It's a piece of neural audio technology for rewiring other people's minds. I'm talking about your language, of course, because it allows you to implant a thought from your mind directly into someone else's mind, and they can attempt to do the same to you, without either of you having to perform surgery.*

Mark Pagel (TEDGlobal, 2011)

Language and words leave imprints and impacts on the mind and heart of the listener(s) as well as the reader(s) on a permanent, long-term, and short-term basis. These imprints and impacts provide opportunities for meaning-making. Meaning-making is a cognitive process that encompasses a series of procedures through which meaning is derived; for instance, observation, reflection, judgment, response, reaction, clarification, explanation etc. can be named. All humans make meaning of what they listen, read, or observe based on their existing knowledge, understanding, and capabilities. In fact, right now I am busy in a process of transferring meaning
acquired based on my linguistic cognitive capabilities and you, the reader, are busy in making meaning out of my writing based on your existing knowledge.

New meanings acquired through the cognitive process lead to a synthesis of the previous meaning with the newly acquired one. Based on the meanings made, human beings form their attitude to respond, react, and engage with the participants of a conversation. A number of linguistic and non-linguistic factors have a direct influence over the meaning-making process. Some of these factors are intrinsically internal (inside the language) such as choice of words (lexicon), order of words (Syntax), sounds patterns (phonology) while others are external (outside the language) that are more related to the user (speaker) for example social status, gender, age, variety of language, tone of voice, emotional and psychological state, beliefs, education, profession, life experiences etc. Other factors include time, space, theme of conversation, culture, values, channel of communication, communities, societies, social and institutional structures etc…

A question that might arise is: what is the need for the meaning-making? Well, meaning is an intrinsic part of communication and a social need that is necessary for relationship-building and maintaining. Relationships are natural needs and sources to meet the needs of human beings that facilitate their existence in their respective communities and societies. These relationships can be perceived as positive or negative depending on factors that determine social status. The nature of relationships has an impact over the quality of communication, while the quality of communication can strengthen or weaken relationships.

Another question that might arise is: is meaning-making a conscious process or a subconscious one? To me it is both depending on the individuals and the periphery of the situation in which the conversation takes place. However, whether the meaning-making process
takes place consciously or subconsciously, it affects the attitude of the individuals. An experiment was conducted by a group of researchers to check the subconscious effect of linguistic and visual inputs on the memory of human beings and how they play out in their attitudes.

**The Priming Experiment**

*Priming is a non-conscious form of human memory concerned with perceptual identification of words and objects..... it is also a technique used in psychology to train a person’s memory in both positive and negative ways.*

(Paola Bossola, Documentary, 2014)

In the Paola Bossola’s (2014) documentary, Dr. Mellissa Tiers explains: “Priming is a natural external influence on human’s adaptive unconscious mind. It is a way that we have of saving time. We make short cuts in our processing, because that is the way the brain conserve energy”. She further maintains: “One of the things about priming is: we are always being influenced by what we see. And it is outside of our conscious awareness”. According to Dr. Tiers, “Subtle things, subtle words or images have effects not only on our behavior but on our perceptions of the world and our self-identity. When we take on the primed messages, we have no idea that they rule our behaviors, emotions, and beliefs”.

In the priming experiment activity, the participants were divided into two groups. They were instructed that the activity had two parts. For the first part, each group was provided with sets of unscrambled word sentences. The set of words given to each group were different. According to Dr. Tiers, one set contained words that were related to impatience such as:
“hostility, impatience, anger, hurry, harried”. While the other set of words were consisted of: “patience, slow, aged, retirement, vacation, Miami etc”.

For the second part of the activity, participants were instructed to meet the facilitator in the hall after completing the first part (scrambled words activity) to find out from the facilitator which room to go next. The experiment researchers had staged the facilitator’s part in the hall with someone keeping him busy in a conversation. The participants were then tested in terms of how much time they could wait for the facilitator to get free of the conversation and let them know what to do next.

In the hall, the result of the waiting part of the experiment of each group was totally different. The participants of the group with words of impatience interrupted the facilitator after waiting for up to a maximum of 3 minutes. The participants with words related to patience waited up to 10 minutes. In the end when the participants were asked about why they interrupted or did not interrupt the facilitator in the conversation, they had no idea, they had no conscious awareness of why they had interrupted or not interrupted.

In the first part, the participants perceived that they were being tested for how fast they could put the words in order, but actually they were being exposed to two different sorts of words with different priming influences. The experiment concluded that exposure to language or visual objects that are not noticeable –and that are part of the periphery in the subconscious- has a direct impact over the attitude and behavior of the human beings. As a matter of fact, in the experiment, participants tested with primed words of impatience could not wait so long before they intruded the facilitator’s conversation; while the participants primed with words of patience, waited up to 10 minutes.
The researchers chose a linguistic component for their experimentation, though the experiment was conducted to measure the effects of media violence on the mind and attitude of human beings. Although, the set of words in the experiment were used in a written capacity, it can be equally true of the input received through other senses.

We, as humans, are always exposed to the environment around us. Whilst our five senses function; they receive data and send it to the brain. Most of the data is conducted from the periphery that is then sent to the brain.

Dr. John Schinnerer, a positive psychologist, explains:

*The human brain is the most complex system known to mankind: over one hundred billion neurons, each with tens of thousands of connections to other brain cells. There is considerable more data coming in through your senses than you are aware (4 billion bits per second unconscious v/s 4000 bits per second conscious).*

(John Schinnerer, HowICanBeHappy.com)

According to Dr. Schinnerer, only 4000 bits per second of data received in the brain is in a conscious way; the rest of billions of data received in the brain is without our conscious ability of knowing it. However, whichever sense as the means of input, the information receive in the brain of humans either consciously or subconsciously impact the mental state that in turn influences their physical and linguistic attitude.
Language and Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structure, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships.

(Lederach, 2003, p.14)

In the core of every conflict there is a need to be fulfilled. This need can be material or psychological in nature. Human beings live in communities in order to ensure their material and psychological needs are fulfilled. Living in communities “itself” is a need. Every community comes into being on the basis and number of relationships among individuals. An individual can be a member of different communities simultaneously. In every community, the quality of individuals’ lives depends on the nature of the relationships with other members of that community. These relationships are formed and maintained through proper and regular communication. Through communications member of a communities inform each other about their needs. All communications among the members of a community require a common language (or languages).

The quality of communication depends on the linguistic abilities of individuals, their awareness of language and culture of self and others, their personal and communal backgrounds, environments, circumstances, and social status in each community. Conflict is an inevitable aspect of life. In fact, it is a natural and necessary component of life that opens the door for further communication. If communication is successful, needs are met, current relationships strengthen and new ones are built. But if communication fails or is broken, needs fulfillment is interrupted and conflict moves towards violence. Thus, violence is the result of unfulfilled needs.
John Paul Lederach (2003) states:

*Many of the skill-based mechanisms that are called upon to reduce violence are rooted in the communicative abilities to exchange ideas, find common definitions to issues, and seek ways forward toward solutions.* (p.21-22)

From the given statement, a chain of related concepts are prominent. One, that the tools needed to reduce violence are directly linked with communicative abilities; in other words, they are linked with language. Next, that language is used to exchange ideas. These ideas should be a source of negotiation to “find common definitions to the issues”. In other words, finding common definitions is essential to find common grounds which is a measure in the meaning-making process. The process of common meaning-making brings into existence a working together relationship between parties in conflict. This working relationship that is more founded on communicative skills can then lead to finding solution making strategies and resolutions to transform conflicts.

Figure 1 visualizes my present understanding of needs, conflicts, and violence. When a need emerges, the possibility for conflict also emerges. When a conflict arises, there is one of the two ways to go –either to transform the conflict or opt not to transform it. If the conflict is transformed, the result is peace, harmony, and positive relationships. But if the conflict is not transformed, the result is violence.
Trauma is the initial and primary product of violence. Violence traumatizes its victims directly or indirectly. Traumatized victims are vulnerable to the notions of hatred that lead to revenge. Hatred and revenge turn victims into new agents of violence. Thus, a cycle of violence is generated that needs to be intervened in a well-planned, appropriate, timely manner. According to Yoder (2005, p.25) “Trauma creates needs.”

She further maintains,

“The most urgent need for trauma survivor is often for safety and security—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.” Yoder (2005, p.25)
Providing physical, emotional, and spiritual safety and security is the very first step towards trauma healing and towards preventing the victim to be drawn towards hatred and revenge. Trauma is a product of violence; however, it can be a factor for the generation of further violence.

Language is used for trauma healing. Traumatized people are motivated to tell their stories and share their emotions that are mainly caused by the trauma. Psychologists and psychiatrists consider sharing and deep listening to trauma survivors a healing tool. In Peace Circles, participants form special circles in which trauma survivors tell their stories and the participants listen to him/her from the heart.

When we listen to each other’s stories, we develop a positive feeling that someone is listening to us, that someone is out there who is interested in their stories and feelings. Thus, language becomes the first tool of healing people’s trauma.

Language plays an important role from the initial stage of describing a need. The variety of language used in describing a need can be an indicator of the intentions of the parties in conflict and whether they are willing towards transformation/resolution or not. Thus, if language can play a part in transforming a conflict, it can similarly contribute to exacerbating it.

**Linguistic Discrimination, Intolerance, and English**

*Transfer the savage born infant to the surroundings of civilization and he will grow to possess a civilized language and habit.*

Capt. Richard H. Pratt (1879)
Linguistic discrimination and intolerance is not a new phenomenon; in fact, it dates back centuries. In the colonization era, language discrimination was particularly used as a tool by the colonizers who used all sorts of oppressive measures to suppress the masses politically, physically, culturally, and psychologically. Because language, besides being the medium of communication, is the carrier of culture and values from one generation to another and one civilization to another, colonizers used it to achieve two goals with one strategy.

Through language policy, colonizers, on one hand, interrupted the culture and values’ transmission among the colonized nations; on the other hand, they introduced/imposed their own culture and values on the colonized nations.

The colonizer, initially, invaded and seized the lands of indigenous and native nations, and after establishing their rule they confiscated their properties. Gradually, their invasive strategies changed into structurally violent governance that tried (and succeeded too in most cases particularly in language policy) to manipulate the cultural foundations of the people. As language is one of the main components of cultural foundations, the colonizers replaced and gradually displaced the languages of the colonized regions with the colonizers’ languages.

The replacement of languages was imposed through all available means to the extent that, for example, in India according to Mahboob (2003) “Macaulay recommended that publication of books in Arabic and Sanskrit should be stopped” (p.4). Thomas Macaulay, a British politician and historian, was stationed in India as “Secretary at War” (1834-1838) who possessed the polarized ideology of “Civilized and Barbaric” nations. Macaulay believed that the people of India needed to get civilized through adapting English language and English education. Therefore, introduction of English (western) education in Indian sub-continent is attributed to
him. The responsibility of replacing Persian, the official language then, with English is also attributed to him.

These sorts of linguistic discriminations opened a new chapter of structured violence in the linguistically, culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse communities of the Indian sub-continent. The discriminative linguistic policy of the colonizers cultivated a linguistically intolerant culture in the region which is still in practice after almost 70 years of independence. This has resulted in some nationalist groups still considering English as the language of colonizers. Nonetheless, it is an observable fact that after decades and centuries of colonization, English has assimilated into the culture and communities to such an extent that separating it out is not only difficult but impossible.

Today English remains the official language (or one of the official languages) in most of the post-colonization states. For instance, English is one of the official languages of all south Asian countries. There are several reasons behind the survival and strong existence of English language in the de-colonized India and newly born nations.

After the Second World War, the strengthening political and economic status of English in the world impeded the previously colonized regions/nations to restore and revitalize their languages to the pre-colonization status. Moreover, English is considered the language of privileges that opens the doors of opportunities to education and employment; however, there is a sad spectrum existing that access to the privileges attached to English is not available to common people from the middle and lower classes, unfortunately.

The fact that some of the colonizing policies, such as the linguistic deprivation and lack of linguistic access to privileges has continued to the present, has caused an increase in social inequalities. These social inequalities have resulted in the gap between people to keep growing
under disparate classifications. Due to the growing gap, a sense of linguistic intolerance towards English language and English medium education has developed among the inhabitants of these formerly colonized regions. As a result, English is contemplated as a continuation of colonial policies that still triggers memories of the colonization and all sorts of structured violence exercised then.

Another factor that has promoted linguistic discrimination and intolerance is the linguistic power struggle between majority and minority populations. On one hand, if the majority’s language is declared the national and/or official language, the minority’s language(s) are not promoted, to the extent that in the long run they lose their academic/written features leaving them oral-only languages. On the other hand, when minority’s language becomes the national and/or official language, majority develops a sense of being linguistically colonized or colonially deprived of their democratic rights.

However, it is an understandable fact that the linguistic race for power is more influenced by the social status of a language. The social status of a language is more determined by the political and economic status of its speakers than purely the linguistic components within a language.

**Language and Social Status**

Though, social status is something outside the linguistic spectrum of a language, it has a direct influence on the language or its varieties, the nature of the discourse, interpersonal communication, attitude, relationship building, and execution of transactions. Social status of languages is determined mostly by the political and economic forces. Any shift in the political and economic spectrum of a language, changes the social status and for that reason the linguistic
balance of languages. For instance, French was considered the language of diplomacy, but today English has replaced it. In some formerly colonized countries where French was the official language, for example Rwanda, it is being replaced by English. Though, these switches are apparently considered for linguistic access, there are historical factors from the colonization era at play behind these language policy changes.

Social status cannot only change the balance among two or more languages and the speakers of them; it also can change the balance of a conversation among different groups or individuals of the same language. How social status of a language can affect a daily conversation between individuals, a historical example would clarify.

Nearly 1450 years ago (six years before the mission of Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him) Umar ibn Khattab, who later became the second caliph of Muslims, was working for his father: caretaking the cattle and animals of burden in the suburbs of his native city, Makkah. They also possessed a water-well which they used to water their animals. One day a caravan was passing by and they reached Umar to ask for his permission to water their animals at his water-well. Following is the English translation version of the conversation:

The Conversation

Caravan head: (with a rough tone of voice) May we water our animals at your well, young man?

Umar: Who are you people?

Caravan head: We belong to the tribe of Khuzaah.

Umar: (after a moment of silence) What if I refuse?
Caravan head: (after a moment of silence) Then we will go back in peace; hoping to find what we want with some noble person.

Umar: A noble man gives for a gentle approach what he denies for a rough one. When we have finished and begun to move our camels away, you may bring in your camels. You are most welcome.

Caravan head: May I know the name of the generous young man?

Umar: Umar….. Umar ibn Al-Khattab.

Caravan head: Of which clan of Quraysh?

Umar: And you know that I belong to the Quraysh?

Caravan head: The Qurayshi looks cannot be mistaken.

Umar: I belong to the clan of Adiyy.

Caravan head: Kind and noble people.

The English translation of the conversation is taken from the subtitle of a part of the movie series produced to film the biography of Umar Ibn Khattab –the second caliph of Islam– who is recorded in the history of Islam as the most just ruler because of his welfare social system, social equity, and social justice.

The real conversation originally took place in Arabic language and in the Arab peninsula –a region called Makkah (Mecca) what is now part of Saudi Arabia. Then and now, the region has been a tribal society where people live in different tribes. Every society has different variable and evolving factors –among them language- that determine their social status from time to time. Some of the factors are determined within a society, while others can be determined in a relative manner, in comparison, to other society’s factors and the nature of relationship with them. In a
tribal society, the social status of a tribe and its members profoundly depend on few prominent factors, for example, number of tribesmen, wealth, territorial possession, history, and influence on and relationship with other tribes.

The conversation between Umar and the caravan head can be analyzed in two ways – between two individuals based on their personalities and linguistic competence, and between their social statuses that in this case is their tribal associations.

Though personalities and social status go together and cannot be separated in a real life situations, for sake of this analysis I would like the readers’ attention towards the distinction I would like to draw between the two.

**Individual**

The caravan head placed his request for water with a rough tone of voice “*May we water our animals at your well, young man?*” It can be seen that the question is a close-ended one that can be easily answered with one word YES or NO, but Umar responds with a counter question “*Who are you people?*” The caravan head replies the question by introducing his tribal association. Afterwards, Umar again poses a question “*What if I refuse?*” That still does not answer their request for water. The caravan head might then realize that the young man did not like his way of requesting water. That is why he takes a moment of silence and then replies to Umar’s “*What if I refuse?*” question with a soft voice that includes the wisdom words “Peace” and “Noble man”. It is then that Umar first explains what actually was not pleasing to him in the request and afterwards grants his permission and welcomes them.
Social (Tribal) Status

If we consider the social statuses of the two individuals’ tribes at the time, without any hesitation it is evident that Quraysh (Umar’s tribe) had much superior status both political and economic over Khuzaah (caravan head’s tribe). Quraysh was the host tribe that took care of Makkah (Mecca) –the center of pilgrimage where all tribes of the Arab peninsula had placed their idols. Thus, Quraysh had far great influence on almost all other tribes including Khuzaah. Third, Quraysh was a merchant tribe enriched with wealth that controlled the financial system of the whole peninsula.

In this conversation, the caravan head starts the conversation with a rough tone of voice most probably because he considers Umar a laborer from an inferior tribe. It had been a routine practice that inferior tribes’ members were serving the superior tribes; thus, they were looked down upon. It is also possible that the caravan head might have sensed they had outnumbered Umar so a rough request would grant them a swift access to the water-well. But the moment Umar speaks out, the accent of his language indicates that he is a member of Quraysh tribe. That is why the caravan head later in the conversation directly asks about his clan not the tribe when he poses the question “Of which clan of Quraysh?” In response Umar enquires, “And you know that I belong to the Quraysh.” To which the caravan head replies, “The Qurayshi looks cannot be mistaken.” After knowing Umar is a Qurayshi, the caravan head’s tone of voice and choice of words changed. And as Umar observes an acceptable attitude from caravan head, he permits them to water their animals.

The reason behind bringing this story lies in a few elements. First, it is authentically famous in the history of Islam. Second many individuals have read/heard the story and are well-aware of its context. Third, the conversation has taken place between two tribesmen from two
different tribes and different social tribal contexts that is similar to the tribal society where I come from. Fourth, the narration of stories from the civilizations rather than a western one can serve as an initial introduction for those who might have interest in learning about other communities, their languages, cultures, values, and social contexts to analyze and assess the universality of humanity despite all the diversity and differences.

**Language, Violence, and Media**

Discrimination and intolerance towards languages and/or their speakers is a sort of structural violence that is mostly caused by politically and/or economically influenced factors outside of a language. When discrimination is expressed or promoted against a language, the speakers of that particular language get transgressed because of their cultural and social identity related values attached with their language(s). In such cases when the sentiments of the people are hurt, they become defensive and react towards such prejudice with similar or stronger attitude/behavior that create a cycle of violence against languages and their speakers. Moreover, the same political and/or economic factors formulate concepts among the people which support the notions that a certain language or variety of the language is superior to another language or variety.

Languages are not static; they are dynamic and ever evolving with the changes that occur in cultures, people, communities, environments, and the contexts in which the languages exist. Change happens with the elapse of time, with the interaction of people, their attitudes, their values, their beliefs, with the emergence of conflicts, with the advancement of technology, and with the discoveries and expansion of the universe. Languages and the varieties of languages are evidence of the ever changing and adapting human being and their societies. The existence of
various languages and varieties create the diversity that is the universal asset essential for human growth. However, in times this linguistic diversity has been proven a liability.

During ethnic conflicts, especially between linguistically divided groups, differences become prominent. It is then that linguistic diversity turns into a liability. For instance, during the 1992 civil war in Afghanistan, certain undocumented and unrecorded stories have been narrated in which language or a variety of language was used to identify ethnic association of individuals prior to carrying out any assassination. Unfortunately, language was part of the hundreds of thousands of homicides and other incidents of violence in the past almost four decades of conflict and violence in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the technological advancement of the 20th century, and the rise of media as a new power entity has shifted the power dynamics in the world. Politically influenced media sources concentrated on promoting social and cultural differences that could assist reaching the political and economic aims of a specific group or organization. In this process, misguiding and deliberately manipulated information has been included in the broadcasts that give rise to various kinds of stereotypes.

The major risk of the stereotyping is formation of assumptions that contradict the facts and realities of other people, their cultures, values, beliefs, and their ways of life. When accurate information is not conveyed through media broadcasts, there is a strong possibility for the promotion of negative thinking and hatred that misguidedly induce individuals and groups’ attitudes that result in different sorts of violence –including linguistic violence.

Scientifically, any data input to the human brain can generate physiological changes which commonly take place in the subconscious. Dimitri Christakis, a pediatrician researcher, in his TEDtalk (2011) refers to a research conducted on a “one-day” old infant. The infant is
exposed to two different types of music –Mozart and Stravinsky namely. He maintains, in the conclusion of the experiment, that a change in the breathing pattern of the infant was detected. The point he makes is that even at a “one-day” old life, there is a physiological change/reaction towards what a human brain receives.

At the age of one-day, a human being does not develop the cognitive linguistic capacity to recognize sounds or messages and decode a meaningful message out of them. Eventually, once the linguistic abilities and cognitive capacities of a human gradually start developing, it is explicable that the effects of data input –and for that reason language and words- can be higher and stronger. Therefore, language and words not only generate physiological reactions, but also impact the brain that in turns plays out in the attitude and behavior of individuals.

Reflecting on Dimitri Christakis’ experiment on an infant and music, which is a great source of entertainment in the present times; I believe it is equally essential that the effects of media also be scrutinized. In 2014, Paola Bossola, producer and writer, produced a documentary film titled “The Effects of Media Violence and the Need for more Pro-Social Programming” that analyzes the effects of violent images, publicized on the mass media and entertainment industry, on the society and people’s perception of reality.

The day-by-day growing volume of violence on the media persuaded two enormous organizations, The American Psychiatric Association and The American Academy of Pediatrics, to express their concerns in the following statements:

*By the age of 18, a US youth will have seen 16000 simulated murders and 200000 acts of violence.*

The American Psychiatric Association
Gun violence has tripled in PG-13 movies from 1985 to 2014.

The official Journal of
The American Academy of Pediatrics

In the Paola Bossola’s (2014) documentary, Prof. Albert Bandura, from Stanford University, narrates an experiment he conducted in 1961 on children to test their aggression through the aggressive modeling based on observational learning. Prof. Bandura found that, “the children exposed to the aggressive model were more likely to act in physically and verbally aggressive ways than those who were not exposed to the aggressive model.” The experiment also concluded that, “observing adult behavior influences a child to think that this type of behavior is acceptable, thus weakening the child’s aggressive inhibitions.” Prof. Bandura further observes that, “Reduced aggressive inhibition in children means that they are more likely to respond to future situations with more aggression.” Moreover, Prof. Bandura maintains that, “Exposure to violence produces effects in four ways”

First, accident teaching: People watch different forms of violence. They can learn how to do it.

The Second, it can reduce restraints over pre-existing aggression. And this is why most of the violence is, really, captain virtue doing most of the killings. It is really the good guys trying to take over evil by violent means. And so if you have the agents of society being the perpetrators of the violence, then you are legitimizing it.

The third, heavy violence tends to desensitize people to cruelty and so on. It habituates you to the violence and so you no longer moved to do something about it.
And the fourth effect is it shapes the images of reality. In our daily lives, we follow routines. We go to same places, we go to same work place and most of our view of reality is based on the media. And these are places that we don’t go to; we may have very limited information. So our beliefs and attitudes about different places, different people, different societies, are heavily influenced by mass media.

Media is a tool that can be used in constructive or destructive ways. Henceforth, it is obvious that media can impact a society both directly and indirectly. To transform the role of the media into a constructive one, there are two aspects of media, I believe, that should be addressed. First, media’s main goals should be diverted from “name and fame” to “serve and deserve”. Human welfare must be the core of all media programs and broadcasts. Second, media must become realistic and reflect the actual picture of a society even if they are violent incidents that occur in the real life.

According to Prof. Bandura only 10% of real life incidents are violent, while on the media 77% of the incidents are violent. In addition, he maintains that “Most of the crimes on TV are the crimes of greed and personal failing, whereas in society most of the crimes are resulting from poverty and failing of the social system.” (Paola Bossola’s, Documentary, 2014).

With a 67% exaggeration, the 77% violent programs on media portray a very opposite and unrealistic picture of the real world. Disproportionate portrayal of violence on the media manipulates people’s perceptions of reality in a negative and unrealistic manner.

When media misrepresent or over-present the real life conditions, situations, incidents, and facts, they influence our decision-making abilities. Predicting future, based on the evaluation
of the current circumstances, is a part of decision-making process. When media does not portray the real picture of a society, the outcomes of the current circumstances are misevaluated which leads to misprediction of the future that in turn leads to making poor decisions about our purpose.

Eventually, I acquiesce with Prof. Bandura’s conclusion that “as presented by the media, people begin to believe that greed and personal failings are the factors of violence. As a result, they support more strict laws and legal penalties. On the contrary, if people’s perceptions of reality accord with that of the real world, they will demand reforms in the social policies.” Likewise, they will participate and endorse movements and organizations such as civil societies that support and fight for the human welfare and human rights. The quality of social change actually depends on the people’s perceptions of reality.

**Now What?**

In the current time where the human race seems divided into various physical and psychological boundaries under different classifications, and the entire world appears to be filled with fear, anger, violence and its consequences, there are groups of individuals who strongly believe in the innate compassion of human species and the capacity for peace and harmony. These individuals direct human attentions towards positive thinking in the midst of negativity generated out of conflicts, violence, and despair.

World War One and the deteriorating world economy that gradually resulted in the Great Depression provided an opportunity for the Nonviolent Movements to transition into their historical phase of implementation. Nonviolent Movements encouraged social change through nonviolent strategies such as civil disobedience, political and economic noncooperation, and
what Mahatma Gandhi called Satyagraha – meaning holding onto truth. One of the fundamental components of Nonviolent Movements was the use of nonviolent language that fostered nonviolent communication. Eventually, the nonviolent movements specifically in India and later in South Africa succeeded to such a great extent that they led to the independence of the countries after The Second World War.

Likewise, after the end of the cold war in the early 1990s, and the emergence of major world violent conflicts, according to Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, (2013) the emphasis of psychology started shifting from suffering and misfortune to what makes life meaningful. Thus, a new field “Positive Psychology” came into existence. Positive psychology focuses its research on the constructive topics that deal with happiness and meaningfulness. Moreover, positive psychology discusses constructive and positive thinking that promote evaluation of life in terms of happy life and meaningful life.

**Happy Life, Meaningful Life, and Language**

As stated before, human beings have their material and psychological needs. Fulfilling those needs is essential for humans to survive as individuals and as a species. Human needs and wants are innumerable and ever growing, but resources are limited and scarce. These resources are possessed at varying proportions by individuals, groups, communities, organizations, states, and nations. However, the scarcity of means persuades human beings; on one hand, to prioritize their needs on a scale of the most essential to the least essential; on the other hand, to participate in the race for power and authority that leads to possession of resources and fulfillment of needs. During the course of these processes, existing relationships are impacted and new relationships
come into existence, that ultimately drive formation of new communities and groups of people. These groups and communities share the same or similar goals, interests, and objectives.

Possession and allocation of resources originate a power and dependency relationship at interpersonal, inter-group, intra-group, national, and international levels. Power and dependency also lead to an endless struggle and competition. When any need is addressed, it brings happiness to humans. The evaluation of the accumulative amount of happiness determines the overall life satisfaction. However, with the development of positive psychology, social scientists and psychologists established grounds for differentiating between a happy life and a meaningful life.

In their research –published by The Journal of Positive Psychology- Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, (2013) explain life in the light of two important concepts –happiness and meaning. In this process they describe the two types of happy life and the two component of meaningful life. This way they draw distinctions between happy life and meaningful life.

The authors explain:

*Being happy and finding life meaningful overlap, but there are important differences. A large survey revealed multiple differing predictors of happiness .... and meaningfulness .... Satisfying one’s needs and wants increased happiness but was largely irrelevant to meaningfulness. Happiness was largely present oriented, whereas meaningfulness involves integrating past, present, and future.... Happiness was linked to being a taker rather than a giver, whereas meaningfulness went with being a giver rather than a taker.* (p. 505)

Despite the fact that the authors indicate that a happy life and a meaningful life are intertwined, they concentrated on the measures that differentiate one from the other. They
explain two ways in which happiness is measured. The first way is termed as “Affect Balance” which designates “Having more pleasant than unpleasant emotional states”. The second is termed as “Life Satisfaction” which, according to the authors, “Goes beyond momentary feelings to invoke an integrative, evaluative assessment of one’s life as a whole”.

However, what is of high attention to the subject matter of this thesis is the linguistic formation of meaning under the umbrella of culture and time. At a theoretical level, meaning is explained as, “Meaning can be a purely symbolic or linguistic reality” (Baumeister et al., 2013). Likewise, a meaningful life is referred to having purpose and values. It is then that the distinction between happy life and meaningful life comes into the focus.

In terms of time, happiness is more related to the fulfilment of needs and the satisfactory feelings derived out of it at the present. But a meaningful life is concerned with thinking thoroughly about past, present, and future. It is understandable that if fulfilled needs generate positive feeling, unfulfilled needs generate negative feeling.

Both essential components of a meaningful life (purpose and values) carry meanings. Meanings are culturally defined within communities and over a span of time. It is then the language that performs the job of a carrier, transmitting the meaning from one generation to the next. As Baumeister (2013) states, “If happiness is natural, meaningfulness may depend on culture. All known cultures use language which enables them to use meaning and communicate them” (p.506). They further maintain, “Large set of concepts underlying language are built up over many generations and each new person comes to learn most of these meaning from the group” (p.506).
Taking into account the importance of time (past, present, and future), Figure 2 indicates my understanding – based on Baumeister’s approach - of how meaning is transmitted to values and purpose.

Referring to Figure 2, values take meaning from the past, while purpose mostly takes its meaning from the future because they are meant for future happenings. In both scenarios, language plays the role of the carrier that carries the meaning. The meaning in our present values is actually transmitted from the former generations through language that then drives our decision-making process for determining our future purposes. Therefore, communication transmitted by language should be evaluated in order to inhibit the transmission of violence, stereotypes, and unrealistic manipulations to the future generations.

**Figure 2: Transmission of Meaning**
Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

“Speak any language, Turkish, Greek, Persian, Arabic, but always speak
with love.”

Rumi

In his book “Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life”, Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, a leading practitioner of nonviolence and scholar of nonviolent communication, observes, “While studying the factors that affect our ability to stay compassionate, I was struck by the crucial role of language and our use of words……. While we may not consider the way we talk to be violent, words often lead to hurt and pain, whether for others or ourselves” (p. 2, 3)

Dr. Rosenberg states that compassion is an innate nature of human beings that allows some people to stay compassionate in the midst of hard circumstances. However, he poses the question regarding what disconnects us from this innate nature of being compassionate under certain circumstances and makes us behave violently.

Dr. Rosenberg identifies the approach “To give from the heart and receive from the heart” while communicating with the “Nonviolent Communication”. Nonviolent Communication connects people with each other in a manner that enhances compassion. Once people behave with compassion, a relationship is established among them that then facilitates an environment that leads to understanding each other’s needs and feelings.

Dr. Rosenberg explains that there are four components in the process of nonviolent communication. They are: Observations, Feelings, Needs, and Requests. According to him, first, we observe the concrete actions that affect our well-being. Next, we check our feelings in relation to what we observe. Afterwards, we evaluate our needs, values, desires that create our feelings. Finally, we request concrete actions that enrich our lives (p. 7). In addition, the initial
challenge Dr. Rosenberg refers to is “to be able to articulate this observation without introducing any judgment”. (p.6)

Every communication has two parts –expressing and receiving. The four components of nonviolent communication are equally applicable in both of the parts –expressing and receiving. Dr. Rosenberg explains the two parts with specific features, “The two parts of NVC: One, expressing honestly through the four components; two, receiving empathically through the four components” (p.7). Therefore, the two essential features “Honesty and Empathy” respectively in expressing and receiving are clearly indicative of the effectiveness of a communication.

However, the success and failure of expressing and receiving is interlinked with the needs. Specifically, when people’s needs are thwarted, they lead to conflicts. Nonviolent communication helps transform those conflicts in a peaceful manner. Nonetheless, untransformed conflicts lead to all sorts of violence. Every violent incident carries, to a great extent, violent communications, or hate speech. Hate speech is the language of violence, but nonviolence is the language of peace and conflict transformation. Hate speech is produced out of the anger, one person or group feels because of injustice happened to them in the shape of unfulfilled needs.

Dr. Scilla Elworthy, a famous peace builder, author, and activist once said,

Wherever there is injustice there is anger. But anger is like gasoline, and if you spray it around and somebody lights a match, you have got an inferno. But anger as an engine -- in an engine -- is powerful. If we can put our anger inside an engine, it can drive us forward, it can get us through the dreadful moments and it can give us real inner power. (Elworthy, TEDtalk, 2012)
In his book “The Revival of Religious Learnings”, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (a Muslim jurist, philosopher, and theologian from the 11th century) discusses anger, hatred, and envy altogether with a prescriptive approach that enhances awareness and suggests ways on how to cope with anger. Imam Al-Ghazali (May God be pleased with him) describes anger as a weapon that grows in all people which defends them from harm. He, however, explains “If anger becomes excessive, it becomes harmful as it clouds the intellect. On the contrary, if anger is deficient, it leads to cowardice. The best state of anger is moderation when anger is under the command of intellect”.

Imam Al-Ghazali describes five factors that cause anger; they are: pride, vanity, greed, blame and fault-finding, and mockery. Based on anger and please, Al-Ghazali classifies people into four different categories.

1. Hard to anger  
   Hard to please
2. Easy to anger  
   Easy to please
3. Easy to anger  
   Hard to please
4. Hard to anger  
   Easy to please

Imam Ghazali refers to number three that is “Easy to anger, Hard to please” as the worst category; and number four that is “Hard to anger, Easy to please” as the best category of the people. He further states that “Best character occurs when one swallows his anger by choice”. Conversely, if anger is suppressed by weakness, it turns into hatred. Thus, hatred is considered a product of anger that then generates violence, malicious joy, harmful talk, cutting off family ties, and envy.
When it comes to anger and people, Dr. Scilla Elworthy advises in her TEDtalk (2012) that,

_In order to develop a dialogue for change we have to deal with our anger. It is okay to be angry with the thing….. but it is hopeless to be angry with the people. They are human beings just like us. And they are doing what they think is best. And that is the basis on which we have to talk with them._

Explaining the context, Dr. Elworthy further continues,

_I learned this in my work with nuclear weapon policy-makers. Because at the beginning I was so outraged at the dangers they were exposing us to that I just wanted to argue and blame and make them wrong; totally ineffective._

Al-Ghazali’s standing on argument is, “Do not argue with anyone regarding any issue. The evil of argumentation is greater than its benefit” (inkofknowledge, 2015). He further describes arguing as a type of ignorance. He maintains, “Know that ignorance is a disease of the heart. And it is of four types: the first is: someone whose arguing is with the intent to put others down rather than to improve themselves” (inkofknowledge, 2015).

In his book “Everybody Wins: The Guide to Solving Conflicts without Arguing”, Dr. Gary Chapman says, “Conflict is inevitable, but argument is a choice….. Any victory won by means of an argument will be short lived. The loser will eventually come back with a new argument (or an old argument restated)” (Chapman, 2006, p.9).

Nonviolent communication is not just limited to verbal language. Nonviolent communication’s implications are broader than just being oral/verbal utterances. Certain body
language postures and gestures convey nonviolent messages that can mitigate conflict and violence and result in saving many lives in certain grave situations.

For instance, Dr. Scilla Elworthy narrates:

*U.S. lieutenant colonel called Chris Hughes. And he was leading his men down the streets of Najaf -- in Iraq actually -- and suddenly people were pouring out of the houses on either side of the road, screaming, yelling, furiously angry, and surrounded these very young troops who were completely terrified, did not know what was going on, could not speak Arabic. And Chris Hughes strode into the middle of the throng with his weapon above his head, pointing at the ground, and he said, "Kneel." And these huge soldiers with their backpacks and their body armor, wobbled to the ground. And complete silence fell. And after about two minutes, everybody moved aside and went home.*

(Elworthy, TEDtalk, 2012)

From the above narration, it is quite obvious, that a simple gesture “Kneeling” ended a very tense situation that could have cost many innocent lives. Similarly, the application of nonviolent communication is not limited to a context with conflict. In fact, it is a compassionate way of communication that can be adapted in other contexts related to our daily live as Dr. Rosenberg describes,

*Some people use NVC to respond compassionately to themselves, some to create greater depth in their personal relationships, and still others to build effective relationships at work or in the political arena. Worldwide, NVC is used to mediate disputes and conflicts at all levels.* (2003, p.12)
Components of NVC

The affectivity and efficiency of nonviolent communication is gravely dependent on the awareness of a number of aspects of NVC and its components that lead to compassionate communication that then connects people to each other. Dr. Rosenberg describes, “NVC fosters deep listening, respect, and empathy and engenders a mutual desire to give from the heart” (p.12).

The four characteristics –deep listening, respect, empathy, and to give from the heart- are the key to the practice of the NVC. Developing the skills to be deep listener (active listener) is the first key to receiving from the heart.

Jack Zimmerman and Virginia Coyle (1991), comments on the nature of people’s listening that:

*Have you ever noticed what happens when you really listen to another person, listen without reaction or even intending to respond? Most of us listen that way only rarely. In ordinary conversation or group discussion our response usually begins to form well before the others are finished speaking.* (p.79)

I believe that without acquiring the skills for deep listening (active listening), one cannot acquire the latter three characteristics (respect, empathy, and desire to give from the heart) necessary for NVC affectivity. Deep listening is an act of expressing compassion that contains respect, empathy, and the desire to give from the heart.

I would also say that the affectivity of the four components of NCV depends on deep listening and for that reason on compassion. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of...
nonviolent communication and its four components, I would like to touch upon the fundamental aspects of NVC components that are related to this thesis.

Figure 3 bellow illustrates the four components of NVC in the shape of a cycle.

![Figure 3: Component of NVC](image)

**Observe**

Dr. Rosenberg enlists a few factors in communication that block compassion. They are: 1) moralistic judgments that imply the idea of wrongness and badness of others based on our values; 2) making comparison that diverts our attention to the differences among individuals. When we pay attention to differences, then we lose the ability to concentrate on finding common ground between us and others that leads to connecting with them. Once we develop such an attitude, it affects the first component of NVC that is OBSERVE. Observing without evaluation and judgment is crucial in describing what actually occurs.

**Feel**
Once we learn how to observe without evaluation and judgment, we will be able to describe our feelings. To me feeling is the most challenging component of NVC, because initially it is difficult to identify the feelings and then comes the language limitations to describe the feeling as they are. Another challenging aspect of feeling is the cost of expression and/or non-expression. When emotions are high, particularly when a negative incident occurs or violence is reported on media, the intellect gets clouded and thus the ability to think properly is affected.

For instance, if we receive a negative message, according to Dr. Rosenberg, we act in one of the four ways: 1) Blame ourselves, 2) Blame others, 3) Sense our own feelings and needs, and 4) Sense other’s feelings and needs. Blaming self or others actually stems from not taking responsibility for our feelings; however, when we take responsibility, our consideration changes on paying attention to our feelings and needs and that of others.

**Need**

Needs and feelings are quite closely related. As discussed earlier, when a need is thwarted, individuals develop anger. And anger is a type of feeling that, if not addressed in time and with wisdom, can cause negative response both verbally and attitudinally. Because feelings and needs are natural and interconnected and influence human attitudes and behaviors, they have been a central theme of the nonviolence studies. An intrinsic awareness to identify, describe, and express feelings and needs is an essential life skill that every individual should acquire and struggle to spread by teaching to others.

Needs have mutual relationships with feelings, because, on one hand, it is mostly our needs that give roots to our feelings; on the other hand, our feelings and the way they are
expressed can impact our needs. When needs are fulfilled or not fulfilled, positive and negative feelings are generated. Feelings play out in our attitude and verbal utterances that impact our current needs to be either met or not; and also new needs can emerge. For example, if due to any unfulfilled need, one’s emotional state persuade them to react violently, new needs can emerge as the consequences of the violent behavioral and verbal responses.

Request

The last component of nonviolent communication is to make a request. In the course of communication, after being through the first three components (observe, feel, and need), it is always the turn for placing a request. Requests are made to let others know what we want from them. In most requests, we ask others for specific actions that fulfill our need(s) that then enrich our lives. Effective requests are frequently made through the positive use of language. However, not always and not everyone uses a positive language to place their requests.

A lot of times, our needs are not fulfilled due to the use of negative language. In most cases when a negative language is used while placing a request, they trigger resistance that either result in forfeit of needs or postponement of fulfilling them. Referring to Umar and caravan head conversation, we can observe that a negative language (or intonation) impacted the conversation and the need almost remained unaddressed. But by the time a positive language was used, the conversation succeeded and the need was addressed and fulfilled.

Language is the medium that explains the need among parties. If nonviolent communication is used, from the very beginning the conflict transformation is in action, but if rough language is used, there is a higher risk of the conflict to move towards violence rather than transformation. In the conversation between Umar and the caravan head, it is observable that
Umar did not like the caravan head’s rough tone of voice in placing his request that almost moved the conversation towards refusing and nonfulfillment of their water need.

Therefore, nonviolent communication is not only a method of communication; I would prefer to call it the natural way of communication. I would like to reiterate Rumi’s quote that “Speak any language, Turkish, Greek, Persian, Arabic, but always speak with love.” And I would like to add to it by saying that “Speak any language, but communicate with nonviolent communication”.

Conclusion

It is never late to ask yourself “Am I ready to change my life? Am I ready to change myself?” However old we are, whatever we went through, it is always possible to reborn. If each day is a copy of the last one, what a pity! Every breath is a chance to reborn. But to reborn into a new life, you have to die before dying.

Shams Tabrizi

Language is a powerful human property that when recorded stays alive for centuries and civilizations to come. Despite the fact that Shams Tabrizi wrote in Persian in 13th century, the thoughtfulness of his speech is so universal that even after translation into other languages, the wisdom transfers and is not lost in translations. Language is a medium of communication as well as a medium that carries ideas, beliefs, thoughts, values, and cultures from one generation to another.

Histories and stories are recorded by the power of language. Language evokes with the changes that occur to people, their culture, environment, and political and economic statuses.
However, on the same line, language brings change in people and society. Change happens either naturally or by the people’s interactions with each other and environment around them over a span of time. However, the most important aspect of change is to bring awareness in people aligned with life realities.

Yes, one word “AWARENESS” is the success key to deal with and cope with the entire messy world surrounding us. If we, on an individual level, take the responsibility of developing an awareness of ourselves, our needs, our feelings, our attitudes, our behaviors, our languages, our values, our personalities, our cultures, our abilities, our capacities, our environments, our sources and resources, our relationships, our understandings, our knowledge, our ignorance, our limitations, our identity, our beliefs, our goals, our objectives, our ways of lives, and etc. I am sure that we can actually develop an awareness of others. We live in a world of relativity where our words, our actions, our experiences, and finally our presence leave impacts and imprints on others as well as ourselves.

According to Shams Tabrizi’s quote above, change begins with an individual’s conscious intention to do so to change self and life. We have to raise our awareness to the level that can help us unlearn the negatives and relearn the positives. In the course of enhancing awareness, one’s language should be considered to adapt the most attention. Language is a carrier; it can carry anything we want it to carry. Tabrizi also implies that we should not halt bringing change – to self and life- by bounding it to time, age, or our past life experiences. Each day can be a starting day for change. Tabrizi believes in the individuals’ collective change. Mahatma Gandhi said, “Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”
Change brings knowledge and understanding. Knowledge must play out in our actions. Imam Al-Ghazali says, “Knowledge without action is wastefulness, and action without knowledge is foolishness”.

Mahatma Gandhi also said:

“Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive because your words become your behavior. Keep your behavior positive because your behavior becomes your habits. Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny.”

I would like to conclude with reiterating my intention that diversity is a human asset and languages are what bond us together. Conflicts are inevitable but with a positive set of mind we can turn them into an energy that flourishes our humanity and coexistence. We must step out of our comfort zones and we must break our personal biases in order to create an atmosphere that promotes diversity, coexistence, hope, and peace.

We are responsible for our individual transformation that then leads to our collective transformation. On an individual level, we need to transform our language, emotions, beliefs, and thoughts that control our attitude. We should also transform our ways of receiving information that impacts our perception of others and the world. Consequently, we will be able to transform our communities, environment, and the structure and systems that run our collective affairs.

We should open our hearts to accept the diversity of humanity – among them linguistic diversity. Accepting diversity and what is different from us paves the way to coexistence that
leads to peace and harmony. To promote peace and harmony, we have to make our languages peaceful so that they can foster peace. I would like to end with Rumi’s quote that:

“Those with open hearts will always have open hands.”

References


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