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DEVELOPMENT BUZZWORDS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

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ANNOTATION

The paper continues to analyze the language of international organizations, its development and importance of its correct understanding in the course of partners' communication with different languages, which requires translators to be more attentive to avoid discrepancies and confusions while translating dialogues or presentations at some official meetings. The topicality of such research is obvious. Thus in the article the authors decided to discuss a very interesting phenomenon of buzzwords and 'plastic' words as a distinct class of words. For that, they reviewed key publications on development discourse and eleven characteristics of development buzzwords and plastic words were identified and discussed. An attempt was made at classification of development buzzwords into concepts and decorative elements. The international organizations with their activities try to help further promotion of world economies and improve the life of countries in need. Consistent studies of development terms and their deconstruction seem promising and, as a result, might contribute to better understanding and perception of buzzwords in the countries receiving a development assistance.

Key words: development, Development speak, buzzwords, plastic words, jargon, promotion, development concepts, characteristics, classification, international organizations.

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ТАРАҚҚИЁТ ЛЕКСИКОНИНИНГ ХУСУСИЯТЛАРИ

АННОТАЦИЯ

Мақолада халқаро ташкилотлар тили, унинг ривожланиши ва ҳамкорларнинг турли тилларда ўзаро алоқалари жараёнида тўғри тушунишнинг аҳамияти таҳлил қилинган. Таржимонлардан расмий учрашувларда суҳбатлар ёки тақдимотларни таржима қилиш жараёнида келишмовчиликлар ва чалкашликларга йўл қўймасликлари учун кўпроқ эътибор талаб қилади. Шубҳасиз, бундай тадқиқотлар долзарб ҳисобланади.

Мақолада сўзларнинг алоҳида гуруҳи ва жуда қизик бўлган "базвордс" (маҳсус сўзлар) муҳокама қилинади. Бунинг учун дискурс юзасидан асосий нашрлар кўриб чиқилди, пластик сўзларнинг ўн битта хусусияти аниқланди ва таҳлил қилинди. Сўзлар концепциялар ва декоратив элементлар сифатида таснифланди. Халқаро ташкилотлар ўз фаолияти билан жаҳон иқтисодиётини янада ривожлантиришга ва муҳтож мамлакатлар ҳаётини яхшилашга ёрдам беришга ҳаракат қилмоқдалар. Тараққий этаётган тилларни изчил ўрганиш ва уларнинг деконструкцияси истиқболда ушбу мамлакатларда мазкур лексикани яхшироқ тушуниш ва идрок этишда муҳим аҳамият касб этади.

Калит сўзлар: тараққиёт, тараққиёт тили, шов-шув сўзлар, пластик сўзлар, жаргон, тарғибот, ривожланиш концепцияси, хусусият, тасниф, халқаро ташкилотлар.

INTRODUCTION

‘That buzzing noise means something. You don’t get a buzzing noise like that, just buzzing and buzzing, without its meaning something.’

(A. A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, 1926)

Previously, we focused on evolution of Developmentspeak, a peculiar dialect of the development industry, since 1940s. Since then, thanks to international development organizations and their experts, a variety of concepts emerged, and most of them are so vague and ambiguous that lay people find it difficult to understand them. What is worse, this development jargon is often misinterpreted, even by the English speakers, let alone those who are guided by translations of this lexicon into other languages. There is a risk to stumble across hidden and deliberately distorted meanings of development buzzwords, and that is why it is so important to know their characteristics and be able to demystify and deconstruct the development lexicon.

The Developmentspeak concepts were best explained in the famous collections of articles – “The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power” (2009; first published in 1992) edited by W. Sachs, and “Deconstructing Development Discourse: Buzzwords and Fuzzwords” (2010) edited by A. Cornwall and D. Eade. Essential characteristics of Developmentspeak elements were outlined by U. Poerksen in “Plastic words: the tyranny of a modular language” (1995). The following is an attempt at a classification of *Developmentspeak* vocabulary and an overview of its key concepts, their ulterior meanings and implications.

METHODS

We reviewed the three above publications, as well as some other, more recent, articles on development discourse to identify the main characteristics of development buzzwords. Also, an attempt was made at classification of this lexicon.

RESULTS

Eleven key characteristics of development buzzwords were identified and explained. Where applicable, different shades of their meanings were given. A classification of development buzzwords was proposed. Further studies of *Developmentspeak* terms and their deconstruction seem promising and might contribute to better understanding and perception of buzzwords in the countries receiving development assistance.

DISCUSSION

W. Sachs, a research director, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Germany, said that ‘development is much more than just a socio-economic endeavour; it is a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions’ [Sachs, 2009; xvi]. These perceptions, myths, and passions are sustained by development ‘buzzwords’ [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 31].

Buzzwords, fuzzwords and catchphrases represent the main concepts used by the international development organizations. U. Poerksen, a German linguist, labels them as amorphous ‘plastic words’ and ‘amoeba words’ [Poerksen, 1995; 26], and H.-J. Schmid, a German Professor of Modern English Linguistics, calls similar vocabulary ‘shell nouns’ because they can “contain or encapsulate conceptual content” [Schmid, 2018; 111]. Linguists might call them connotative stereotypes [Poerksen, 1995; xvii]. They are also referred to as ‘vogue words’ and ‘weasel words’ [Alfini and Chambers in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 29], e.g. harmonization, governance, resilience, advocacy, empowerment, transparency, participation, accountability, etc.

However, none of them was the first to identify this lexicon. Back in 1946, G. Orwell detected ‘plastic’ words in his essay "Politics and the English Language." Orwell said that “political speech contained ever fewer words that were carefully chosen for their meaning but ever more phrases tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated henhouse” [Poerksen, 1995; xii]. Later, in 1949, George Orwell created ‘Newspeak’, a fictitious language with restricted vocabulary, in his dystopia “Nineteen Eighty-Four”. Most of its characteristics are similar to those of DevelopmentSpeak.

One can find several definitions of a buzzword in the Internet [Alfini and Chambers in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 29], and all these definitions are equally applicable to the development buzzwords:

- ‘a word or phrase that takes on added significance through repetition or special usage’. – In fact, the originally useful development terms and concepts are overused, become devalued and often turn into ‘hollow jargon’ [Roth and Franks, 1997; 280];
- ‘a word or phrase connected with a specialized field or group that usually sounds important and is used primarily to impress lay persons’. – In development theory and practice, buzzwords are connected to the development industry and its army of development experts.
- ‘a stylish or trendy word or phrase’. – Buzzwords get their ‘buzz’ from being the words that define what is in vogue. Some development buzzwords dip in and out of fashion, some remain in vogue for decades, others appear briefly and then become submerged for years until they resurface [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 3].

The words and expressions that dominate the development discourse keep changing [Alfini and Chambers in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 29]. A discourse is the ‘ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena’ [Hajer in Cornwall and Brock, 2005; 1046]. However, the term ‘discourse’ has become so overused in development studies that it has itself become a buzzword, and is often taken as ‘monolithic, totalizing’ and ‘impossible to change’ [Cornwall and Brock, 2005; 1046]. As explained in the third definition above, some words remain in use year after year, like poverty, gender, sustainable, and livelihood. Others emerge and then fade, like scheme and integrated rural development. Others signal major shifts in ideology, policy, and reality, like liberalization, privatization, and globalization [Alfini and Chambers in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 29]. These words seem to be a new type, and such ‘newcomers’ were evidently introduced in each epoch. The words in vogue in the 1930s are not the type in vogue in the 1990s [Poerksen, 1995; 103].

In recent decades, the buzzwords in English were mostly coined in Washington, DC and then disseminated globally as instruments of power [Alfini and Chambers in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 29-30]. They are associated with influential international organizations [Mintzberg and Srinivas, 2010; 49], e.g. World Bank, OECD, UN agencies, etc. because the development agencies are in eternal search for attractive catchphrases and magic bullets that could fast-track social transformation [Batliwala in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 113].

Key development concepts were outlined in “The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power” [2009; first published in 1992] edited by W. Sachs, and in “Deconstructing Development Discourse: Buzzwords and Fuzzwords” (2010) edited by A. Cornwall and D. Eade. The Development Dictionary aimed to write the obituary of development. Comparing entries in both publications, A. Cornwall, a professor of anthropology and development, University of Sussex, writes that ‘It is a sign of how far, and how fast, things have changed that there is so little overlap between the words that feature there and here’. In fact, only 3 entries match – on development, poverty and participation. However, many of the entries in “The Development Dictionary” appear in modern development discourse in new guises: state as fragile states and good governance; environment as sustainability; planning as harmonization. Equality has come to be used in development more often with gender in front of it. Helping is transformed into capacity building with its own entourage of ‘experts’. International NGOs shifted from needs to rights, and progress is still mentioned regularly, although the hopes once associated with it quietly ebb [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 4].

Everyone in the development industry must use the development lexicon, because ‘Nobody trying to be influential can afford to neglect the fine art of buzzwords’. [Standing in Cornwall and Brock, 2005; 1045] They are the ‘benign-sounding terms that pepper mainstream development policy’ and their use is ‘de rigueur for anyone working in this field’ [Eade in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; viii].

Some development organizations, namely non-government organizations (NGOs), are under pressure from development agencies to adhere to certain norms and values, including adoption of development buzzwords created by multilaterals and governments. Thus, NGOs have to use new terminology for fear of losing money and being excluded from development activities because they are perceived as ‘illegitimate’ by major development organizations [Harrison, 2011; 78, 92].

Why bother?

Development practitioners may find it irrelevant to reflect on words and their meanings with regard to the real business of doing development. Why, after all, should language matter to them? As long as development practitioners are familiar with the buzzwords that need to be used in funding proposals and other documents, then definitely ‘there are more important things to be done than sit around mulling over questions of semantics?’ [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 1-2].

G. Standing states that ‘Images conveyed by simple terms are taken as reality, and words are increasingly loaded with ideological symbolism and political correctness. It may seem innocuous. It surely is not. Why make a fuss? The reason is that the terms

we use help to shape the policy agenda... The linguistic crisis is real, and is not going to go away'. [Standing in Cornwall and Brock, 2005; 1045]. And we cannot agree more with this statement. In fact, in 1876, long before this diagnosis of a crisis in language, Nietzsche noted in *Untimely Meditations* (IV, 5) that 'Everywhere language has fallen ill, and the oppression of this dreadful sickness weighs on all of human development [Nietzsche in Poerksen, 1995; 31].

N. Alfini and R. Chambers conclude that the words we use, especially buzzwords, frame our perceptions and thoughts, mindsets and actions. The language influences both policies and practice in development. Thus, studying how the language of development policy has changed can help us understand historical shifts in development thinking and priorities and reflect on where we are going in the future [Alfini and Chambers in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 30].

In addition, words matter because they can enlighten or obscure. Jargon in general, and development jargon in particular, is an example of how words can be used destructively. Jargon creates artificial barriers to understanding and thus creates obscurity [Buiter in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 223]. Thus, it is essential to decipher the development jargon make it clear for lay persons.

Another significant point is made by I. Smyth regarding frequency and clarity with which certain terms are used. Frequency is a sign of what is given priority and air space. Clarity is important because whether and how policies are developed and implemented depends on it [Smyth in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 144].

No doubt a language does matter for development. As A. Cornwall puts it, development buzzwords are 'not only passwords to funding and influence; and they are more than the mere specialist jargon that is characteristic of any profession' [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 2]. The most important thing is what is hidden behind their elegant façade because buzzwords have ulterior and double meanings, are conceptually hollow and smoothed out. A good example is given by S. Batliwala about depoliticization of empowerment and its transformation from an approach that aimed to fundamentally alter power relations to its new status of the development's 'magic bullet' [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 5]. S. Batliwala exposes a 'subterranean process of challenging and subverting' the concept that the word was created to symbolize, and it is 'not some innocent linguistic fad' [Batliwala in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 112]. We believe that this substitution of notions is a dangerous phenomenon, because as a result the concept is 'neutralized'. It is now like a bee that has lost its sting [Eade in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; viii]

At the same time, there is a growing feeling that the buzzwords have 'lost their meaning', and this is the 'linguistic crisis' Standing referred to. What remains is only their connotations. For example, participation, poverty reduction and empowerment are 'feel-good' terms connoting good and nice things; those who use them are good, right and legitimate to intervene in the lives of others [Cornwall and Brock, 2005; 1045]. This characteristic of buzzword is also noted by U. Poerksen "they sound friendly, smooth, positive, and consensual". However, "they mask brutality" while not evil in themselves. 'With a word such as development, one can ruin an entire

region' [Poerksen, 1995; 6-7], or half the world, which is underdeveloped. At least, the buzzwords that have 'plagued the development industry' led to ineffective poverty reduction efforts in the past [Harrison, 2011; 2].

The above statements confirm that further studies of development buzzwords are required. So far, no attempts at their classification have been made. We suggest that all DevelopmentSpeak elements be conventionally classified under two broad categories – concepts and decorations.

Decorative elements are frequently used in documents of international organizations, mostly for their beauty, because they can be easily replaced with other words without compromising the meaning of a sentence. They go in and out of fashion more quickly than concepts. Also, they are more difficult to translate because one-word equivalents in the target language are often missing. For example, low-hanging fruits, eye openers, flagship reports, buy-ins, well-orchestrated policies, scalable activities, windows of opportunity, thinking outside the box, robust measures, to leverage (resources, investments, whatever), to synergize/synergies, to impact, Many of these pretentious expressions are also on the Forbes List of the Most Annoying Business Jargon.

In contrast, concepts are at the core of DevelopmentSpeak. First of all, they are characterized by inconsistency of their meanings, and as a result a concept means different things to different people, e.g. one can understand development as economic growth, others as sustainable use of resources, better health care, better investment climate [Ziai, 2013; 132–133], social development or all of the above. In addition, it is difficult to understand such concepts because of their ambiguity, which may result in double standards, e.g. equality implies 'sameness', needs – a 'dependency trap', and population is nothing but a statistical category [Sachs, 2009; xii].

An emphasized by U. Poerksen, 'plastic' words are 'first and foremost concepts'. For example, in the 19th century, development represented the common element in many natural and historical phenomena. They could also be represented by the word evolution. Other words could be used as well to express what development has meant since 1950s. All the following nouns, verbs, and adjectives support development: "improvement," "growth", "modernization", and "innovation"; "improving" and "modernizing"; "overhauled", "progressive", and "modern", etc. At the same time, development as a word also conjures many meanings and associations. U. Poerksen calls it a "pointed abbreviation, a sorter of diffuse data with a particular ring to it", which can 'take on a life of its own' [Poerksen, 1995; 28].

U. Poerksen notes that 'plastic' words are not new in how they appear but in how they are used, e.g. needs, population, development, poverty, planning, etc. For example, the notion of needs 'began to shine like a supernova in the semantic sky' during the Second Development Decade (1971-1980), Such terms like needs belong to a category of 'surreptitious neologisms – old words whose predominant current meaning is new while those who use them still have the impression of saying what has always been said' [Illich in Sachs, 2009; 106-108].

'Plastic' words resemble one another as though there were a place somewhere

in the world where these words were being produced at intervals, as if there existed 'a factory releasing them complete from its assembly line' [Poerksen, 1995; 1], and we are under the same impression. These words have a unique capacity to be linked up, as if put together by the 'word machine' in the J. Swift's Lagado Academy. Poerksen further suggests that 'plastic' words represent a new class of words and lists the characteristics that sketch a composite image of 'plastic' words so that we could recognize them. The longer list contains thirty criteria, and they were also presented as a short list of nine essential characteristics [Poerksen, 1995; 21-23]. Based on this list, we created our list of eleven characteristics.

So, a 'plastic' word/buzzword

- A. relies on an unquestioned assumption and a strong belief in what a notion is supposed to bring about [Rist in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 20];
- B. has no clear definition [Rist in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 20; Poerksen, 1995; 22];
- C. is semantically diffuse, i.e. has broad and unclear meanings [Mukhametdinova, 2020; 97], which results in elasticity of meaning when different people have different understanding of a concept;
- D. originates from science and resembles building blocks. It is a stereotype [Poerksen, 1995; 23];
- E. is a reductive concept, impoverished in content [Poerksen, 1995; 100];
- F. has the capacity to combine with other terms, which seems almost unlimited; it forms new words; there are infinite possibilities of using them [Poerksen, 1995; 22, 94];
- G. can be applied universally, surfaces in countless contexts and is a "key for everything" [Poerksen, 1995; 23, 100];
- H. has a connotation that dominates; its connotation is positive [Poerksen, 1995; 101];
- I. establishes an elite of experts and serves as their 'resource' [Poerksen, 1995; 23];
- J. is international [Poerksen, 1995; 103];
- K. is difficult to translate [Mukhametdinova, 2020; 101]; a one-word equivalent in the target language is often missing.

Let us consider and discuss each characteristic individually.

A. A 'plastic' word/buzzword relies on an unquestioned assumption and a strong belief in what a notion is supposed to bring about

G. Rist, a professor of political science, Graduate Institute of Development Studies, Switzerland, observes that the word *development* itself is taken for granted and is used 'to convey the idea that tomorrow things will be better, or that more is necessarily better' [Rist in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 19]. However, like many other words in development discourse, much of what is actually done in the name of development is left unquestioned [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 2].

Many development buzzwords are what W.B. Gallie (1956), the philosopher, called 'essentially contested concepts', where general agreement on the abstract

notion that they represent is combined with disagreement about what they mean in practice. The contestability of many of the words in the development lexicon has been ‘flattened’, and they became ‘consensual hurrah-words’ because the ‘once vibrant disagreement’ about them disappeared. These words sanctify the goals of development beyond reproach [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 2] and are ‘intended to invite automatic approval’ [Standing in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 57].

A good example to illustrate this is the ‘righteous virtue’ of anticorruption talk, when it becomes ‘virtually immoral to question what is being labelled ‘corrupt’, and by whom’ [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 2] because ‘corruption is so obviously harmful’ that questioning this is similar to ‘excusing immorality’ [Harrison in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 263].

B. A ‘plastic’ word/buzzword has no clear definition

We believe that ‘an absence of real definition’ [Rist in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 20] is the most important characteristic of development buzzwords. In addition, ‘plastic’ words have ‘weak contours’ and are semantically pliant. This makes it very difficult to define a concept. U. Poerksen states that when a speaker loses the power of definition is in fact ‘the first criterion by which we can recognize ‘plastic’ words’ [Poerksen, 1995; 8]. We fully agree because we also doubt that anyone can define, say, *empowerment* or *capacity building* offhand.

C. A ‘plastic’ word/buzzword is semantically diffuse, i.e. has broad and unclear meaning, which results in elasticity of meaning when different people have different understanding of a concept

‘Plastic’ words have a high degree of abstraction [Poerksen, 1995; 93]. Thanks to their vague and euphemistic qualities, buzzwords can ‘embrace a multitude of possible meanings’ [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 2]. These meanings and nuances vary with the context and depend on who is using a buzzword – this can be called ‘the Humpty Dumpty Syndrome’ [Eade in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; viii]

‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less.’ [Lewis Carroll, 2010; VII]

For example, social protection is not a fixed concept; this term is an elastic notion and can be defined differently by everyone who uses it [Standing in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 65].

Also, these words appear to convey one thing, but are used to mean something quite different; they might have no real meaning at all [Eade in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; viii] or mean anything. To be effectively used in development, it is essential for buzzwords to remain ‘contested, ambiguous, and vague’ [Scoones in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 160]. Those who use buzzwords fill them with meanings, and as a result ‘buzzwords shelter multiple agendas, providing room for manoeuvre and space for contestation’ [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 5].

We believe that is quite natural when people have different understanding of an ambiguous concept with many shades of meaning. It is much worse when someone deliberately uses this quality of buzzwords to distort the meaning or advance their interests. This often happens when ‘differently positioned users put very different

versions of these concepts to use' [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 5], or when tough policies and practices are wrapped in 'linguistic cotton wool'. So, no buzzword should be taken 'at face value' [Eade in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; ix].

Sometimes those who use a buzzword have no understanding of what it means. For example, the term public advocacy, 'the latest fad in the NGO world', has 'a mire of meanings' that surrounds it [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 7]. Many people doing or promoting advocacy do not really think about what they mean by this, and 'hardly anyone seems to know what it really is'. As explained by J. Samuel, 'Public advocacy is a set of deliberate actions designed to influence public policies or public attitudes in order to empower the marginalized.' Instead of these actions aimed at long-term social change, the result is that ambiguous messages are disseminated and get lost in the 'quick-fix' tools and strategies for 'scaling up impacts' [Samuel in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 186-189].

Another example is our favorite buzzword, capacity building. First of all, it is unclear what it really means and 'exactly what and whose capacities are seen as worth building' [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 8]. For some people it is a 'sloppy piece of aid jargon', and for others it is 'a synonym for institutional or organizational development'. According to D. Eade, this term means 'enabling those out on the margins to represent and defend their interests more effectively, not only within their own immediate contexts but also globally'. However, it is often perceived as 'no more than a serious-sounding alternative to 'training''. Capacity building might be viewed as in-service or vocational training or as 'a catch-all to mean everything and nothing' [Eade in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 203-205]. Due to lack of clarity and ambiguity of this buzzword, usually what happens is – 'The workshops have been held, the participants gave positive feedback on their evaluation forms, and so capacity has been built. A year later, there is nothing to show for it' [Eade in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 211].

We assume in other languages understanding of this term is even worse. For example, in Russian capacity building is normally rendered as development of potential (создание материально-технической базы), which is as vague and ambiguous as it sounds in English. When development activities began in post-Soviet countries in early 1990s, no one seemed to understand this buzzword at all, and one of the wrong translations even sounded as construction of 'powerful' buildings.

D. A 'plastic' word/buzzword originates from science and resembles building blocks. It is a stereotype.

'Plastic' words are the broadest "bridges" from science into the everyday world [Poerksen, 1995; 92]. In a discussion with U. Poerksen, I. Illich, an Austrian philosopher, called them amoeba words because these things were spreading out from science into the ordinary language, but Poerksen was asked by his friends, biologists, 'not to associate those innocent creatures from the earliest times with these recent verbal monstrosities.' So, he decided to use the terms 'plastic' or 'amorphous' for such words. These terms reflect 'a stereotype's endless ability to generate new forms', which is similar to complete malleability of plastic [Poerksen, 1995; 7].

‘Plastic’ words either begin in science or pass through it, so they can also be described as a sort of ‘scientific rubble’ [Poerksen, 1995; 8]; they are used as ‘boldly outlined building blocks’ [Poerksen, 1995; 93].

The meanings of buzzwords that originated in the academic circles were transformed in the development industry, e.g. social capital and gender, with applications of these words ‘far distant’ from the theoretical debates they were once associated with (Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 3). Another example is everyday use of the word communication, which is fundamentally different from the use of communication in science [Poerksen, 1995; xvii, 98].

Many of the currently used dominant ‘plastic’ words in development discourse originated in economics, e.g. poverty, efficiency, development, basic needs, sustainability, planning, wellbeing, cost minimization, etc [Stahel, 2020; 273].

In addition, most of the key concepts in development discourse are ‘immigrants’ from statistics; they are ‘statistical driftwood’, e.g. population [Duden in Sachs, 2009; 164]. Thus, human populations would have never emerged as a development concept without the ‘spread of statistical terminology and reasoning into ordinary English’ [Duden in Sachs, 2009; 172].

There is also another characteristic typical of the development discourse in general – the ‘alphabet soup of acronyms’ [Alfini and Chambers in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 29] or the ‘proliferation of acronyms’, which are ‘rarely innocent’. They give insiders ‘an advantage, a capacity to blind outsiders with science’ – ‘The PRSP must help to deliver the MDGs, and the IFAs will support that’ [Standing in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 65].

E. A ‘plastic’ word/buzzword is a reductive concept, impoverished in content

‘Plastic’ words have another important characteristic: ‘the broader the application, the smaller the content; the poorer the content, the larger the application.’ These words have a reduced and impoverished content. It is not easy to grasp their referent; such words are ‘poor in substance, if not altogether without substance’ [Poerksen, 1995; 100].

The terms that form the present-day development jargon are ‘reduced to monochrome’ [Cornwall and Brock, 2005; 1047]. These amorphous ‘plastic’ words are shallow, ‘taste of nothing’ and evoke no particular setting. They are ‘purely imaginary, meaningless, self-referential, and functioning only as stackable poker chips’ [Poerksen, 1995; 93, 101], and we completely agree with this conclusion.

F. A ‘plastic’ word/buzzword has the capacity to combine with other terms, which seems almost unlimited; it forms new words; there are infinite possibilities of using them

The ‘plastic’ words can create sentences when placed in almost any order. U. Poerksen notes their alarming interchangeability and ability to form chains of equations, e.g. ‘Communication is exchange. Exchange is a relationship. A relationship is a process...’ This is only a small number of words, but they are ‘the building blocks of countless models of reality’ and can be used to discuss any topic, e.g. health, agriculture,

etc., and based on them projects are developed instantly. Words are adjusted to the sector where they are used. These words ‘tend to form series’ [Poerksen, 1995; 94]. For example, with the word development we have production development, energy development, communication development, consumption development, and health care development. At the same time, instead of development we can also put process, system or structure as predicates. Concepts are turning into grammatical categories [Poerksen, 1995; 70].

‘Plastic’ words are ‘idols, magical and empty’. At the same time, they are very handy because they can quickly construct new realities and world models. They are like Lego blocks shaping the Lego language [Poerksen, 1995; 23, 69].

G. A ‘plastic’ word/buzzword can be applied universally, surfaces in countless contexts and is a "key for everything"

‘Plastic’ words are universal [Poerksen, 1995; 93]. They are everywhere: in the speeches of politicians, at academic conferences, and in the media and may even go unnoticed [Poerksen, 1995; 1]. They are ‘the master key to the everyday’ opening doors to many rooms [Poerksen, 1995; 4].

The words and concepts become ‘vaguer and more flexible’ and distanced from their original meanings. They turn into relatively meaningless or vaguely defined, ‘problematic’ buzzwords like empowerment, accountability, ‘legitimacy, participation, poverty, etc. which can be applied in many contexts [Harrison, 2011; 1].

Such words travel from one domain of discourse to another [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 1; Poerksen, 1995; 22], e.g. the word empowerment that circulates in advertising, religion, and development industry [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 3].

Another ‘master key’ is best practice. It is based on an assumption that there are practices that can be ‘best’ for all. Best practice is part of the ‘ever more homogenizing world of development prescriptions, indicators, and ‘results’.’ However, what is best depends on the context; and what works in one setting may be inappropriate, even ‘bad practice’, in another, because there things are different. So, if something is not to be replicated, ‘why label it the ‘best’” [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 9].

So, we can conclude that these words help sustain the myth that one-size-fits-all solutions can be applied to all and in any context.

H ‘plastic’ word/buzzword has a connotation that dominates; its connotation is positive

‘Plastic’ words are ‘connotative stereotypes’ [Poerksen, 1995; 26]. They have auras. We like the following example given by Poerksen in his book. Denotation, or designation of a thing, is like the first wave that is formed after a stone hits the water; connotation, or feelings and associations evoked by the thing, are like all the following waves. ‘Plastic’ words seem to be composed of only the ring-like connotations’, from the second wave to infinity, and the stone and the first wave are gone [Poerksen, 1995; 8].

There are words in development discourse that ‘admit no negatives, words that evoke Good Things that noone could possibly disagree with and ‘warm mutuality’,

e.g. partnership, civil society, community, etc. Some words suggest possible future, e.g. rights-based and poverty eradication. These words became ubiquitous not only because of what they promised to deliver, but also because of their ‘feel-good factor’ [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 2-6].

As stated by Poerksen, ‘amorphous plastic words are not picturesque or aggressive or target-oriented, but apparently neutral’ [Poerksen, 1995; 45]. Still, we believe that they are either ‘feel-good’ like social capital, or ‘feel-bad’ like corruption or poverty.

I. A ‘plastic’ word/buzzword establishes an elite of experts and serves as their ‘resource’

Buzzwords give ‘the impression of something very important and obvious, and which the layman cannot understand without an explanation by experts’ [Duden in Sachs, 2009; 164]. These words hint at another world in which others know more about them and build a bridge to this world of experts. Such words increase ‘the need for expert help’ and form the ‘doublespeak, a two-tongued language in which ordinary talk and expert talk’ are intertwined [Poerksen, 1995; 16-18].

These ‘code-words’ are part of an ‘exclusive and fast-changing vocabulary’ ‘barely intelligible’ to those outside the development industry [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 3]. These words sound ‘intellectual and scientific, beyond the understanding of the lay person, best left to ‘experts’’ [Standing in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 60]. So, the development discourse became ‘the work of ‘experts’’ [Sbert in Sachs, 2009; 215]

Experts often transmit a sense of ‘extensive space’ and use words such as ‘global’ and ‘world-encompassing’. Their language ‘imitates stability’ and ‘unfurls the future like a banner’ – ‘A study is not a study, but rather a pilot study; a project is not a project, but a pilot project; each modest beginning is located within a far-ranging program’. [Poerksen, 1995; 81-86].

Name-calling is their most convincing argument. Those who are not involved are ‘hopelessly backward’ and ‘sleeping through development’. Such people are ‘useless deviants’, they are stigmatized as ‘illiterate’ and underdeveloped or, more recently, developing. They are backward and live below the poverty line [Poerksen, 1995; 81-83].

An expert ‘throws the mantle of scientific language over himself and disappears beneath it’ This scientific speech is characterized by

- Prestige that is historically associated with the language of science;
- increasing opacity of specialized lexicon that strengthens the expert’s position and creates a contrast between ‘a responsible elite’ and ‘an irresponsible laity’, so the world is split into ‘experts with something to say and others who may hardly speak’;
- its capacity for imitation. It is clear that specialized terminology, passive sentences, neutral word choices, and tables are indicators of science, and ‘this loom’ can be easily used to ‘manufacture linguistic garments’. Poerksen says that ‘Hans Christian Andersen’s story “The Emperor’s New Clothes” is the story of our time’ [Poerksen, 1995; 80-81], and we are with him.

However, our experience has shown that when many of these smart and brilliant

experts come to a country with their ‘missions’ they often fail to do their homework, which is to learn at least the very basics about the country they are going to ‘develop’. Even their speech, full of nice and warm buzzwords, cannot hide this.

J. A ‘plastic’ word/buzzword is international

This vocabulary is international [Poerksen, 1995; 103], and this is self-evident because, as noted above, buzzwords are coined and disseminated globally by international organizations.

K. A ‘plastic’ word/buzzword is difficult to translate; a one-word equivalent in the target language is often missing

Translation of buzzwords is beyond the scope of this paper but is definitely important enough to be further explored. We will only note that *DevelopmentSpeak* is the ‘language of evasion’, and G. Rist even found it impossible to translate the word *buzzword* itself into [French Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 4]. By the way, its one-word equivalent in Russian is also missing.

CONCLUSION – Why deconstruct?

The modular Lego language still plasticizes the planet [Poerksen, 1995; 96], so more attention needs to be paid to the development discourse to understand what buzzwords mean and do for development.

Constructive deconstruction means taking apart the different meanings that buzzwords have acquired in development discourse and provides an opportunity for their rehabilitation. The process of constructive deconstruction reveals the ideological differences and opens up an opportunity to revive the debates once associated with the use of ‘bland catch-all terms’ like civil society and social capital [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 14]. We completely agree that the multiple guises of buzzwords need to be peeled off [Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade, 2010; 1]. We need constructive deconstruction to rethink the buzzwords used in documents of international organizations in general and in our country in particular. We need to know what they mean for us.

As stated by Poerksen, these words are part of the reality that ‘locks us in a conceptual prison’, and this prison must be held to account. ‘We must analyze the language we use. All denunciation of individual words, without careful linguistic analysis, amounts to nothing more than theatrical posturing’ [Poerksen, 1995; 6].

It is also important to note that the main development concepts have been analyzed and explained in English, e.g. in publications edited by Sachs, Cornwall and Eade, etc. In Russian, such attempts have been fragmented and insufficient, which definitely does not improve understanding of development buzzwords by the Russian-speaking recipients of international assistance.

Deconstruction of buzzwords becomes even more important because ‘Nietzsche’s diagnosis appears to have been confirmed’ [Poerksen, 1995; 33].

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